



# THE STATE OF LABOUR IN HONG KONG 2024

**APRIL 2025**

*Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor  
Amplifying workers' voices from Hong Kong to the world*

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# **The State of Labour in Hong Kong 2024**

**March 2025**

## **1. Introduction**

This report documents recent developments in Hong Kong's labour market, labour laws and policies, labour standards violation, as well as trade union activities and worker's collective actions. The city's unemployment and underemployment rates remained low throughout 2024 despite a slight slowdown in job creation toward the end of the year. Thanks to moderate economic growth and a tight labour market, wages continued to grow and outpaced the rise of consumer prices. Though the Government has implemented a series of talent attraction measures and more than 300,000 visas or entry permits were issued in the previous two years, the final quarter of 2024 still saw a decline in labour force by 4.8% from six years earlier. With the working population shrinking and China's recent economic growth slowing, Hong Kong's economy faces severe challenges in the medium term, which could eventually have a negative impact on the city's labour market.

The Government has never demonstrated any concrete efforts to close Hong Kong's long-existing "decent work deficits". The new adjustment mechanism of the statutory minimum wage (SMW) guarantees the wage floor can never keep pace with economic or productivity growth. The proposed amendment to the definition of "continuous employment" continues to deny a significant number of part-time employees of full statutory protection and benefits. Employment status of digital platform workers and whether they are covered by labour laws remain ambiguous.

2024 saw the hasty passage of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (locally known as Article 23 Legislation), the provisions of which could seriously impair trade union's right to freedom of expression and association (in particular collaboration with overseas organizations) and right to organize their administration and activities. The heavy sentences imposed on two trade unionists and other activists over their participation in the democracy camp's primary election illustrates how the National Security Law (NSL) is used against civil society organizers. Extra-legal suppression methods were also adopted to silence the city's remaining independent trade unions, and transnational repression tactics were employed to target exiled trade union and civil society leaders. Amid the Government's tightening control on civil society activities, worker's collective actions have almost disappeared in the public sphere and trade union activities were largely confined to those relating to narrow occupational interests. A list of major events in 2024 can be found at Annex 2.

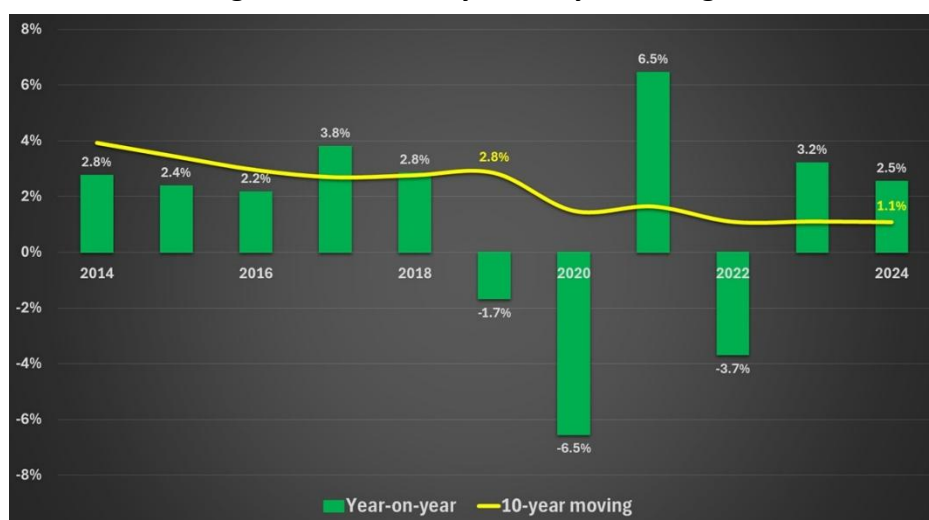
## **2. Economic and Labour Market Situations**

Hong Kong's economy expanded in two consecutive years for the first time since 2018. After the previous year's weaker-than-expected post-pandemic rebound,

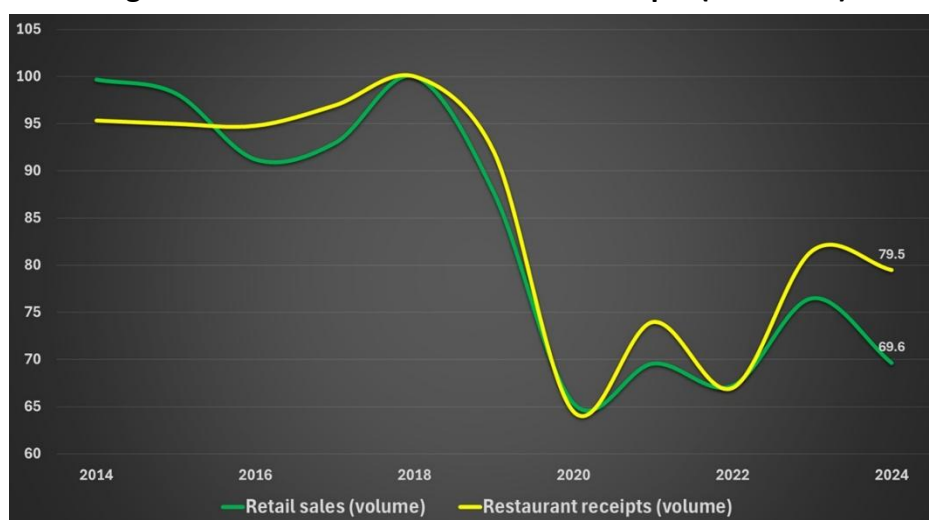
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the city's real GDP growth moderated to 2.5% in 2024, which is 0.3 percentage points lower than the 10-year trend growth rate prior to the COVID outbreak (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Suffered from the three-year draconian “zero-COVID” measures and the poor recovery thereafter, Hong Kong's economy has yet to return to its pre-pandemic peak; in real terms, the city's GDP in 2024 was still 0.3% lower than that in 2018. The mediocre economic performance in the last two years is partly attributed to weak private consumption. Retail sales in 2024 declined by 9.0% year-on-year in volume terms, and was 30% lower than the historic high in 2018; while restaurant receipts in 2024 contracted by 2.5% from a year earlier, and was 20% below the 2018 level (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Real GDP year-on-year changes**



**Figure 2: Retail sales and restaurant receipts (2018=100)**



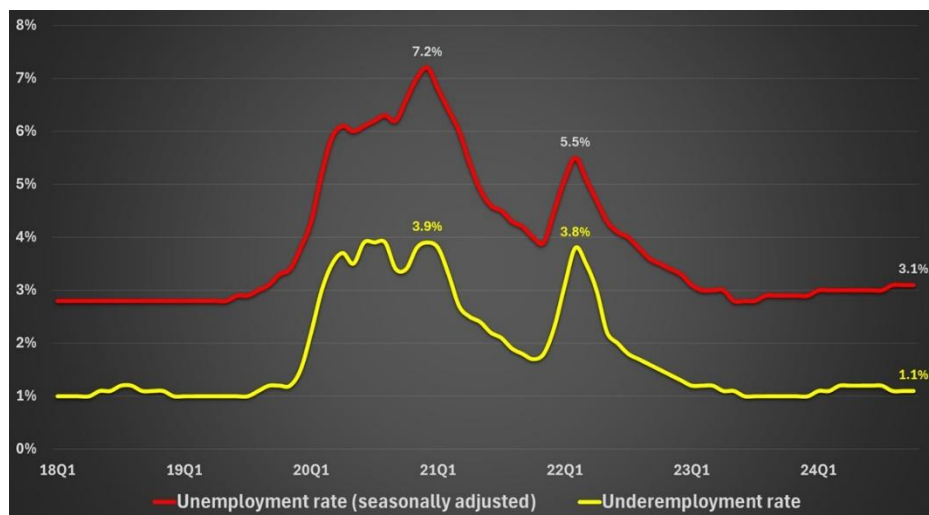
Hong Kong's labour market remained tight in 2024. Though the final quarter saw unemployment rate increased by 0.1 percentage points from the preceding three quarters to 3.1%, it was still 2.4 percentage points lower than the previous high during

<sup>1</sup> Sources of the statistics cited can be found at Annex 1.

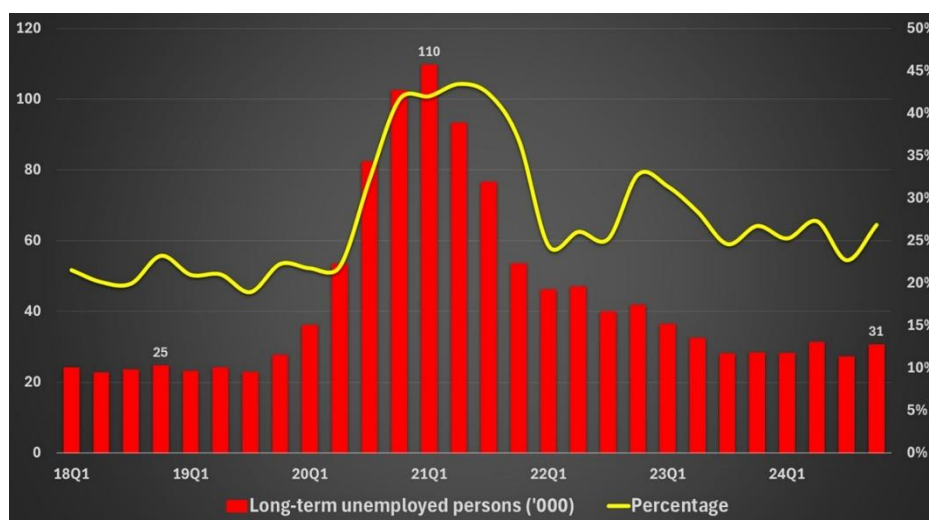


the Omicron outbreak; while underemployment rate downed from 3.8% to 1.1% over the same period (Figure 3). As the labour market situation improved, long-term unemployment has reduced significantly. The number of persons who had been unemployed for six months or more decreased from 110,000 in the first quarter of 2021 to 31,000 in the fourth quarter of 2024, though it was still 25% higher than the pre-pandemic level (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Unemployment and underemployment rates**



**Figure 4: Long-term unemployed persons**



After marked improvement upon the lift of all COVID containment measures in early 2023, the labour market situations of the four sectors hardest hit by the pandemic weakened slightly in 2024. Unemployment rates in “decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings” and retail sectors rose to 6.1% and 4.1% respectively in the final quarter of 2024, an increase of 0.8 and 0.9 percentage points respectively from a year earlier; while underemployment rates in “arts, entertainment and recreation” and “food and beverage service” sectors increased from 1.7% to 2.2% and from 1.3% to 1.9% respectively over the same period (Figures 5 & 6).

Figure 5: Unemployment rates in hardest hit sectors

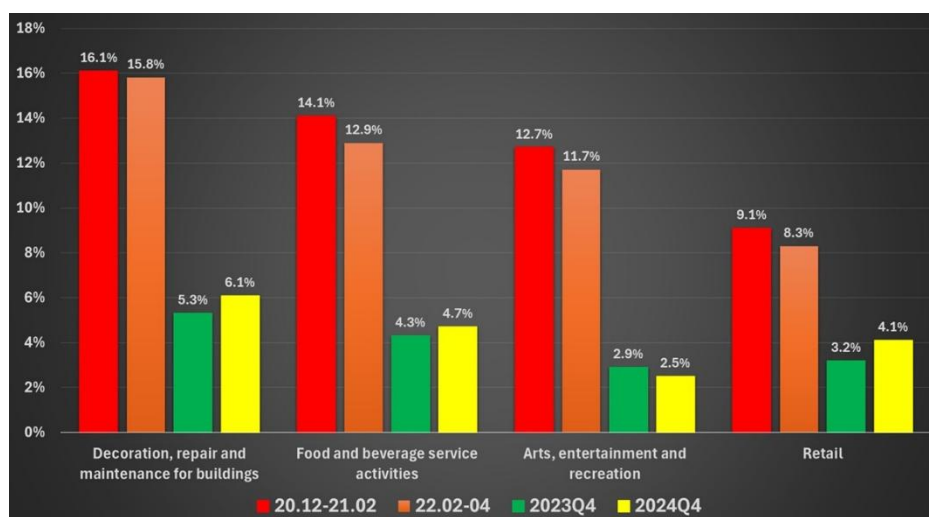
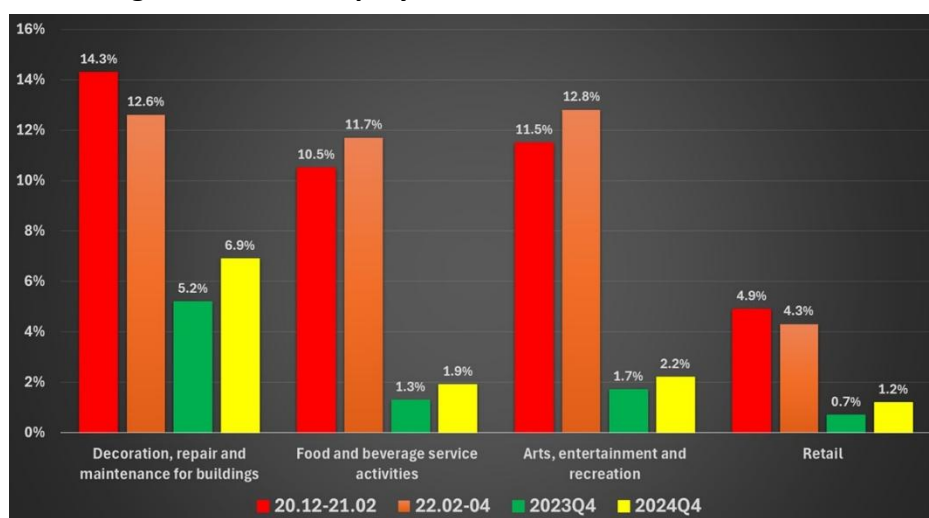


Figure 6: Underemployment rates in hardest hit sectors



As economic growth moderated, companies became more cautious in recruiting workers. Private sector vacancies dropped to 58,411 in the final quarter of 2024, 28.3% less than the historic peak in the second quarter of the previous year, resulting in the rise of the ratio of unemployed persons to vacancies from 1.4 to 1.9 (Figure 7). Vacancies in retail sector decreased from historic peak (6,596 in the second quarter of 2023) to 3,807 in the final quarter of 2024, a decline by 42.3%; while vacancies in “transportation, storage, postal and courier services” dropped from 8,819 in the first quarter of 2024 to 4,084 in the final quarter, down by 53.7%.

Amid the widening of vacancy gap (the difference between unemployed persons and vacancies), wage growth slowed slightly in 2024. Nominal wage index increased by 3.5% year-on-year in the final quarter of 2024, compared to 3.8% a year earlier (Figure 8). As rise in consumer prices remained modest,<sup>2</sup> real wages grew by

<sup>2</sup> In this report, underlying consumer price index (A) is used as the deflator to calculate the real wage level, as it eliminates the distortions of Government’s one-off relief measures.

nearly 3% in the first three quarters of 2024 before slowed to 2% in the final quarter (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Vacancies and unemployed persons

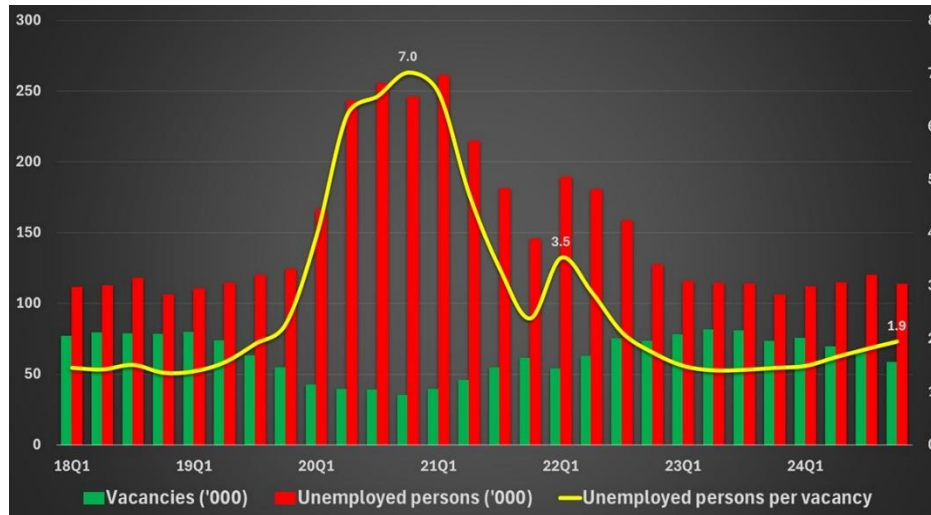


Figure 8: Vacancy gap and nominal wage

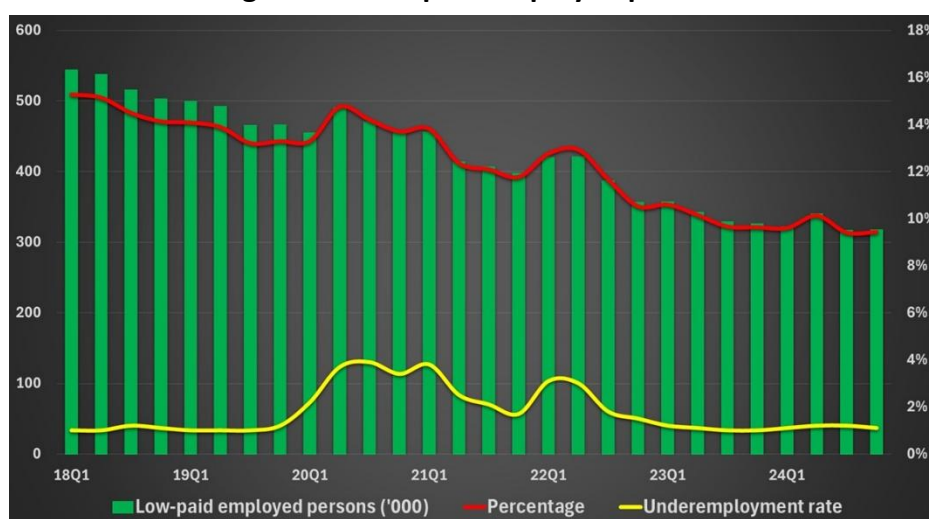


Figure 9: Nominal and real wages (year-on-year changes)

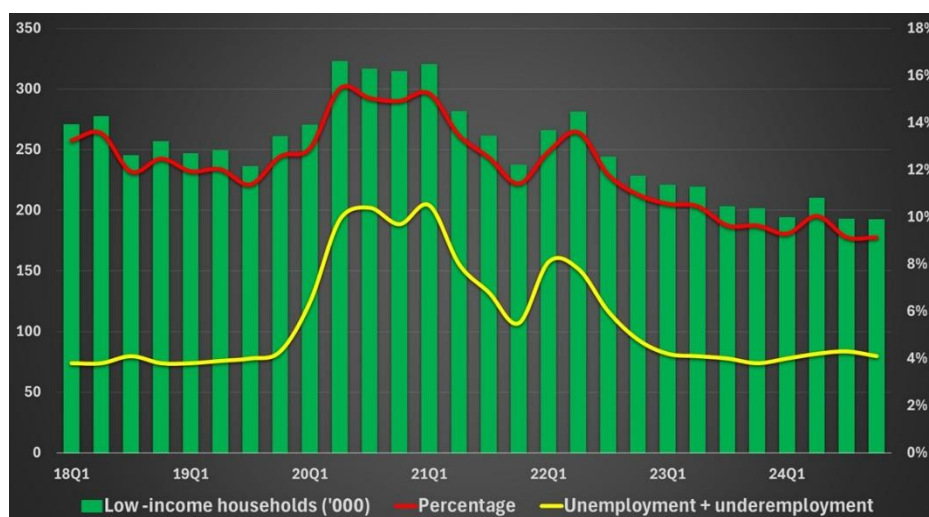


With wages rising steadily and underemployment remaining low, the number of low-paid workers (with monthly earnings less than HK\$10,000, excluding migrant domestic workers, MDWs) reduced gradually, from 357,000 (10.6%) in the first quarter of 2023 to 318,000 (9.4%) in the final quarter of 2024 (Figure 10). Similarly, the number of economically active low-income households (with monthly income less than HK\$15,000, excluding MDWs) also dropped from almost 221,000 (10.6%) to 192,000 (9.1%) over the same period (Figure 11).

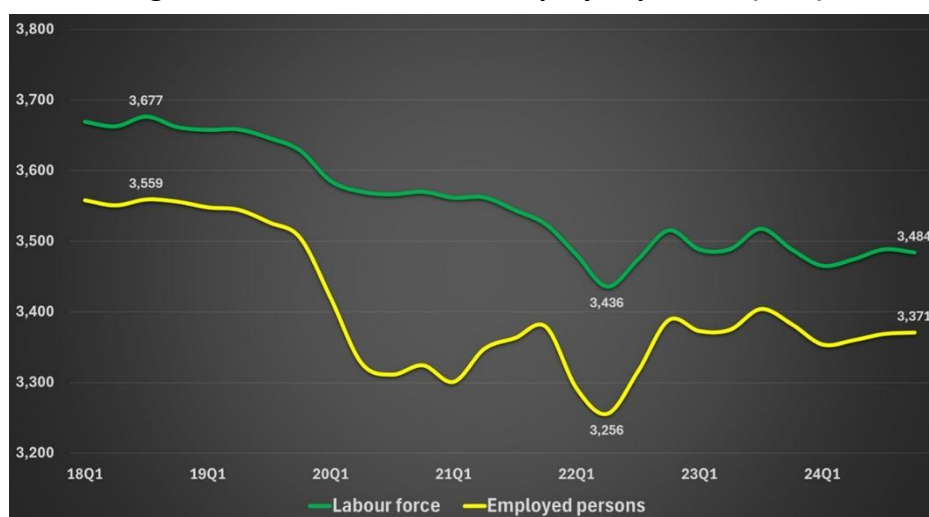
Figure 10: Low-paid employed persons





**Figure 11: Economically active low-income households**

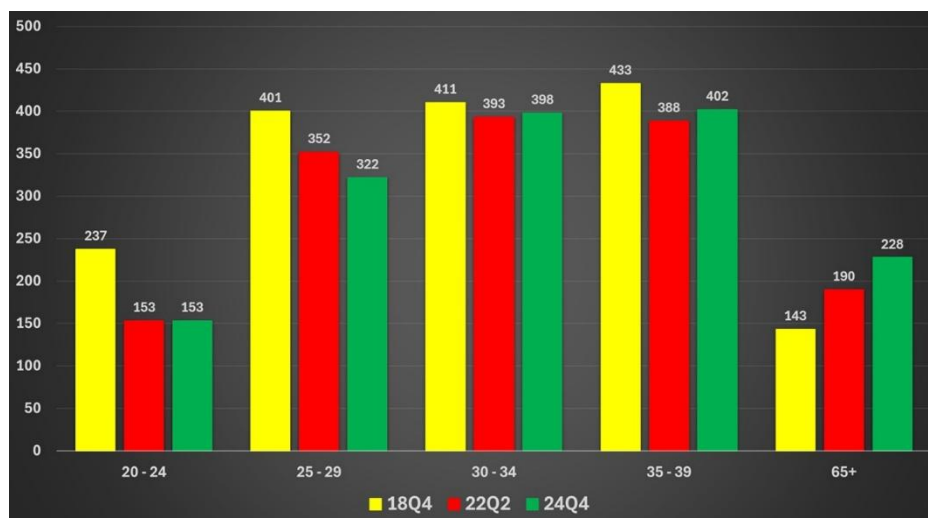
The second quarter of 2022 saw the sharpest annual decline in Hong Kong's labour force, economically active population (excluding MDWs) dropped by 125,000 or 3.5% from a year earlier and was 6.5% below the historic high in the third quarter of 2018. Though the Government has implemented a series of talent attraction measures and more than 300,000 working visas have been issued in the previous two years, the final quarter of 2024 still saw a fall in labour force by 178,000 (4.8%) from six years earlier. Similarly, the number of employed persons (excluding MDWs) also decreased by 185,000 (5.2%) over the same period (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Labour force and employed persons ('000)**

The contraction in labour force was unevenly spread across age groups. The younger cohorts saw a larger drop in the economically active population, while more older people (aged 65 or above) participated in the labour market. In the six years to the final quarter of 2024, age groups 20-24 and 25-29 experienced the biggest decline in the labour force, their respective drops are 84,000 (35.4%) and 79,000 (19.7%);

while that of aged 65 or above increased by 85,000 (59.3%) over the same period (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Labour force by selected age groups ('000)**



Labour force is determined by two factors: the population and labour force participation rate. Based on own estimation from official statistics, it is found that the drops in labour force for aged 30-34 and 35-39 were solely attributable to the respective drops in the population (part of which were offset by their respective rise in participation rates), while for aged 20-24 and 25-29, the decline in participation rate contributed to about respectively 33% and 17% of the contraction (Table 1). Apart from the ageing demographic trend, one possible reason for the decline of population among the younger cohorts is an exodus that has accelerated since 2020 amid the fast-deteriorating socio-political environments and draconian “zero-COVID” measures.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Population and labour force participation rates (ex MDWs) by selected age groups**

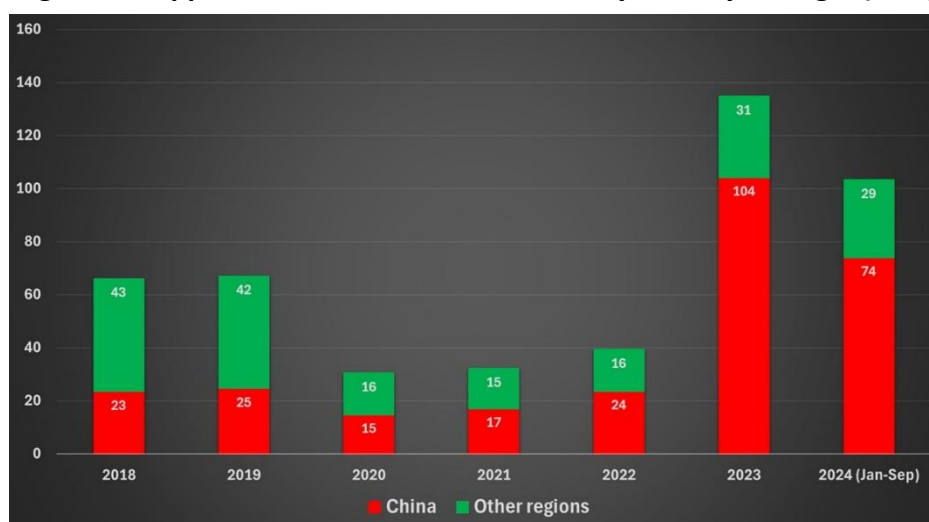
| Age groups | Population ('000) |        | Labour force participation rate |        | Approximate contribution to change in labour force |                    |
|------------|-------------------|--------|---------------------------------|--------|--|--------------------|
|            | 2018Q4            | 2024Q4 | 2018Q4                          | 2024Q4 | Population   | Participation rate |
| 20-24      | 402               | 302    | 59.1%                           | 50.8%  | 67%  | 33%                |
| 25-29      | 452               | 378    | 88.6%                           | 85.2%  | 83%  | 17%                |
| 30-34      | 483               | 461    | 85.0%                           | 86.2%  | 145%   | -45%               |
| 35-39      | 523               | 485    | 82.8%                           | 82.9%  | 102%   | -2%                |
| 65+        | 1,233             | 1,675  | 11.6%                           | 13.6%  | 64%  | 36%                |

The mild recovery of Hong Kong’s labour force is in no small part attributable to the influx of migrant managerial and professional workers since the lifting of all COVID containment measures and the implementation of various talent admission measures.

<sup>3</sup> For example, [edition.cnn.com/2022/08/12/asia/hong-kong-population-record-fall-covid-intl-hnk/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/12/asia/hong-kong-population-record-fall-covid-intl-hnk/index.html) [March 2025].

Visas or entry permits granted under the five major admission schemes<sup>4</sup> totalled 103,000 in the first nine months of 2024, more than that between 2020 and 2022 combined. Of the 103,000 applicants for the admission schemes, more than 70% came from China, a reverse prior to the pandemic outbreak (Figure 14). As *The Economist* explains, Hong Kong has lost its appeal to Westerners.<sup>5</sup> Many of them left the city because of strict “zero-COVID” policy. They also complain of Beijing’s tightening grip on the territory and consider Hong Kong as just another Chinese city.

**Figure 14: Applicants for admission schemes by country of origin ('000)**

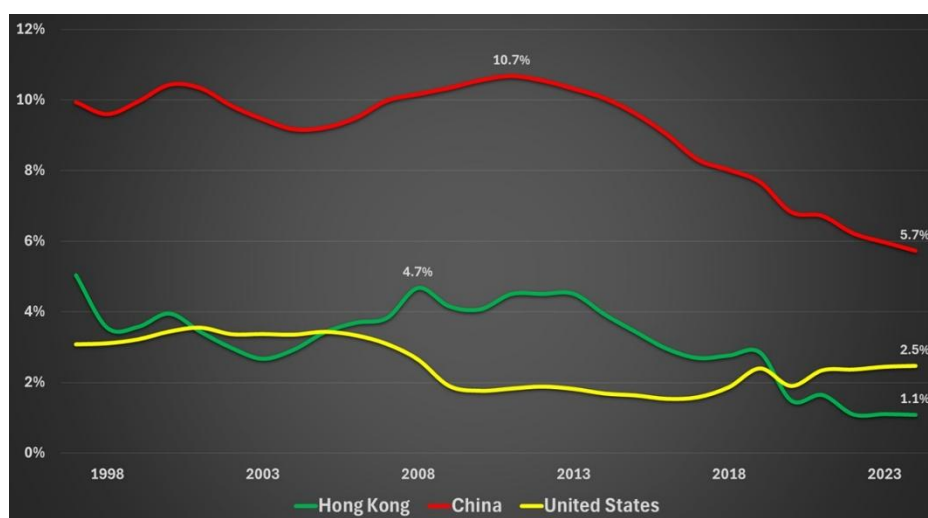


Hong Kong’s economic integration with China has accelerated ever since the 1997 handover. In the last two decades or so, the city’s trend growth rate was more or less in line with that of the mainland, as opposed to that of the United States (Figure 15). When China’s economic growth started losing pace around 2010, so did Hong Kong. It is widely acknowledged that the Chinese economy is facing severe structural problems, in particular of rising debts, persisting deflationary pressure and declining working population, the city’s short- to medium-term economic outlook will inevitably be affected.

<sup>4</sup> The five schemes are General Employment Policy, Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals, Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates and Top Talent Pass Scheme.

<sup>5</sup> [www.economist.com/china/2024/01/25/hong-kong-is-becoming-less-of-an-international-city](https://www.economist.com/china/2024/01/25/hong-kong-is-becoming-less-of-an-international-city) [March 2025]

Figure 15: GDP growth (10-year moving average)



Hong Kong's competitive advantage in the past was acting as a “super-connector” between China and the rest of the world. This role hinges upon the city maintaining its autonomy and uniqueness, but it is fading fast amid Beijing's tightening control over the city. Ratings agency Moody's downgraded Hong Kong's credit outlook to negative from stable in December 2023, citing the erosion of the city's autonomy of political, institutional and economic decisions after the imposition of the NSL in 2020 and the overhaul of the electoral system.<sup>6</sup>

With local labour force declining, competitive advantage eroding and the Chinese economy hitting a wall, Hong Kong's economy is facing severe challenges in medium term, which could eventually have an adverse impact on the labour market.

### 3. Labour Laws and Policies

The Government announced several measures in 2024 to strengthen the protection of workers, the proposals are however inadequate to close Hong Kong's long-existing “decent work gap”. The new adjustment mechanism of the SMW guarantees the wage floor can never keep pace with economic or productivity growth. The proposed amendment to the definition of “continuous employment” continues to deny a significant number of part-time employees of full statutory protection and benefits. The Government finally promised to study the ways to offer some statutory protection to digital platform workers, but preliminary results of the review are not expected until 2026 at the earliest. On the other hand, the Government decided to import more less-skilled workers amid the shrinking of labour force, that could impact on the livelihoods of local grassroots workers.

<sup>6</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2023/12/07/moodys-downgrades](https://hongkongfp.com/2023/12/07/moodys-downgrades) [March 2025]

*New mechanism guarantees the SMW can't keep pace with economic growth*

The Government accepted in April 2024 the Minimum Wage Commission's recommendations on the adjustment mechanism of the SMW. Starting May 2026, the SMW will be adjusted annually and the annual rate of adjustment will be calculated using the formula that taking into account of inflation (annual change in headline CPI(A), subject to a lower bound of zero) and economic growth factor ((real GDP growth rate minus 10-year trend growth rate) x 20%, subject to a lower bound of zero and an upper bound of 1%).<sup>7</sup> While adjusting SMW annually is a positive step to maintaining its purchasing power, the new formula however guarantees that the wage floor can never keep pace of economic or productivity growth.

The Government announced in February 2025 to raise the SMW by 5.25% to HK\$42.1 an hour starting May 2025<sup>8</sup>. The new hourly rate is calculated using the above formula, taking into account of inflation and economic growth factor in 2023 and 2024. The proposed adjustment of the SMW is way lower than the accumulated growth of nominal GDP in the previous two years (13.1%) or the rise in real GDP plus inflation over the same period (10.3%).

The SMW has so far failed to lift low-paid workers out of poverty. From the start, the Government has never intended to ensure all workers with decent remunerations and refuses to fix the wage floor at a rate sufficient to meet workers and their families' basic needs.<sup>9</sup> The level of SMW is set so low that even if there are two full-time minimum wage workers in a 3-person household, it is still not enough to lift them out of poverty.<sup>10</sup> Since the SMW has failed to keep pace with the growth of market wages, its coverage has significantly reduced from 6.4% of private sector employees when it was first introduced in May 2011 to a merely 0.4% in 2024.

*Amendment to the statutory definition of "continuous employment"*

Under the Employment Ordinance (EO), only "continuous contract employees" (hereafter "4-18 employees") are entitled to such benefits as rest days, paid holidays and annual leave, maternity leave and pay, sickness allowance, severance and long service payments, etc., subject to the satisfaction of the qualifying periods stipulated therein.<sup>11</sup> A statistics report finds that there were nearly 160,000 private sector employees who usually worked less than 18 hours per week in 2019, almost triple the

<sup>7</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (April 2024) *Enhancing the Review Mechanism of the Statutory Minimum Wage*, Legislative Council Brief, LD SMW 83-2/2/6(C), para. 6

<sup>8</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202502/18/P2025021800208.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202502/18/P2025021800208.htm) [March 2025]

<sup>9</sup> See for example Legislative Council (2010) *Official Record of Proceedings* pp. 11,688 & 12,210

<sup>10</sup> [hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20230430/bkn-20230430033012627-0430\\_00822\\_001.html](http://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20230430/bkn-20230430033012627-0430_00822_001.html) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>11</sup> "Continuous contract employees" or "4-18 employees" are those who had worked for the same employer for at least four consecutive weeks and had worked for at least 18 hours each week (the 4-18 requirement).



56,300 in 2009.<sup>12</sup> There were another roughly 10,000 employees who usually worked more than 18 hours per week but not every week. This means that those 170,000 part-time workers can never enjoy the benefits afforded to “4-18 employees”, no matter how long they had worked for the same employer.

The Labour Advisory Board reached a consensus at its meeting in February 2024 that the definition of “continuous contract of employment” be revised by using the aggregate working hours of four weeks as a counting unit and setting the four-week working hour threshold at 68 hours (4-68 requirement).<sup>13</sup> The revised definition would benefit approximately 11,400 part-time employees, less than 7% of the 170,000 “non-4-18 employees” (findings of the 2019 survey). The Government will introduce an amendment bill to the EO in the first half of 2025.

The Government maintains the purpose of “4-18 requirement” is to establish that full statutory benefits should only be afforded to “employees who provide a stable and considerable level of service [*sic*]”. When the EO was enacted in 1968, weekly working day and daily working hour thresholds were adopted in the definition of “continuous contract” of employment, which is deemed to be a contract for one month renewable from month to month, to provide an objective basis for avoiding any confusion arising from different wage periods and modes of calculating wages.<sup>14</sup> Back then, part-time workers were not regarded as “regular employees” and their exclusion from the coverage of the EO was taken for granted.

The Government’s position is at odds with international labour standards. The *Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175)* enshrines the principle of equal treatment of part-time workers.<sup>15</sup> Article 8 of the Convention provides that if there is a working hour threshold for the entitlement of certain employee protection or benefits, the authorities should periodically review the threshold in force, including the reason therefor. Among countries or regions of comparable economic development level, Hong Kong seems to be the only one adopting weekly hour threshold in its labour laws, resulting “non 4-18 employees” to second-class workers under the law.

The “4-18 requirement” or “4-68 requirement” not only directly discriminates against part-time employees but also indirectly discriminates against women as they made up the majority of “non-4-18 employees”. The proposed amendment to the definition of “continuous employment” also fails to prevent employers from exploiting legal loopholes by engaging the employees under a series of fixed-term contracts and

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<sup>12</sup> Census and Statistics Department (2021) *Thematic Household Survey Report No. 72*

<sup>13</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (March 2024) *Review of the “continuous contract” requirement under the Employment Ordinance*, LC Paper No. CB(2)342/2024(03)

<sup>14</sup> *Hong Kong Legislative Council Official Report of Proceedings: Meeting of 23rd August 1968*, p. 373

<sup>15</sup> Convention No. 175 does not apply to Hong Kong.

inserting a gap between each contract, thus breaking the employees' continuity of service in order to evade their statutory obligations.

### *Statutory protection for digital platform workers*

Access to employment rights depends to a large extent on whether an individual is worked as an employee. The traditional binary categorisation of "subordinate and dependent employee" versus "autonomous and independent self-employed" however gives rise to problem when the status of individuals is so unclear that they cannot be easily classified as being employees or self-employed. This problem becomes more acute as the existing classification fails to reflect recent growth of certain flexible or non-standard forms of employment, including casual work, zero-hours contracts, fixed term and task work, agency work, platform work, freelancing and "dependent self-employment".

With the growing popularity of gig economy in recent years, more and more people have switched to working as digital platform workers in Hong Kong. A study finds that the five major local digital platforms, Uber, DiDi, GogoX, Foodpanda and Deliveroo, had a total of 114,000 registered workers in 2023, accounting for about 3.4% of the total employment.<sup>16</sup> Given that a person can work for more than one platform, the above figure is very likely to be an over-estimation.

Almost all platform workers in Hong Kong are (mis)classified as independent contractors, hindering their effective enjoyment of statutory protection and benefits. The Labour Tribunal ruled for the first time in 2023 that the employment status of delivery workers engaged by digital platform Zeek is in fact employee.<sup>17</sup> The Tribunal's ruling is however not binding and disputes over employment status of other delivery platforms' workers must be determined on a case-by-case basis via litigation. Fighting for platform worker's rights through litigation though has three major limitations. First, the outcome of litigation is unpredictable; in a District Court work injury compensation case in 2024, the presiding deputy judge ruled that a Deliveroo rider, who was injured in a work-related traffic accident in 2022, was an independent contractor.<sup>18</sup> Second, the legal proceedings are cumbersome and expensive, which could be prohibitive for workers without legal aid or trade union's assistance. Third, platform operators often reach confidential settlements with claimant workers in order to avoid unfavourable court rulings.

There are growing public concerns over the protection afforded to platform workers, particularly after several riders, who were killed or seriously injured in work-related traffic accidents, received little or no compensation from the digital

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<sup>16</sup> LegCo Research and Information Division (2023) *Protection of digital platform workers in Singapore and Spain*, Information Note IN17/2023, p. 1

<sup>17</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2023/06/19/gig-workers-win](https://hongkongfp.com/2023/06/19/gig-workers-win/) [March 2025]

<sup>18</sup> *Gurung, Sanjaya Man v Deliveroo Hong Kong Limited* [2024] HKDC 1932

platforms.<sup>19</sup> Amid growing public concerns, the Government has commissioned the Census and Statistics Department to conduct a survey on the working conditions of platform workers, and starts exploring and formulating a “policy direction” in early 2025 when the survey results are available. However, before the formal consultation kicks off, the Government has already expressed its opposition to classify platform worker as employee, claiming mandating employment relationship between digital platforms and their workers “may not be conducive to the development of the industry”.<sup>20</sup> The authorities instead focus their study on three areas, namely work injury compensation, communication mechanism between platform operators and workers, and preventing illegal workers from working on platforms.<sup>21</sup> This means that the employment status of digital platform workers remains ambiguous in the foreseeable future.

### *Importation of labour*

Amid the sharp decline in the city’s workforce, the Government decided in June 2023 to import more labour through the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS). In addition to a special scheme to import care workers for residential care homes announced in December 2022, the Government introduced another two sector-specific schemes for the construction and transport sectors (aviation, and public light bus / coach) respectively. Employers are also allowed, provisionally for two years, to apply for importing workers in 26 job categories, including waiter, junior cook, sales assistant, warehouse keeper, food processing worker, clerical worker and receptionist, which are excluded in the original labour importation scheme.<sup>22</sup>

As at 31 January 2025, around 23,800 quotas for importation of workers under the three sector-specific schemes were approved; and since September 2023, 6,762 applications involving 47,474 quotas of imported workers have been approved under the ESLS, over half of which (24,384) falling within the previously excluded 26 job categories (Table 2).<sup>23</sup>

“Accommodation and food services” is the sector that imported the most foreign workers. More than 21,000 quotas for cook, junior cook, waiter, dish washer and room attendant have been granted under the ESLS, representing 8.3% of the persons engaged in the sector in the final quarter of 2024. The impact of importing a large number of foreign workers is evidently felt. The sector’s unemployment and

<sup>19</sup> For instance, see [www.hk01.com/article/895788](http://www.hk01.com/article/895788) & [thecollectivehk.com/逆權車手2](http://thecollectivehk.com/逆權車手2) (both in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>20</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (December 2023) *Protection for digital platform workers*, LC Paper No. CB(2)1132/2023(03), para. 16

<sup>21</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202411/28/P2024112800286.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202411/28/P2024112800286.htm) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>22</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (13 June 2023) *Importation of Labour*, Legislative Council Brief LD SL-C1/205(C)

<sup>23</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202502/26/P2025022600248.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202502/26/P2025022600248.htm) [March 2025]

underemployment rates rose to 4.9% and 1.6% respectively in the third quarter of 2024, increase by 1.0 and 0.6 percentage points from a year earlier respectively. Wage growth also slowed considerably; nominal salaries index increased by 3.3% year-on-year in the final quarter of 2024, down from 5.5% a year earlier.

**Table 2: Labour importation quotas approved**

| Scheme                     | Quotas approved   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Construction               | 9,109 (active quotas; quota is allocated on rolling basis)                        |
| Aviation                   | 5,823   |
| Public light bus and coach | 1,700 (900 for public light bus and 800 for coach)                                |
| Residential care homes     | Around 7,200 (including renewal of quotas approved under previous scheme)         |
| ESLS                       | 47,474 (24,384 of which falling within the previously excluded 26 job categories) |

Separately, the Government implemented the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS) in December 2022 to attract outside talent with high income and academic qualifications to explore opportunities in the city. Eligible applicants are not required to have secured an offer of employment in Hong Kong before application for a two-year visa through the scheme. As at end of 2024, nearly 92,000 applications under the TTPS were approved; of those, more than 75,000 applicants have arrived with their families. According to a survey conducted by the Labour and Welfare Bureau, more than half of the incoming applicants have been in employment, and nearly 20% of their spouses have also taken up jobs in Hong Kong.<sup>24</sup> The influx of arrivals under the scheme, nearly 95% of whom came from China, is one of the most important factors contributing to the mild recovery of Hong Kong's labour force.

#### 4. Article 23 Legislation

Article 23 Legislation was rushed through the opposition-free legislature on 19 March 2024, just 11 days after the original bill was first gazetted. The law creates new criminal offences, broadens the scope of existing crimes and grants the authorities sweeping powers of enforcement, in relation to treason, insurrection, incitement of mutiny or dissatisfaction, sedition, state secrets and espionage, sabotage, external interference and prohibition of operation of organizations, amongst others.

Article 23 Legislation defines “national security” in Section 4 as “the status in which the state's political regime, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major interests of the state are relatively free from danger and internal or external threats, and the capability to maintain a sustained status of security”, which is literally a carbon copy of Beijing's notion of comprehensive national security. This definition is imprecise and overly broad, which is incompatible with the principle of legal certainty as

<sup>24</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202501/22/P2025012200218.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202501/22/P2025012200218.htm) [March 2025]

enshrined in international human right instruments, and opens the door for the authorities to make use of the law as a weapon to suppress dissidents and civil society organizations. A comprehensive analysis of Article 23 Legislation is beyond the scope of this report, the following paragraphs highlight the most important provisions that could have a direct bearing on the normal and effective functioning of the city's trade unions and labour organizations.<sup>25</sup>

### *Acts with seditious intention*

Article 23 Legislation broadens the scope of existing seditious offences under the Crimes Ordinance and increases the maximum penalty for committing an act with seditious intention from two years imprisonment to seven years (or 10 years if there is collusion with external forces). Seditious intention now covers, amongst others, bringing persons into "hatred, contempt or disaffection against the constitutional order, executive, legislative or judicial authority", and causing "hatred or enmity amongst different classes of residents". Section 25 explicitly provides that proof of intention to incite public disorder or violence is not necessary to convict a defendant, contrary to the Privy Council's opinion that the principle of legality would limit seditious offences with "a requirement that there must be an intention to incite violence or disorder".<sup>26</sup> Section 28 applies the offence to a Hong Kong resident doing an act with seditious intention outside the territory.

Since the promulgation of the NSL, the Government has re-weaponised sedition, an offence enacted in the colonial era that had not been invoked for decades, to target journalists, human right defenders and civil society organizers. **Five former executive committee (ExCo) members of the now de-registered General Union of Hong Kong Speech Therapists (GUHKST)** were convicted in September 2022 of publishing and circulating seditious materials (three children's picture books about sheep defending their village from invading wolves) by a District Court national security judge handpicked by the Chief Executive (CE) under the NSL and were sentenced to 19 months each in prison.<sup>27</sup> As at end of 2024, five people have been charged with the revitalised seditious offences under Article 23 Legislation and three of them have been convicted, with one was sentenced to 14 months in prison for wearing a T-shirt with protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times".<sup>28</sup>

The imprecise and overly broad definition of seditious crimes may also encourage the police's abuses against civil society activists. On one occasion, the police asked trade union organizers to put away a banner that read "Livelihood Is

<sup>25</sup> For an authoritative review of Article 23 Legislation, see UN Special Rapporteurs' letter dated 22 March 2024, JOL CHN 5/2024

<sup>26</sup> *Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago v Vijay Maharaj Substituted on behalf of the Estate of Satnarayan Maharaj for Satnarayan Maharaj and another (Trinidad and Tobago)*, [2023] UKPC 36, para. 47

<sup>27</sup> hongkongfp.com/2022/09/10/breaking [March 2025]

<sup>28</sup> hongkongfp.com/2025/02/27/case & hongkongfp.com/2024/11/13/Hongkonger [March 2025]



Politics, Grassroots Want Justice”, accusing them of using an inciting slogan that amounted to “hatred towards the government”.<sup>29</sup> Trade unions accuse the authorities of “colluding with the business” when criticising the government’s pro-business policies (hatred or contempt against the executive authority) or label the capitalists as worker’s “class enemy” during industrial actions (hatred or enmity amongst different classes of residents) would risk being caught by the seditious offence under the new law. Without adequate protection for freedom of expression, a number of trade unions have chosen to stay silence, while other unions that continue to comment on government’s labour policies have moderated their tone to avoid troubles.

While it is advisable that trade unions should refrain from using abusive or insulting languages when expressing their opinions, it is well-settled that the right to expression includes speech that may offend, shock or disturb. The ILO always maintains that “freedom of opinion and expression [including those criticising the government’s economic and social policies] constitutes one of the basic civil liberties essential for the normal expression of trade union rights”, and the “authorities’ threatening to press criminal charges in response to legitimate opinions of trade union representatives may have an intimidating and detrimental effect on the exercise of trade union rights”.<sup>30</sup> The seditious offences under Article 23 Legislation, which invite arbitrary application against dissidents and pose undue restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression, are not in conformity with established labour standards.

### *External interference*

Article 23 Legislation prohibits a person from collaborating with an external force to do an act with intent to bring about an interference effect by improper means. The new crime carries a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment (Section 52). Section 6 defines an “external force” as, amongst others, a political party or any other organization that pursues political ends in an external place, and an international organization. “Interference effect” includes influencing the executive authorities “in the formulation or execution of any policy or measures”, and influencing the Legislative Council (LegCo) and its Members “in performing functions” (Section 53). “Collaborating with external force” covers situations where a person merely “participates in an activity planned or otherwise led by an external force”, does an act “in cooperation with” or “with the financial contributions, or the support by other means, of” an external force (Section 54). “Improper means” includes knowingly making a “material misrepresentation”, “damaging or threatening to damage a person’s reputation” or “causing psychological harm to, or placing undue psychological pressure on, a person” (Section 55). Section 57 provides for the extra-territorial effect of the offence.

<sup>29</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2021/07/01/hong-kong-police](http://hongkongfp.com/2021/07/01/hong-kong-police) [March 2025]

<sup>30</sup> ILO (2018) *Compilation of decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association 6th edition*, para. 233, 237 & 245

As UN Special Rapporteurs note, the offence of external interference “set a low threshold due to a combination of the over-broad and vague definition of ‘national security’, no requirement that any physical harm be caused or intended, the requirement to merely ‘influence’ the ... authorities, and the incrimination of potentially innocent associations with legitimate ‘external forces’, including ordinary advocacy and lobbying activities in democratic society”.<sup>31</sup> The provisions will inevitably deter the city’s trade unions from collaborating with or seeking financial support from foreign or international labour organizations, as the police can use this as a pretext to conduct covert surveillance on the unions and their members, and even raid their premises, seize documents and arrest their leaders. **Three former ExCo members of the now dissolved Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU)** were charged for failing to provide the police with information regarding HKCTU’s operations, past activities, financial sources and links to groups outside Hong Kong. They were found guilty under Article 16(2) of the Societies Ordinance and were fined HK\$8,000 each in November 2022.<sup>32</sup> The police had earlier raided more than 10 locations across the city, seizing documents and electronic devices from the HKCTU’s offices and warehouses.<sup>33</sup>

Not only legitimate foreign non-governmental organizations but also the United Nations and its agencies, such as the ILO, could fall within the scope of “external force” (international organizations). The Government’s delegation to a Human Rights Committee public hearing in July 2022 remained tight-lipped when asked repeatedly whether the organizations that took part in UN’s human rights mechanisms would face legal consequences.<sup>34</sup> Local trade union lodging a complaint to the ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association (collaborating with an external force) alleging the government of violating international labour conventions (bringing about an interference effect) may risk being caught by the offence, if it is perceived to have knowingly made a material misrepresentation or damaged a person’s reputation (using improper means).

In an era of global economic integration, it is unavoidable that local trade unions have to communicate and collaborate with their counterparts at regional and international level to safeguard worker’s interests. Trade union’s taking part in ILO’s meetings and mechanisms is also an indispensable means to ensure the effective realisation of fundamental labour rights and standards. Yet, the potential legal risks brought about by the external interference offence under Article 23 Legislation could probably deter the city’s trade unions from participating in such activities, compromising their functions of promoting labour rights and worker’s welfare.

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<sup>31</sup> Note 25, UN Special Rapporteurs, pp. 8 – 9

<sup>32</sup> [www.inmediahk.net/node/社運/已解散職工盟被指無按例交資料-三人認罪各罰款 8 千元-鄧建華：良心驅使、人不能夠捲曲如蛆蟲](http://www.inmediahk.net/node/社運/已解散職工盟被指無按例交資料-三人認罪各罰款 8 千元-鄧建華：良心驅使、人不能夠捲曲如蛆蟲) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>33</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2022/03/31/hong-kong-national-security-police-quiz-ex-leaders](http://hongkongfp.com/2022/03/31/hong-kong-national-security-police-quiz-ex-leaders) [March 2025]

<sup>34</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2022/07/13/that-would-actually-depend](http://hongkongfp.com/2022/07/13/that-would-actually-depend) [March 2025]

*Sabotage endangering national security*

Article 23 Legislation creates a new offence targeting people who “damage or weaken a public infrastructure” with “intent to endanger national security” or at a substantially lower standard of “being reckless”. The offence carries a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment (or life imprisonment if there is collusion with external force). Public infrastructure is defined very broadly, including public transport facility, and infrastructure, facility, computer or electronic system providing or maintaining public service. Weakening a public infrastructure includes, amongst others, “causing the infrastructure not to be able to function as it should in whole or in part”, without having actually damaged the infrastructure.

The sabotage offence, with its very vague definition, overly broad scope, extremely low threshold for conviction and excessively heavy penalties, may unduly intrude the rights of trade union to organize its legitimate activities, including protest, strike and industrial action. Public transport trade union staging a large scale strike could risk falling within the ambit of the offence, as it may cause the public transport facilities not functioning properly (weakening a public infrastructure) and affect people’s welfare or sustainable economic development (recklessly endangering national security). Facing potentially very serious criminal liabilities (life imprisonment if supported by external organizations), trade unions would understandably choose to err on the cautious side, and refrain from organizing any risky (albeit peaceful) industrial actions.

The right to strike is regarded as constituting a fundamental right of workers and of their organizations, and the restriction of which is permitted only in essential services in the strictest sense of the term (that is, services the interruption of which would pose a clear and imminent threat to the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population).<sup>35</sup> The sabotage offence as it now stands could seriously jeopardize trade union’s right to organize legitimate strike, and is not in full conformity with international labour standards.

*Prohibition of operation of organizations*

Section 60 of Article 23 Legislation grants the Secretary for Security the powers to prohibit the operation or continued operation of an organization if he or she “reasonably believes that it is necessary for safeguarding national security”. The new law then makes provisions for consequential offences in connection with prohibited organizations, including acting as office-bearer of or managing a prohibited organization (which carries a maximum penalty of a fine of HK\$1,000,000 and imprisonment for 14 years); being a member of, conducting any activity on behalf of or in cooperation with, participating in a meeting of, or paying money to a prohibited organization (a fine of HK\$250,000 and imprisonment for 10 years); allowing meeting

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<sup>35</sup> Note 30, ILO *Compilation*, para. 824, 830 & 836

of a prohibited organization to be held on premises, inciting others to become members of a prohibited organization, or procuring subscription or aid for a prohibited organization (a fine of HK\$250,000 and imprisonment for 7 years). Section 68 empowers an authorized officer to require any organization or any office-bearer of an organization to provide information; any person failing to do so is liable to a fine at level 4 (currently HK\$25,000).

The extensive powers afforded to the Secretary for Security to ban any organization could unjustifiably compromise worker's right to freedom of association. Given the overly broad definition of national security (including people's welfare, sustainable economic and social development, and other major interests of the state) and the extremely low threshold for exercising the powers (reasonable belief of necessary for safeguarding national security is a substantially lower standard than reasonable suspicion of having committed or likely to commit national security offences, which themselves are broadly defined), the provisions could open the door for the authorities to put a blank label of "necessary for safeguarding national security" to any organization (trade union included), and arbitrarily interfere into, or even prohibit, the operation of the organization.

The ILO has repeatedly stressed that organizations of workers can only be dissolved voluntarily or through judicial channels. Legislative provisions empowering the executive authorities to prohibit the operation or continued operation of a trade union constitutes serious infringements of the principles of freedom of association, in particular Article 4 of Convention No. 87.<sup>36</sup> The unchecked powers to require trade union office-bearers to provide information, and to enter and inspect trade union's non-domestic premises without warrant (Section 70) also allow the authorities to unduly interfere into trade union's operation, infringing the right of workers to organize their administration and activities without any interference by the public authorities.<sup>37</sup>

## 5. Labour Rights Violations

Since the implementation of the NSL, at least 15 trade union organizers have been arrested or charged by the authorities. A summary of their latest statuses as at end of 2024 can be found at Annex 3. The heavy sentences imposed on two trade unionists and other activists over their participation in the democracy camp's primary election illustrates how the NSL is used against civil society organizers. Extra-legal suppression methods were also adopted to silence the city's remaining independent trade unions, and transnational repression tactics were employed to target exiled trade union and civil society leaders. On the other hand, social workers' right to work was compromised as 17 persons' social worker registration was stripped or suspended

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<sup>36</sup> Note 30, *ILO Compilation*, para. 979, 986 & 987

<sup>37</sup> Note 30, *ILO Compilation*, para. 666

seemingly because of their political beliefs or activities. MDWs' right to work of their own choosing was also denied as the Government revised the employment agency's codes of practice to combat "job-hopping".

### *Primary election trial*

Former chair of the HKCTU **Carol Ng** and former chair of the now disbanded Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA) **Winnie Yu** were sentenced to jail for 53 months and 81 months respectively on 19 November 2024, over their participation in the democracy camp's unofficial primary election held in July 2020.<sup>38</sup> Both were arrested on 6 January 2021 and were charged on 28 February with "conspiracy to commit subversion" under the draconian NSL. The primary election trial was presided by a panel of three national security judges without a jury and started in February 2023, almost two years after the 47 democracy activists were charged.

Ng stood for the primary election on the platform of striving for better protection of labour rights and strengthening the role of workers in the fight for the city's democracy through union organizing. She has been detained since 28 February 2021. A High Court national security judge declined her appeal for bail on 20 December, claiming she "has an international influence as a result of her trade union work, therefore, it would be very easy for her to connect with her colleagues abroad to further the hostility against the authorities".<sup>39</sup> Ng indicated her intention to plead guilty at a case management hearing in November 2022.<sup>40</sup>

Yu won the democracy camp's primaries in the Health Services functional constituency. She is one of the founders of the HAEA, which staged a 5-day strike, with an estimated 6,000 strong medical workers taking part, amid the COVID outbreak in February 2020, demanding for adequate personal protective equipment to HA staffs and boarder closure to stop the virus spreading to the city.<sup>41</sup> A High Court judge allowed her appeal for bail on 28 July 2021, noting there was "no evidence that she ever had any international connection".<sup>42</sup> Yu was arrested again on suspicion of violating bail conditions on 7 March 2022 and her bail was revoked the next day by a magistrate judge, seemingly because of posts she made to social media criticising the government's handling of the Omicron outbreak, which had left nearly 3,000 people dead (as of early March 2022) and hospitals overwhelmed.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> [2024] HKCFI 3298, para. 254 & 337; for a detailed timeline of the primary election trial, see: [hongkongfp.com/2024/11/18/hong-kong-47](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/11/18/hong-kong-47)

<sup>39</sup> [2022] HKCFI 1061, para. 17

<sup>40</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2022/11/08/17-hong-kong-democrats](https://hongkongfp.com/2022/11/08/17-hong-kong-democrats) [March 2025]

<sup>41</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnie\\_Yu\\_\(nurse\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnie_Yu_(nurse)) [March 2025]

<sup>42</sup> [2021] HKCFI 2562, para. 16

<sup>43</sup> [www.rfa.org/english/news/china/hongkong-unionist-03102022105118.html](https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/hongkong-unionist-03102022105118.html) [March 2025]



Yu pleaded not guilty in February 2023 when the trial started, and finished her testimony in August. Her defence counsel told the court on 29 November in the closing statement that she was “simply seeking to hold those in power to account and that could be not subversion”.<sup>44</sup> Yu was however found guilty when the court handed down its verdict on 30 May 2024.<sup>45</sup> She lodged an appeal against her conviction and sentence a week after the court’s sentencing.<sup>46</sup> Appeal hearing is scheduled on 14 July 2025.

The core issue of the primary election trial is whether vetoing the budget to press for democratic reform, the central demand of the 2019 Anit-Extradition Bill Movement (2019 Movement), is a subversive act under the NSL. The democracy camp contended that they were merely relying on a constitutional mechanism to push for change. The court however sided with the prosecution that the defendants intended to abuse the powers conferred to lawmakers to indiscriminately veto the budget, forcing the CE’s resignation and a government shutdown. Threatening to veto the budget is a common political bargaining tactics in democratic societies; yet, in Hong Kong, it has become a subversive crime that carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

The primary election trial is seen as an acid test of how the NSL, and the law more generally, is used against democratic activists and political dissidents. A former overseas non-permanent judge of the Court of Final Appeal, who quitted the position shortly after the court delivered its verdict, opines that the ruling is “legally indefensible” and the NSL is used to “crush even peaceful political dissent”, and warns that “Hong Kong, once a vibrant and politically diverse community, is slowly becoming a totalitarian state”.<sup>47</sup>

### *Mung Siu-tat’s passport cancelled*

The Secretary for Security specified **Mung Siu-tat** and five others as absconders and cancelled their passports on 12 June 2024.<sup>48</sup> Article 23 Legislation empowers the Secretary to specify a person as absconder and apply measures against the him or her. It will be unlawful for any person, whether directly or indirectly, to provide absconders with funds, financial assets, handle their economic resources or have property dealings. The offence carries a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment.

Mung is former Chief Executive of the HKCTU. Days before HKCTU’s announcement to disband on 19 September 2021, he resigned and fled the city because of “imminent political risks and safety concerns”. He later revealed that he

<sup>44</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/29/closing-arguments-begin-in-trial-of-hong-kong-pro-democracy-activists](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/29/closing-arguments-begin-in-trial-of-hong-kong-pro-democracy-activists) [March 2025]

<sup>45</sup> [2024] HKCFI 1468, para. 585 – 593

<sup>46</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/11/27/4-hong-kong-democrats](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/11/27/4-hong-kong-democrats) [March 2025]

<sup>47</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/06/10/lord-sumption](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/06/10/lord-sumption) [March 2025]

<sup>48</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202406/12/P2024061200018.htm](https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202406/12/P2024061200018.htm) [March 2025]

was questioned by Beijing's "middlemen" three times within a month, and referral to the national security police was mentioned in their last meeting.<sup>49</sup>

The police announced on 3 July 2023 arrest warrant had been issued against Mung for suspicion of violating the NSL, and offered HK\$1 million in reward money for information leading to his arrest.<sup>50</sup> He was accused of smearing the China and Hong Kong Governments while attending an overseas conference (seemingly the French Democratic Confederation of Labour congress held in Lyon) in June 2022 and advocating separating Hong Kong from China, allegedly violating Article 21 of the NSL (incitement to secession). Given that he has never called for Hong Kong's independence, it is not unreasonable to perceive that police's high-profile action is in fact targeting his labour advocacy work overseas. A government source also confessed that Mung and co. were singled out because they were "more actively involved" than the rest in activities that "endangered national security".<sup>51</sup>

Mung is currently Executive Director of the Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor, an UK-based labour group formed by exiled trade unionists among others aiming to speak up for the workers of Hong Kong and amplify their voices around the world. He is seemingly a target of the Hong Kong authorities' surveillance operation. Three men associated with the London Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office were arrested in May 2024 for violating the UK's national security law by assisting a foreign intelligence service and engaging in foreign interference on behalf of Hong Kong. Mung's name was found listed on a note on one of the arrestees' phone.<sup>52</sup> The Government's issuance of arrest warrants against, provision of bounty for the arrest of, surveillance operation against, cancellation of passports of and prohibition against economic connection with, Mung and other activists are example of Beijing's comprehensive campaign of transnational repression to silence dissent among exiles.

#### *Updates of trade unionists arrested since the NSL*

Former General Secretary of the HKCTU **Lee Cheuk-yan** was sentenced to a total of 20 months in jail by the District Court in three separate trials for organising peaceful, albeit unauthorised, assemblies on 18 & 31 August and 1 October 2019 and 4 June 2020.<sup>53</sup> He received two more weeks behind bars in April 2022 for obstructing a police officer during a peaceful protest calling for the release of political prisoners outside

<sup>49</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3149319/hong-kongs-largest-opposition-trade-union-confirms](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3149319/hong-kongs-largest-opposition-trade-union-confirms) [March 2025]

<sup>50</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202307/03/P2023070300526.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202307/03/P2023070300526.htm) [March 2025]

<sup>51</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3226372/hong-kong-national-security-law-police-offer-hk1-million-rewards-arrest-8-people](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3226372/hong-kong-national-security-law-police-offer-hk1-million-rewards-arrest-8-people) [March 2025]

<sup>52</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/05/18/explainer-why-uk](http://hongkongfp.com/2024/05/18/explainer-why-uk) [March 2025]

<sup>53</sup> [www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/4/184432/](http://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/4/184432/) [March 2025]

the LegCo Building on the New Year's Day in 2021.<sup>54</sup> The Court of Appeal on 14 August 2023 allowed his and six other activists' appeal against the conviction of organizing an unauthorised assembly held on 18 August 2019 but upheld the lower court's verdict on knowingly participating in the rally.<sup>55</sup> The Court of the Final Appeal dismissed their appeal on 12 August 2024.<sup>56</sup>

Lee was also arrested (while in prison) on 9 September 2021 and charged with inciting subversion of state power under the NSL. The offence carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. He has been remanded in custody since finished serving his jail terms on 30 September 2022. The High Court declined his application for bail on 2 December, citing the risk he could continue to commit acts endangering national security.<sup>57</sup> The trial is presided by a panel of three High Court national security judges without a jury and will begin on 11 November 2025, more than four years after Lee was arrested.<sup>58</sup>

**Elizabeth Tang** was arrested on 9 March 2023 for "suspected collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security" after visiting her husband Lee Cheuk-yan, who is being detained in Stanley Prison awaiting trial on a NSL charge. She is former Chief Executive of the HKCTU and former director of the now dissolved Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC). It is reported that Tang, as a director of the AMRC, was suspected of "receiving more than HK\$100 million in donations from groups in the United States, Germany and Norway since 1994 to support labour movements in Asia".<sup>59</sup> The AMRC, which was registered as a limited company in Hong Kong, decided in September 2021 to cease operations after being accused by Beijing's propaganda arm *Ta Kung Pao* of operating under the HKCTU, which was allegedly colluding with overseas organizations. She was discharged by the police in May 2024.<sup>60</sup>

The police also arrested Tang's younger sister **Marilyn Tang** on 11 March 2023 on suspicion of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice<sup>61</sup>. Marilyn Tang, who is also former Executive Director of the now dissolved HKCTU Training Centre, was formally charged in late September for allegedly removing her sister's mobile phone and laptop

<sup>54</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3175861/jailed-former-hong-kong-lawmaker-gets-2-more-weeks](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3175861/jailed-former-hong-kong-lawmaker-gets-2-more-weeks) [March 2025]

<sup>55</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/14/hong-kong-pro-democracy-advocates-have-part-of-convictions-quashed-jimmy-lai-martin-lee-margaret-ng-](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/14/hong-kong-pro-democracy-advocates-have-part-of-convictions-quashed-jimmy-lai-martin-lee-margaret-ng-) [March 2025]

<sup>56</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/08/12/breaking-jimmy-lai](http://hongkongfp.com/2024/08/12/breaking-jimmy-lai) [March 2025]

<sup>57</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2022/12/06/ex-hong-kong-tiananmen-vigil-leader](http://hongkongfp.com/2022/12/06/ex-hong-kong-tiananmen-vigil-leader) [March 2025]

<sup>58</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2025/02/21/hong-kong-ex-lawmaker](http://hongkongfp.com/2025/02/21/hong-kong-ex-lawmaker) [March 2025]

<sup>59</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3212918/wife-jailed-hong-kong-opposition-politician-arrested-national-security-officers-after-prison-visit](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3212918/wife-jailed-hong-kong-opposition-politician-arrested-national-security-officers-after-prison-visit) [March 2025]

<sup>60</sup> [bit.ly/3WjvMvn](https://bit.ly/3WjvMvn) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>61</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3213186/hong-kong-national-security-law-unionist-wife-jailed-ex-opposition-politician-lee-cheuk-yan-released](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3213186/hong-kong-national-security-law-unionist-wife-jailed-ex-opposition-politician-lee-cheuk-yan-released) [March 2025]

before a police search. She pleaded guilty before a magistrate judge on 7 December and was sentenced to six months imprisonment two weeks later.<sup>62</sup> She finished serving her jail terms in April 2024.

**Joseph Lee**, former chair of the Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff, and **Cyrus Lau**, former ExCo member of the Allied Health Professionals and Nurses Association were arrested in January 2021 over their participation in the democracy camp's primary election. They have not been charged and have been on police bail with their travel documents surrendered since their arrest. A national security police officer revealed in May 2024 that their cases were still under investigation and they would be charged if there were sufficient evidence.<sup>63</sup>

### *Chair of journalists' union sacked*

**Selina Cheng** was sacked by *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) on 17 July 2024, just weeks after she was elected the chair of the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA). Prior to her dismissal, WSJ editors "pressured Cheng to withdraw from running in the HKJA election as chair and to resign from the executive committee, which she refused to".<sup>64</sup> She filed a claim to the Labour Tribunal for unlawful dismissal remedies in November after her request for reinstatement through mediation was declined.<sup>65</sup> She also initiated private prosecution proceedings in February 2025 against WSJ for anti-union discrimination under Section 21B of the EO, after the Department of Justice reportedly advised the Labour Department against criminal proceedings.<sup>66</sup>

The HKJA, being one of the few remaining independent trade unions in the city, has been a target of the authorities since the territory-wide protests in 2019. Former chair **Ronson Chan** announced in May 2024 he would not seek another term as his re-election might not be the best option for the union.<sup>67</sup> He had been taken away by the police twice, and was found guilty in September 2023 of obstructing a police officer while he was reporting a year earlier. He was sentenced to 5 days imprisonment and has been granted bail pending appeal.

Extra-legal suppression methods, such as intimidating organizers or erecting barriers to obstruct the smooth functioning of civil society organizations have increasingly been used to silence critics. The HKJA reveals that some ExCo members "have also been pressured by their employers to stand down", adding a growing

<sup>62</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2023/12/21/hong-kong-woman](https://hongkongfp.com/2023/12/21/hong-kong-woman) [March 2025]

<sup>63</sup> [www.inmediahk.net/node/社運/【初選 47 人案】涂謹申鄭俊宇等 8 人續保逾 3 年-李桂華：案件仍在調查中](https://www.inmediahk.net/node/社運/【初選 47 人案】涂謹申鄭俊宇等 8 人續保逾 3 年-李桂華：案件仍在調查中) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>64</sup> [hkja.org.hk/en/press-release/the-hkja-condemns](https://hkja.org.hk/en/press-release/the-hkja-condemns) [March 2025]

<sup>65</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/11/12/hong-kong-press-group-chief](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/11/12/hong-kong-press-group-chief) [March 2025]

<sup>66</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2025/02/13/wall-st-journal](https://hongkongfp.com/2025/02/13/wall-st-journal) [March 2025]

<sup>67</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/05/16/hong-kong-press-group-chief](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/05/16/hong-kong-press-group-chief) [March 2025]

number of potential candidates for board positions at the city's journalist's organizations "have been warned off standing for election, or told outright they cannot without risking their jobs".<sup>68</sup> Prior to the HKJA's annual general meeting on 22 June 2024, two candidates, Preston Cheung of Justice Centre Hong Kong and Danny Vincent of the BBC, said they wished to drop out of the election for ExCo seats.<sup>69</sup> Both resigned immediately after the poll, with another two also stepped down within a month upon assuming their ExCo positions.<sup>70</sup>

An investigation by the HKJA finds that, between June and August 2024, dozens of journalists, their family members, or their family members' employers, as well as neighbours and associates, were harassed and intimidated both online and offline. Most of the union's ExCo members had received such harassment, including its chair.<sup>71</sup> Earlier, a live fundraising concert organized by the HKJA was called off at the last minute, due to "an irresistible force".<sup>72</sup> It is understood that the venue agreement for the event was unilaterally cancelled. The phenomenon has become a "new normal", as a number of the city's remaining civil society organizations, such as the Democratic Party, have struggled to find venues to host their events for the past few years.

### *Union's funds seized*

A Hight Court national security judge handed down an order to forfeit the GUHKSP's funds in September 2024.<sup>73</sup> The prosecution alleged that the union had organized activities endangering national security. The court may issue an order to seize "offence related properties" under the NSL's Implementation Rules.

Shortly after the police arrested five ExCo members of the GUHKST over the publication of three children's picture books, the Registrar of Trade Unions (RTU) issued a "notice of intention to cancel the registration" to the union on 13 August 2021, alleging that it is being used for purposes inconsistent with its objects or rules. The GUHKST did not appeal the decision and was officially de-registered on 13 October. The police also froze around HK\$160,000 of the union's assets. The court ordered to seize about HK\$116,000 of the union's fund, after deducting about HK\$50,000 in liquidation fees.

### *Social worker registration stripped or suspended*

12 social workers' registrations have been suspended for six months to five years because of their convictions of offences related to the 2019 Movement since the

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<sup>68</sup> Note 64

<sup>69</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/06/22/new-leadership](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/06/22/new-leadership) [March 2025]

<sup>70</sup> [www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/htm/hk-hkja-07192024101146.html](https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/htm/hk-hkja-07192024101146.html) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>71</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/09/13/breaking-dozens](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/09/13/breaking-dozens) [March 2025]

<sup>72</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/04/25/hong-kong-press-groups-fundraising-concert](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/04/25/hong-kong-press-groups-fundraising-concert) [March 2025]

<sup>73</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/09/26/hong-kong-speech-therapists-union](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/09/26/hong-kong-speech-therapists-union) [March 2025]



Social Workers Registration Board was restructured in July 2024.<sup>74</sup> Sze Tak-loy and Ben Chung, who were convicted in May of “conspiracy to commit subversion” over their participation in the democracy camp’s primary election, were permanently stripped of their social worker registration under an amendment made to the Social Workers Registration Ordinance in 2022.<sup>75</sup>

Social worker registration of Lau Ka-tung, who was sentenced to 8 months imprisonment for obstructing a police officer while observing a protest in 2019, was suspended for five years. Four social workers, who were convicted of unlawful assembly during the 2019 Movement and sentenced to 12 to 14 months imprisonment, were suspended for registration for three years. Former member of pro-worker political party League of Social Democrats Ma Wan-ki was suspended for three years because of his offence of desecrating the Hong Kong flag in 2012, ten years before he became a social worker. The sanctions imposed on them are disproportionately harsh when comparing with a social worker, who was found guilty of making false statement under the Housing Ordinance, was suspended for registration for only one year. It is not unreasonable to perceive that the registration board’s decisions were politically motivated to silence social workers who are critical of the government. Social workers’ right to work irrespective of their political belief and opinion is compromised.

Social work sector has been an important member of Hong Kong’s democratic movement since the 1980s. Social workers have also actively participated in fighting for worker’s rights and welfare, such as instituting a universal retirement protection scheme and establishing a statutory minimum wage. Their influential role in the city’s social movement made them a target of the authorities’ relentless crackdown on civil society. The LegCo passed a bill to reconstitute the registration board in July 2024 that gave government appointees, who are not required to be social workers, a 60% majority, despite 95% of social workers surveyed said the amendment would undermine the autonomy of their profession.<sup>76</sup> The board is empowered to set and review the qualification standards for the registration of social workers as well as conduct inquiries in case of disciplinary offence. The government was dissatisfied with the board’s past performance, citing only light sentences were imposed on social workers despite their grave misconduct. Amid the government’s aggressive enforcement of the draconian NSL and the overhaul of the registration board to discipline dissent, social workers, once the most vocal group in the city, have become silenced.

<sup>74</sup> [thecollectivehk.com/dq/社工](https://thecollectivehk.com/dq/社工) | (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>75</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (May 2022) *Social Workers Registration Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 2) Notice 2022*, Legislative Council Brief LWB CR45/2041/86. Under the amendment, a person convicted of an offence endangering national security will be banned from being registered social worker, unless all prevailing members of the Social Workers Registration Board resolve otherwise.

<sup>76</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/06/28/almost-90](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/06/28/almost-90) [March 2025]

*MDWs' right to work of their own choosing denied*

The Code of Practice for Employment Agencies was revised in May 2024 in a bid to further combatting “job-hopping” among MDWs.<sup>77</sup> “Job-hopping” is a pejorative term commonly used to describe MDWs terminate their contracts early to find another employer. The revised code seeks to prohibit employment agencies from adopting business practices, such as providing monetary incentives to MDWs to induce them to terminate their contract prematurely. Employment agencies are also required to clearly brief job seekers on the immigration regulations relevant to MDWs. An explanatory note reads that: MDWs are expected to complete their two-year employment contracts; MDWs who wish to apply for a change of employer must first return to their places of origin and submit new employment visa applications; only in exceptional circumstances such as the death or financial reasons of the original employers, or where there is evidence that the MDWs have been abused or exploited, MDWs may apply for change of employer without first returning to their places of origin; for MDWs who are suspected of abusing the arrangements for premature contract termination to change employers, their employment visa applications may be refused; and the relevant records will also be taken into consideration in assessing their applications for employment visas in future.

The Immigration Department turned down more than 2,800 visa applications from MDWs who had prematurely terminated their employment contract in 2021, more than double the number of previous four years combined.<sup>78</sup> Workers switching employers for better remunerations is a normal phenomenon in the operation of a market economy. It is also people's right to work of their own choosing. The government's detrimental treatments of those MDWs exercising their right to choose their employers freely amounts to a modern form of slavery.

**6. Trade Union Activities and Worker's Collective Actions**

Amid the fast-worsening political environments, hundreds of trade unions or labour organisations have been dissolved, stopped operations or withdrawn from Hong Kong. A total of 247 trade unions cancelled their registration between 2021 and 2024, and union membership fell by 6% in 2023 from four years earlier. With the Government's tightening control on civil society activities and the RTU keeping a close eye on every activity organised by independent trade unions, worker's collective actions have almost disappeared in the public sphere and trade union activities were largely confined to those relating to narrow occupational interests.

*Dissolution of trade unions*


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<sup>77</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (May 2024) *Regulation of Employment Agencies*, LC Paper No. CB(2)674/2024(03), p. 4

<sup>78</sup> [www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/19/P2022011900499.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202201/19/P2022011900499.htm) [March 2025]

A further 30 trade unions cancelled their registration in 2024 through dissolution or at their own request.<sup>79</sup> Between 2021 and 2024, a total of 247 trade unions had cancelled their registration, compared with 15 during the preceding four-year period.<sup>80</sup> The **Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union** (HKPTU), the city's largest independent trade union, passed a special resolution to disband on 11 September 2021, a month after Beijing's propaganda apparatus, the *People's Daily* and *Xinhua*, simultaneously published two commentaries accusing the union of "encouraging anti-China activities that mess up Hong Kong" and blasting it as a "poisonous tumour" that must be "eradicated".<sup>81</sup> The HKPTU announced in November 2023 that the union had completed all regulatory audit, investigation undertaken by the Inland Revenue Department and settlement of outstanding tax liabilities before starting the formal dissolution process.<sup>82</sup> As at end of 2024, the HKPTU has not been officially removed from the Trade Union Register.

Between November 2019 and May 2020, the RTU received nearly 4,400 applications for registration of trade union. Among those applications, 736 were formally registered by the end of 2024, with 190 later cancelled their registration through dissolution or at their own request, and another two de-registered by the RTU. The remaining applications were not further processed because the applicants had failed to submit the required documents or information, or respond to RTU's enquires, or secure sufficient voting members.<sup>83</sup>

One motivating force drove the tidal wave of union formation was related to electoral politics.<sup>84</sup> In the city's LegCo elections, three seats are allotted to the Labour functional constituency. Each registered employee union is given a bloc vote under a simple majority system. This means the larger the number of unions a political faction could muster, the higher its chance of winning all the three seats. Encouraged by the pro-democracy camp's landslide victory in the District Council election in November 2019, some activists initiated a campaign to form trade unions to maximise their chances of winning the Labour functional constituency seats. In response, the pro-government camp also entered (and probably won) the race to create more new unions. As a result, the number of registered trade unions increased by nearly 55%, from 917 in 2019 to 1,412 in 2024.

### *Decline in union membership*

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<sup>79</sup> Registry of Trade Unions (2025) *Preliminary 2024 Statistics of Trade Unions in Hong Kong*

<sup>80</sup> Registry of Trade Unions (various issues) *Annual Statistical Report of Trade Unions in Hong Kong*

<sup>81</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2021/08/10/breaking-hong-kongs](https://hongkongfp.com/2021/08/10/breaking-hong-kongs) [March 2025]

<sup>82</sup> [www.facebook.com/share/p/18eHW7K2Mq](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/18eHW7K2Mq) [March 2025]

<sup>83</sup> Labour and Welfare Bureau (February 2025) *Improving the Trade Union Regulatory Regime*, LC Paper No. CB(1)230/2025(05)

<sup>84</sup> Chan, Anita (2020) "The Emergence of Labor Unions from Within Hong Kong's Protest Movement", *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 18(24)

Despite the surge in the number of registered trade unions between 2019 and 2024, union membership was actually declined over the same period. The number of declared trade union members fell by 6%, from 934,170 in 2019 to 878,522 in 2023. Consequently, the average size of union significantly dropped by 40%, from 1,019 in 2019 to 612 in 2023. At the same time, the number of unions with membership of 50 or less almost tripled, from 287 in 2019 jumped to 794 in 2023.<sup>85</sup>

Contrary to the Government's claim that the increase in the number of trade unions shows that Hong Kong's trade union rights are "strong and intact as ever",<sup>86</sup> the decline in union membership and union size actually reflects the further weakening and fragmentation of trade union movement. Some organizers reveal that they face great challenges in recruiting and retaining members, partly because workers feel that the risk is too great or there is little can do under current political environments. It is expected that union membership will further drop to around 785,000, or a decrease of nearly one-sixth over the end of 2019, when the HKPTU is officially removed from the Trade Union Register.

#### *No Labour Day rally for five consecutive years*

No application had been made to the police for staging a rally on Labour Day 2024. As a result, there had been no Labour Day rally for five years in a row. Between 2020 and 2022, all public gatherings of more than four persons were banned under the strict social distancing measures amid the pandemic. With the lift of the restrictions towards the end of 2022, two former ExCo members of the HKCTU Joe Wong and Denny To applied to the police "in their own names" on 9 April 2023 for staging a Labour Day rally.<sup>87</sup> They however withdrew their application on 26 April after Wong had gone missing for four hours in that morning. To later explained that Wong was taken away by the police but not arrested, adding Wong had experienced "emotional meltdown" and suffered "tremendous pressure".<sup>88</sup> To did not elaborate further, citing confidentiality terms under Article 63 of the NSL. A police spokesman later said that "organisers of demonstrations are legally responsible for maintaining public order and safety", and warned the public against participating in unauthorised assemblies.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Note 80

<sup>86</sup> For instance, then Commissioner for Labour Chris Sun's reply at the 109th International Labour Conference session ([www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13101:0::NO:13101:P13101\\_COMMENT\\_ID:4054077](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13101:0::NO:13101:P13101_COMMENT_ID:4054077) [March 2025])

<sup>87</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2023/04/12/two-ex-members](http://hongkongfp.com/2023/04/12/two-ex-members) [March 2025]

<sup>88</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3218407/former-leader-defunct-confederation-trade-unions-hong-kong-withdraws-labour-day-rally-application](http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3218407/former-leader-defunct-confederation-trade-unions-hong-kong-withdraws-labour-day-rally-application) [March 2025]

<sup>89</sup> [www.thestandard.com.hk/section-news/section/11/251966/Unionists-scrap-rally-call](http://www.thestandard.com.hk/section-news/section/11/251966/Unionists-scrap-rally-call) [March 2025]

*Worker's collective actions*

Amid the fast worsening political environments, many trade unions have opted to stay silence, while other unions that continue to voice their opinions have deliberately chosen the mildest way, such as issuing statements or holding press conferences. For example, the Hong Kong Social Workers' Union issued a statement on its Facebook page to voice its queries of overhauling the Social Workers Registration Board, which is a rare public criticism of government policy in Hong Kong today.<sup>90</sup> The Cleaning Service Industry Workers Union held a press conference in December, revealing its study on the difficulties local grassroots cleaning workers faced when changing jobs.<sup>91</sup> The Association for the Rights of Industrial Accident Victims also publicised the findings of a survey it conducted at a press conference in August, revealing that 40% of the respondents reported that their employers had not provided them with any measures to help prevent heat stress, and urged the Government to review the Guidance Notes on Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work and closely monitor its implementation.<sup>92</sup>

Worker's spontaneous collective actions did occur sporadically. On 15 April 2024, dozens of bar benders went to the Kowloon East Job Centre at the same time to look for jobs. They complained of inadequate job vacancies since the Government implemented the construction sector labour importation scheme in July 2023.<sup>93</sup> Days later, a message was posted on a bar benders' social media group, calling for them to go to a training centre of the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Construction Industry Employees General Union to stage a signature campaign to voice their concern of worsening unemployment and underemployment. Dozens of formwork carpenters reportedly went to the training centre on 24 April 2024 to stage a similar signature campaign. Bar bender's campaign was later called off after the pro-Beijing union reported the matter to the police.<sup>94</sup> The Development Bureau decided in September 2024 that no quota for importing construction workers would be granted in the fifth round of applications.<sup>95</sup>

Construction workers' collective actions arising from wage arrears have occurred occasionally. Such labour disputes became more frequent in 2024 as some construction companies faced severe cash flow problems resulting from drastic drop in new private construction projects amid the sluggish properties market. It is reported that in July 2024 alone, there were more than 10 incidents of construction workers'

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<sup>90</sup> [www.facebook.com/share/p/1B1eVXcksY](https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1B1eVXcksY) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>91</sup> [tinyurl.com/9ash35k6](https://tinyurl.com/9ash35k6) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>92</sup> [hongkongfp.com/2024/08/30/nearly-40](https://hongkongfp.com/2024/08/30/nearly-40) [March 2025]

<sup>93</sup> [www.thevoicehk.com/news/2024416-2](https://www.thevoicehk.com/news/2024416-2) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>94</sup> [photonmedia.net/bar-bender-unemployment](https://photonmedia.net/bar-bender-unemployment) (in Chinese) [March 2025]

<sup>95</sup> [www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3277593/hong-kong-pauses-construction-labour-import-scheme-amid-alleged-worker-exploitation](https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3277593/hong-kong-pauses-construction-labour-import-scheme-amid-alleged-worker-exploitation) [March 2025]

collection actions arising from wage arrears, involving about 500 workers and arrears of HK\$ 30 million.<sup>96</sup> As new private construction projects show no signs of recovery, wage arrears in the sector and related labour disputes are expected to persist in 2025.

## **7. Epilogue**

Though Hong Kong's labour market remained healthy in 2024, there were signs of weakening towards the end of the year. Unemployment rate was marginally increased, job vacancies were markedly dropped and wage growth was slightly slowed. Looking forward, a shrinking workforce owing to ageing and emigration will inevitably undermine the city's economic growth potential. Beijing's tightening grip on Hong Kong has rapidly eroded the city's competitive advantage as a "super-connector" between China and other parts of the world. The Chinese economy is slowing down and facing a series of structural problems, making the city's economy full of uncertainties. In medium term, Hong Kong's economic prospects are far from optimistic, which could adversely impact on the city's labour market.

Since the promulgation of the NSL, the Government's crackdown on the city's trade unions has never relaxed. The hasty passage of Article 23 Legislation in March 2024 has further impaired trade union's right to freedom of expression and association, and right to organize their administration and activities. The Government's proposed amendments to the Trade Union Ordinance will grant the RTU additional powers to restrict the normal functioning of trade unions (in particular collaboration with international organizations) and open the door for the authorities censor and interfere into trade union operations. The political environments in which the city's trade unions operate will undoubtedly further deteriorate. Despite all these challenges, the city's trade union organizers and labour right activists have never stopped exploring the way to break through the current predicament, and workers have started organizing themselves to defend their own rights. Worker's resistance will never disappear because of worsening socio-political environments.

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<sup>96</sup> [www.tkww.hk/a/202407/26/AP66a2f24be4b0519806922d58.html](http://www.tkww.hk/a/202407/26/AP66a2f24be4b0519806922d58.html) (in Chinese) [March 2025]



## **Annex 1: Sources of Statistics Cited**

### **Consumer price index (A), Underlying**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=510-60002](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=510-60002)

### **Employed persons (excluding MDWs)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06301A](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06301A)

### **Employees earning minimum wage**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?scode=210&pcode=B1050014](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?scode=210&pcode=B1050014)

### **GDP, nominal and real (Hong Kong)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=310-31001](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=310-31001)

### **GDP, real (China)**

[data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?end=2023&locations=CN&start=1987](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?end=2023&locations=CN&start=1987)

### **GDP, real (United States)**

[fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDPC1](http://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDPC1)

### **Labour force and labour force participation rate by age (excluding MDWs)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06201A](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06201A)

### **Monthly earnings of employed persons (excluding MDWs)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06313A](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06313A)

### **Monthly income of economically active households (excluding MDWs)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=130-06607A](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=130-06607A)

### **Persons employed and job vacancies by industry (excluding civil service)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=215-16001](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=215-16001)

### **Restaurant receipts (volume index)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=625-68001](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=625-68001)

### **Retail sales (volume index)**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=620-67001](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=620-67001)

### **Salaries index, nominal by industry**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=220-19021](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=220-19021)

### **Underemployment rate by industry**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06504](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06504)

### **Unemployed persons by duration of unemployment**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06403](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06403)

### **Unemployed persons, seasonally adjusted unemployment rate and underemployment rate**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06101](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06101)

### **Unemployment rate by industry**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=210-06405](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06405)

### **Visas granted under various schemes**

[www.immd.gov.hk/eng/facts/visa-control.html](http://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/facts/visa-control.html)

[zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/優秀人才入境計劃](https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/優秀人才入境計劃) (in Chinese)

[zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/非本地畢業生留港/回港就業安排](https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/非本地畢業生留港/回港就業安排) (in Chinese)

### **Wage index, nominal**

[www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web\\_table.html?id=220-19001](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=220-19001)

### ***Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor***

***Amplifying workers' voices from Hong Kong to the world***

**Annex 2: State of Labour in Hong Kong 2024 – Major Events**

| Date   | Major Events   | Page  |
|--------|--|-------|
| 1 Feb  | The Labour Advisory Board reached a consensus to revise the definition of “continuous employment” which still denies majority part-time employees of full statutory protection   | 10-12 |
| 19 Mar | LegCo passed the Article 23 Legislation, the provisions of which could seriously impair trade unions’ right to freedom of expression and association   | 14-19 |
| Apr    | Former Executive Director of the HKCTU Training Centre Marilyn Tang finished her jail terms  | 23    |
| 15 Apr | Dozens of bar benders went to a job centre at the same to look for jobs  | 29-30 |
| 30 Apr | The CE accepted the recommendations on revising the SMW adjustment mechanism which guarantees the SMW can’t never keep pace with economic growth   | 10    |
| May    | Evidence shows Executive Director of the UK-based Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor Mung Siu-tat is seemingly a target of the Government’s surveillance operation  | 22    |
| May    | Former director of the AMRC Elizabeth Tang was discharged by the police  | 23    |
| May    | The Code of Practice for Employment Agencies was revised in a bid to further combatting “job-hopping” among MDWs   | 26-27 |
| 16 May | Former HKJA chair Ronson Chan announced he would not seek another term as his re-election might not be the best option for the union   | 24    |
| 30 May | Former chair of HAEA Winnie Yu was convicted of conspiracy to commit subversion over her participation in the democracy camp’s primary election  | 20-21 |
| 12 Jun | Mung Siu-tat’s passport was cancelled  | 21    |
| 3 Jul  | An amendment to reconstitute the Social Workers Registration Board was passed; as at the end of 2024, two persons convicted of conspiracy to commit subversion were barred from being social workers for life, and the registration of another 12 persons convicted of offences related to the 2019 Movement was suspended for 6 months to 3 years | 25-26 |
| 17 Jul | Selina Cheng was sacked by <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> weeks after she was elected the chair of the HKJA  | 24    |
| 12 Aug | The Court of Final Appeal dismissed former General Secretary of HKCTU Lee Cheuk-yan’s appeal for the conviction of knowingly participating in unauthorised assembly held on 18 Aug 2019  | 22    |
| 13 Sep | The HKJA revealed that most of its ExCo members were harassed between June and August 2024   | 24-25 |
| 26 Sep | GUHKSP’s funds of HK\$116,000 was forfeited by a High Court national security judge  | 25    |

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| <b>Date</b> | <b>Major Events</b>  | <b>Page</b> |
|-------------|--|-------------|
| 28 Oct      | Lee Cheuk-yan's trial on inciting subversion of state power was scheduled 6 May 2025 at a High Court case management hearing (deferred to 11 Nov 2025 at a case management hearing on 21 Feb 2025) | 22-23       |
| 11 Nov      | The Secretary for Labour and Welfare revealed that the government would explore and formulate a "policy direction" of protecting platform workers in early 2025                                    | 12-13       |
| 19 Nov      | Carol Ng and Winnie Yu were sentenced to 53 months and 81 months imprisonment respectively over their participation in the democracy camp primary election in July 2020                            | 19-20       |

### Annex 3: List of Trade Union Leaders Arrested or Prosecuted since the Promulgation of the National Security Law (as at end of 2024)

| Name          | Trade union              | Date of first arrest | Charges (reason of arrest if not charged)   | Status  |
|---------------|--------------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| Lee Cheuk-yan | General secretary, HKCTU | 28 Feb 2021          | Organizing and knowingly participating in unauthorised assemblies (18 & 31 Aug and 1 Oct 2019 and 4 Jun 2020) | Sentenced to a total of 20 months imprisonment; finished serving on 30 Sep 2022; Court of Appeal in Aug 2023 allowed his appeal against the conviction of organizing unauthorised assembly held on 18 Aug 2019; Court of Final Appeal in Aug 2024 dismissed his appeal against the conviction of knowingly participating in unauthorised assembly held on 18 Aug 2019 |
|               |                          | (Summon)             | Obstructing a police officer  | Sentenced to three weeks imprisonment (one week concurrent); finished serving on 30 Sep 2022  |
|               |                          | 9 Sep 2021           | Inciting subversion   | Denied bail on 2 Dec 2022; pending trial (High Court, scheduled 11 Nov 2025)  |
| Carol Ng      | Chair, HKCTU             | 6 Jan 2021           | Conspiracy to commit subversion   | Denied bail on 4 Mar 2021; appeal for bail dismissed on 20 Dec 2021, pledged guilty on 3 Nov 2022, sentenced to 53 months imprisonment on 19 Nov 2024   |
| Winnie Yu     | Chair, HAEA              | 6 Jan 2021           | Conspiracy to commit subversion   | Denied bail on 4 Mar 2021; granted bail on 28 Jul 2021; bail revoked on 8 Mar 2022; pledged not guilty on 6 Feb 2023; finished closing statement in Nov 2023; convicted on 30 May 2024; sentenced to 81 months on 19 Nov 2024; appeal lodged on 26 Nov (hearing scheduled 14 July 2025)   |

| Name           | Trade union                               | Date of first arrest | Charges (reason of arrest if not charged)                    | Status  |
|----------------|---|----------------------|--|---|
| Joseph Lee     | Chair, AHKNS*                             | 6 Jan 2021           | (Conspiracy to commit subversion)                            | On police bail  |
| Cyrus Lau      | ExCo member, AHPNA**                      | 6 Jan 2021           |  |   |
| Lai Man-ling   | Chair, GUHKST                             | 22 Jul 2021          | Publishing and circulating seditious materials               | Denied bail on 23 Jul 2021; sentenced to 19 months imprisonment on 10 Sep 2022; finished serving on 10 Oct 2022 |
| Melody Yeung   | Deputy chair, GUHKST                      | 22 Jul 2021          |  |   |
| Sidney Ng      | Secretary, GUHKST                         | 22 Jul 2021          | Publishing and circulating seditious materials               | Denied bail on 30 Aug 2021; sentenced to 19 months imprisonment on 10 Sep 2022; finished serving on 10 Oct 2022 |
| Samuel Chan    | Treasurer, GUHKST                         | 22 Jul 2021          |  |   |
| Marco Fong     | ExCo member, GUHKST                       | 22 Jul 2021          |  |   |
| Joe Wong       | Chair, HKCTU                              | (Summon)             | Failing to supply information to the Societies Officer       | Fined HK\$8,000 on 1 Nov 2022   |
| Leo Tang       | Vice-chair, HKCTU                         | (Summon)             |  |   |
| Chung Chun-fai | Treasurer, HKCTU                          | (Summon)             |  |   |
| Elizabeth Tang | Director, AMRC                            | 9 Mar 2023           | (Colluding with a foreign country or with external elements) | Discharged by police in May 2024  |
| Marilyn Tang   | Executive Director, HKCTU Training Centre | 11 May 2023          | Perverting the course of justice                             | Sentenced to six months imprisonment on 21 Dec 2023; finished serving in April 2024                             |

\* Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff; \*\* Allied Health Professionals and Nurses Association

**Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor is a UK-based NGO run by independent trade unionists, labour rights activists, and researchers with a special focus on Hong Kong's labour rights issues.**

**We speak up for workers in Hong Kong and amplify their voices around the world.**

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