

準確調整最低工資 排解基層憂難

Precisely adjusting Statutory Minimum Wage to address grassroots people's concerns and difficulties

最低工資在凍結長達4年之後，終於迎來調整。行政會議昨日通過建議，將最低工資水平由現行每小時37.5元調升至40元，增幅為6.7%，待下周三提交立法會表決後，於今年勞動節正式實施。最低工資獲調整固然值得肯定，但目前的金額仍然遠脫離現實，也無法真正反映香港基層勞工所面臨的壓力。有關部門應積極研究，引入客觀的方程式，以「一年一檢」的方式，準確計算合理的最低工資。這是體現特區政府積極作為排解民生憂難的有力舉措。

香港作為全球最富裕的城市之一，在最低工資保障方面，一直處於落後狀態。實際上，參照全球最低工資狀況，例如美歐等國家和地區，最低時薪都在80港元以上，澳洲更高達117港元，幾乎是香港的三倍。至於「亞洲四小龍」的韓國、新加坡、台灣地區，儘管計算方式有所不同，但也無一例外高於香港。如果結合人均GDP的比率來計算，香港最低工資之「低」，可謂全世界之最。不僅是絕對數值低，連計算方式以及檢討時間也遠遠落後於其他地區。

最低工資具有象徵意義，但對於香港而言，如今的最低工資既反映了實際的勞工市場情況，也無法體現對最底層勞工的有效關心。首先，在勞工嚴重短缺的情況下，目前市場已很難用最低工資去請到人，最低工資絕大部分情況下有如一個擺設；其次，根據最新一份報告顯示，當最低工資上調至每小時40元，受惠人數則為4.6萬至8.7萬不等。這一統計數據看似矛盾，但實際上說明了最底層的勞工，尤其是外判制度下長者的就業等方面，仍然面臨各種嚴重不公平情況。

顯而易見，香港需要完善最低工資制度。首先，計算方式應當調整。在目前模式下，調整工資主要考慮4大範疇，其中包括「一系列指標」，最後由勞資雙方「討價還價」來得出結果。整個過程缺乏透明度，也有「流產」之虞，費時失事。有議員建議，應以物價指數、勞工市場狀況及低薪行業僱員數據等，構成一個客觀的方程式，合理計算出最低工資水平。當然，這個方程式的設計，需要取得各界共識。

其次，檢討時效應優化。目前「兩年一檢」的做法已經過時，既無法及時反映勞工市場的變化，也無助於整個經濟發展，往往是在「追落後」。事實上，「一年一檢」方式既有利於勞工一方，資方也同樣能受益，可以避免因累積過高加幅而帶來的壓力。早前不同界別的立法會議員都表態支持相關做法，既然已經形成共識，政府無需顧慮太多，可以跨前一步。

設立最低工資的根本目的，在於保障基層勞工，縮減貧富差距。但香港自2011年實施該制度以來，堅尼系數不降反升，2016年統計高達0.539，五年後今天的情況可能更加惡劣。雖然造成貧富差距擴大的因素有多種，包括稅收及福利政策等，但基層市民的生活未獲明顯改善，這是不爭的事實。

新一屆特區政府上任後積極有為，行政長官李家超首份施政報告也表明解決貧窮問題的決心，包括檢討最低工資制度，以及重組扶貧委員會等等。各界期待，有關部門能盡早落實相關政策，回應市民改善民生的迫切訴求，讓最低工資發揮出應有的角色和作用，增加市民的幸福感和獲得感，真正做到「切實排解民生憂難」。

Having been frozen for four years, the statutory minimum wage (SMW) now is finally to be adjusted. The Chief Executive-in-Council yesterday adopted a recommendation to raise the SMW rate from HK\$37.50 to HK\$40.00 per hour, an increase of 6.7 per cent. Subject to the approval of the Legislative Council (Legco), the revised SMW rate will come into force on May 1, the Labour Day, this year. The move to adjust the minimum wage surely is praiseworthy, but the revised SMW rate is still **divorced** from reality and unable to reflect the pressures Hong Kong's grassroots workers are faced with. Authorities concerned should proactively consider to introduce in an objective formula to accurately calculate a reasonable minimum wage rate through a review "once every year". This would be an effective move to show that the SAR Government takes positive actions to address people's concerns and difficulties in daily life.

Hong Kong, as one of the wealthiest cities in the world, always lags behind others when guaranteed minimum wage is concerned. In fact, looking around globally, in the United States and countries and regions in Europe, their minimum wage rates are all more than HK\$80 per hour. In Australia, it is even as high as HK\$117 per hour, almost three times that in Hong Kong. As for the other three of the "Four Asian Tigers" – South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, their minimum wages without exception are higher than Hong Kong's, different as their calculation methods may be. If the ratio of minimum wage rate over per capita GDP (gross domestic product) **is factored in**, Hong Kong's minimum wage rate could be said to remain at the world's "minimal level". Not only that the absolute value [of Hong Kong's minimum wage] is low, even the calculation method and the period between minimum wage reviews both fall far behind other places.

Minimum wage carries symbolic significance. Yet Hong Kong's minimum wage rate today neither reflects the real situation of the labour market nor shows the effective care for the bottom level workers. First of all, given the severe shortage of labour today, it is very difficult to hire employees with the offer of minimum wage, which therefore remains just like an ornament **nine times out of ten**. On the other hand, according to a latest survey, when the SMW goes up to HK\$40, the number of people will be benefited is from 46,000 to 87,000. Such statistical data are seemingly contradictory, but actually reveal the reality that the bottom level workers especially elder employees under the outsourcing arrangement still face various kinds of injustice in employment.

Obviously, Hong Kong needs to improve its minimum wage regime. In the first place, the calculation method should be adjusted. At present, mainly four categories are taken into consideration for adjusting the SMW, including "a series of indicators" – among others. And eventually the outcome would be produced through "bargaining" between employees and employers. Transparency is lacking in the whole process, and there always is the possibility of "abortion". It is time consuming and cumbersome. Some legislator has suggested to work out an objective formula based on price index, the situation of the labour market and data about employees in low wage sectors, etc. to reasonably calculate the minimum wage level. Needless to say, a consensus among various sectors is required for the design of such a formula.

Secondly, the timeliness of SMW reviews must be improved. The current practice of conducting a review "once every two years" is **out of date**, which is neither able to timely reflect changes in the labour market nor helpful for the overall economic development. Such practice is often just a struggle to "catch up". In fact, a

review "once every year" is not only favourable to employees but also beneficial to employers, which could avoid the pressure brought about by an accumulated substantial wage increase. So far legislators from various sectors have expressed their support to such a change. Since a consensus is already formed, the government does not need to worry too much and could take a step forward.

The fundamental aim of setting up minimum wage is to protect grassroots workers by narrowing the wealth gap. However, since the SMW came into force in 2011, Hong Kong's **Gini Coefficient** has been going up instead of coming down. It reached 0.539 in 2016. Five years have passed and the situation today is probably even worse. Although there are various kinds of factors that result in the expansion of the wealth gap including taxation and welfare policies, etc., an indisputable fact is that daily life of grassroots citizens has not been improved noticeably.

The new-term government is more proactive and aspiring. Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu's virgin Policy Address also shows the determination to solve the poverty problem, including to conduct a review on the SMW regime and to revamp the Commission on Poverty (CoP). Various sectors are looking forward to it that authorities concerned could put relevant policies into practice as soon as possible in response to citizens' urgent appeal for improving their daily life, so as to let the SMW play its due role and heighten people's sense of happiness and sense of gain, and in this way to truly "address people's concerns and difficulties in daily life effectively".

WORDS AND USAGE

• Divorce (verb) –

To separate or dissociate something from something else, typically with an undesirable effect. (分割, 脫離)

Examples:

1. Religion cannot be divorced from morality.
2. Good management in the police cannot be divorced from accountability.

• Factor sth in/into (phrasal verb) –

to include something when you are doing a calculation, or when you are trying to understand something. (把...因素考慮在內)

Examples:

1. You must factor insurance payments into the cost of maintaining a car.
2. Total spending was virtually the same in real terms after factoring in inflation.

• Nine times out of ten/ninety-nine times out of a hundred (idiom) –

Usually; almost always. (十有八九, 幾乎總是)

Examples:

1. Nine times out of ten our opponents will beat us. We just hope this is the one in ten.
2. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred when people say "I know how you feel", they are lying.

• Out of date (idiom) –

Laws, systems, processes, etc. that are out of date are no longer useful or correct because they are not based on recent changes or developments. (失效的, 不合時宜的)

Examples:

1. Current regulations in this regard are out of date.
2. The technology being used in some employment agencies is hopelessly out of date.

• Gini Coefficient (noun) –

堅尼系數(內地譯為「基尼系數」), 由意大利統計學家科拉多·堅尼(Corrado Gini, 1884 - 1965)於1910年代首次提出, 用於量度社會收入分布不平均的程度。該系數的數值介乎0(收入人人相同)與1(收入全歸某一個人)之間, 數值越高, 表示社會上收入分布不平均的程度越大。

奮發「兔」強



5. It is never good enough to please him.
6. The movie was too touching that I cried.
7. It was such a warm evening that we decided to stroll along the beach.
8. She delivered the speech with enough confidence that everyone believed her.

So and Such

So跟Such一般等同"very"的用法, 用於形容詞、名詞或副詞之前。例如: Admiralty is so crowded! 所以(3)及(7)的句子也正確。

另外位置的設定; Such應放在A / An不定冠詞(indefinite article)之後, 例如: It was such a beautiful day. 不是: It was a such beautiful day.

Too

Too一般是指太多的東西造成的負面影響, 或是想帶出太多東西所造成的因果關係。例如: The vacation is too short.

所以第(6)句子應該改成:

(6) The movie was so touching that I cried.

大家可以留意一個簡單的模式或句式; Too很多時候也是跟着to。就好像So及that一樣。

所以第(1)(2)(4)句子應該改成:

- (1) There was too much work to do.
- (2) The bag was so heavy that I couldn't lift it.
- (4) He was so impatient that he left without me.

Enough

Enough當成副詞的用法, 可以放在形容詞及另一副詞之後, 這樣可以強調或改變整個句子。Enough也可以在名詞之前使用。例如: Liam is not good enough to win the game.

(5)的句子正確而第(8)句子可以改成;

(8) She delivered the speech with such confidence that everyone believed her.

全力以赴做好每一件事情, 今日播下的種子, 總會得到回報豐收。

Always do our best. What we plant now, we will harvest later.

大家繼續奮發「兔」強。與各讀者共勉之。

Abc

續FUN英語

2023年兔年第一期《續FUN英語》, 先跟大家拜年。祝各位讀者身心安康, 前「兔」似錦。

今集先討論有關容易混淆詞彙so、too、enough和such的用法。這些字眼看來很簡單, 在文法或語法上用以強調整體意思非常有用, 可是有時候撰寫比較長的段落, 或是短篇故事的時候難免有機會混淆。

大家猜猜以下句子是否正確?

1. There was enough much work to do.
2. The bag was too heavy that I couldn't lift it.
3. The noodle soup is so spicy.
4. He was too impatient that he left without me.

Miss Carol

資深英語老師、國際英文考試主考官; 前大專院校導師及企業培訓導師。