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15,000 new building workers required

By ANDY HO

HONGKONG's booming construction industry needs another 15,000 workers to fill available job vacancies, according to the most recent survey conducted by the Building Contractors' Association.

The study suggests that polishers, carpenters and casual workers, who account for about half of the vacancies, are the most sought after in the trade.

The 300-strong association asked 28 of its biggest and best-organised member contractors to furnish it with data on their employment situations. Only one failed to respond.

The contractors, who are responsible for 199 construction sites, now have a combined labour force of 23,208, but they estimate that they actually need a total of 30,935 workers for their projects, representing a 25 per cent discrepancy.

At present, about 70,000 workers are employed in the construction industry.

An association spokesman yesterday said the 27 contractors were representative of the whole trade.

"If the 25 per cent vacancy rate is applied to the entire construction industry, it is projected that we have fallen short of some 15,000 workers," he said.

He said the findings had been submitted to the Government and it was up to the officials to take remedial action.

The Executive Council is expected to decide next month whether to relax the territory's immigration policy and allow more foreign workers to come in.

Legislative Councillor Hui Yin-fat, however, urged Exco to postpone its decision until after concerned groups and individuals were given a chance to put their views.

"If Exco is to make a decision before the Legislative Council reconvenes, it should be prepared to face the consequences," said Mr Hui, who has been returned unopposed to represent the social welfare constituency for another three-year term.

He added that his colleagues would certainly be dissatisfied if a major policy change was adopted while the legislature was in recess.