

For information  
on 24 February 2015

## **Legislative Council Subcommittee on Poverty**

### **Poverty Situation of Persons with Disabilities**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the poverty statistics relevant to persons with disabilities, and the Government's support for persons with disabilities to integrate into the society.

#### **Poverty Statistics in relation to Persons with Disabilities**

2. Adopting the analytical framework of the poverty line, the Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit under the Financial Secretary's Office in collaboration with the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) conducted a detailed analysis of the poverty situation of persons with disabilities in Hong Kong in 2013, based on the data collected from the Special Topic Enquiry on Persons with Disabilities via the General Household Survey carried out by the C&SD in the same year. The "Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Disability 2013" (the Report) was released in December 2014 and uploaded to the dedicated website of the Commission on Poverty ([www.povertyrelief.gov.hk](http://www.povertyrelief.gov.hk)).

3. The analytical results in the Report show that the poverty rates of persons with disabilities in Hong Kong were notably higher than the overall levels both before and after policy intervention. It should be noted that such phenomenon is not unique to Hong Kong but also prevalent in many developed economies overseas. Besides, the poverty line in Hong Kong is based on the median household income without considering household assets. Therefore, some of the persons with disabilities may be "asset-rich, income-poor", especially for elderly persons. In 2013, after recurrent cash policy intervention, there were 120 300 poor households with members with disabilities, involving 147 400 persons with disabilities and representing a poverty rate of 29.5% for those with disabilities. The corresponding figures before policy intervention were 190 000 households, 226 200 persons with disabilities and 45.3%. Specifically, the Government's recurrent cash benefits lifted 78 800 persons with disabilities out of poverty and reduced the corresponding poverty rate by 15.8

percentage points, indicating that the policy effectiveness of recurrent cash items in alleviating the poverty situation of persons with disabilities was visibly higher than that of the overall poverty reduction. The analysis by age shows that persons with disabilities living in poor households had the following socio-economic characteristics:

- (a) Nearly 70% (102 100 persons) of these poor persons with disabilities were elderly people aged 65 and above, and their poverty rate (34.6%) was similar to the corresponding level of the overall population (30.5%). Their socio-economic characteristics were common to those of poor elderly people in general, i.e. most of them were economically inactive and lacking employment income, and therefore more prone to poverty. A vast majority of these poor elderly persons with disabilities (95.0% or 97 000 persons) were beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA), Old Age Living Allowance, Old Age Allowance or Disability Allowance (DA). The Government will continue to provide them with financial assistance as appropriate, sustain its efforts to promote active ageing, and enhance long-term care services;
- (b) The number of poor children with disabilities under the age of eighteen (5 000 persons) was relatively small and their poverty rate (20.5%) was similar to the corresponding level of the overall population (18.6%). Apart from helping the families with financial need, the Government will seek to increase the number of pre-school rehabilitation service places and provide training subsidies for children from low-income families who are on the waiting list of subvented services. New initiatives such as offering on-site rehabilitation services in kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centres will also be introduced on a pilot basis. In addition, the Government will continue to provide education and training services for children and young people with disabilities as appropriate; and
- (c) Of the poor persons with disabilities, 27.3% or 40 300 persons were at the working age of 18 to 64, and their poverty rate (22.4%) was more than double that of the overall working-age population (10.5%). For working-age persons with disabilities in the labour market, their unemployment rate (6.7%) was notably higher than the corresponding figure (3.7%) of the overall population in the same age group. It is noted, however, that a higher-than-overall unemployment rate among persons with disabilities is a common phenomenon in other economies. Moreover, the situation in Hong Kong improved significantly as compared to 2006-07, when the unemployment rate of working-age persons with disabilities had been 11.1% vis-à-vis 4.3% for the overall population in the same age group. The Government's objective is to

help persons with disabilities find appropriate jobs on the basis of their abilities rather than their disabilities, while promoting an inclusive society which duly recognises the rights, capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities. The Government will continue to provide assistance for persons with disabilities and their employers through various measures and initiatives.

## **Services and Support Provided to Persons with Disabilities**

4. It has all along been the policy objective of the Government to help persons with disabilities develop their capabilities as well as to build a barrier-free living environment with a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate in full both in social life and personal growth, and enjoy equal opportunities.

5. In view of the respective distinctive needs of persons with different type and level of disabilities, the Government implements multipronged initiatives to meet their needs. To this end, the Government has been allocating additional resources to strengthen the support services for person with disabilities. The overall recurrent expenditure of these services has increased from \$16.6 billion in 2007-08 to \$26.6 billion in 2014-15, representing an increase of 60 per cent. As for the overall recurrent expenditure for rehabilitation services, it has increased from \$2.8 billion in 2007-08 to \$5.1 billion in 2014-15, up by over 80 per cent. The services and support for persons with disabilities are set out below.

### Financial Support

6. The CSSA Scheme provides financial assistance for means-tested families in need to meet their basic needs. The Scheme also takes care of the special needs of persons with disabilities through the provision of higher standard rates, special grants and supplements to them. CSSA recipients with disabilities are entitled to special grants to cover expenditure on glasses, dental treatment and removal expenses, fares to and from hospitals / clinics, costs of medically recommended diets and costs of rehabilitation and medical appliances (such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, stoma bags, diapers, etc.). Besides, supplements for CSSA recipients with disabilities may include long-term supplement and community living supplement, etc.

7. On the other hand, DA under the Social Security Allowance Scheme, which is non-means-tested, helps persons with severe disabilities to meet their special needs. Recipients of Normal DA must be severely disabled and as a result needs substantial help from others to cope with daily life. Persons meeting the eligibility criteria for Normal DA and assessed by doctors to be in

need of constant attendance from others in their daily life and not receiving care in government or residential institutions subsidised by the Government (including subsidised places in subvented / contract homes and residential care homes under various bought place schemes), or all public hospitals and institutions under HA, or boarding in special schools under the Education Bureau can receive Higher DA.

8. For persons with disabilities with financial difficulties who are non-CSSA recipients, they may apply for immediate and short-term financial assistance from charitable funds to purchase necessary rehabilitative and medical appliances. Examples of such charitable funds are Yan Chai Tetraplegic Fund administered by Yan Chai Hospital Board; and Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund, Tang Shiu Kin and Ho Tim Charitable Fund, Brewin Trust Fund and Kwan Fong Trust Fund for the Needy administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Non-CSSA persons with disabilities in financial difficulties may approach medical social workers, social workers of the Integrated Family Service Centres or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to apply for the charitable funds. Social workers will assess the applicants' conditions including their financial resources in accordance with the relevant application criteria and categories of assistance and provide them with the appropriate assistance.

#### Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

9. The Government provides a wide range of pre-school rehabilitation services for children with special needs including Early Education and Training Centres (EETCs), Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs), and Integrated Programme in Kindergartens-cum-Child Care Centres (IP in KG-cum-CCCs). The Government has been continuously increasing places for pre-school rehabilitation services (i.e. EETCs, SCCC and IP in KG-cum-CCCs). In the past 6 years, the Government has allocated funding to provide about 1 500 additional places for pre-school rehabilitation places, representing an increase of nearly 30%. At present, the total places of pre-school rehabilitation services is 6 534. In addition, sites have been reserved for providing nearly 1 500 additional places of pre-school rehabilitation services within this term of Government. Additional places will also be provided through redevelopment or expansion on the sites owned by NGOs, particularly those under the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses.

10. Apart from increasing the number of pre-school rehabilitation places, the Government has spared no efforts in enhancing support for children on the waiting list for such services. Launched in December 2011, the Community Care Fund provided a training subsidy to children in need of rehabilitation services from low-income families, so as to enable them to receive timely pre-school rehabilitation services provided by NGOs to facilitate their development

while waiting for subvented services. Considering the effectiveness of the programme, the Government regularised the programme in October 2014, and increased the level of subsidy. There are currently two levels of subsidy for beneficiaries according to the service for which they are waitlisting.

11. In 2015-16, the Government will launch a pilot scheme through the Lotteries Fund to invite NGOs operating subvented pre-school rehabilitation services to provide on-site services so as to benefit children with special needs who are studying in kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centres as early as possible. The Government will also increase the social work manpower in the existing subvented Parents/Relatives Resource Centres so as to organise more systematic training and experience sharing activities with a view to enhancing the support for persons with disabilities and ex-mentally ill patients, including children/youth with special needs and their family members/carers.

### School Education

12. At secondary and primary school level, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing ordinary schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training with a view to facilitating the schools to cater for the students with special educational needs (SEN). The additional resources include Learning Support Grant (LSG), Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, additional teachers provided under various programmes and Top-up Fund for procuring of special furniture and equipment or carrying out minor conversion works for students with SEN. Schools may pool together various resources for employing additional teachers, teaching assistants or hiring professional support services to render appropriate support for students with SEN.

13. The EDB has kept the implementation of integrated education under on-going review and carry out enhancement measures when necessary and practicable. Starting from the 2014/15 school year, the EDB has increased the rates of the LSG by 30%. In subsequent school years, the grant rates will be adjusted annually according to the change in the Composite Consumer Price Index. Furthermore, the EDB is extending the School-based Educational Psychology Service (SBEPS) progressively with a view to covering all public sector primary and secondary schools by the 2016/17 school year. To further strengthen the support for students with SEN, the Government has invited the Community Care Fund to consider launching a pilot project under which a cash grant is provided for ordinary schools with relatively more students with SEN and financial needs to enable the schools to strengthen the teacher manpower so that arrangement can be made for a designated teacher to co-ordinate SEN-related matters.

14. The EDB also provides different resources for various types of special schools to strengthen the support for students with severe or multiple disabilities.

The class size of special schools are relatively small (varying from 8 to 15 students per class for different types of special schools) and they are provided with various types of specialists, e.g. physiotherapists, occupational therapists, mobility instructors, etc. In recent years, the EDB has introduced a number of improvement measures with a view to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in special schools. They include implementation of the new academic structure and improvement measures on extension of years of study for students, reducing the class size or providing additional teacher assistants for certain types of special schools, and strengthening of teacher professional development, etc. We have also improved the manpower for the boarding section of special schools and provided an additional grant to cater for boarders with medical complexity.

### Community Support and Residential Care Services

15. As many persons with disabilities want to live at home, the Government has provided them with a wide range of support services covering home care, day care, District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities (DSCs), vocational rehabilitation, day respite, and medical and care support. The Government also further enhances the services by adopting a case management service approach in the DSCs, increasing the respite service places and introducing the Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities, etc.

16. Moreover, a variety of subsidised residential care services are provided for those persons with disabilities who cannot live independently or are inadequately cared for by their families. The Government will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach to actively identifying suitable sites for the provision of more residential care places and engaging different sectors to offer services. Measures to be taken are (a) regulating residential care homes for persons with disabilities through a licensing scheme to ensure service quality on the one hand, and encouraging the development of more residential care options in the market by launching the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities on the other; (b) supporting NGOs in developing self-financing care homes; and (c) continuing to increase the number of subsidised residential care home places.

### Employment Support Services

17. The Government fully recognises that most persons with disabilities will be able to undertake some kind of productive work. Some of them, depending on the severity and the nature of the disabilities, may not be suitable to enter into the open market, while others may need assistance to prepare them for entry into the open market and for sustaining their employment. Assistance is provided not only to persons with disabilities, but also to their employers.

18. For persons with disabilities who are not ready to take up open employment yet, the Government equips them with skills required to take up employment in the open market through training courses offered by the Vocational Training Council's Shine Skills Centre and the Employees Retraining Board, as well as the vocational rehabilitation services provided by SWD. SWD also provide persons with disabilities with on the job training through the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities and Sunnyway - On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities.

19. The Labour Department (LD) provides personalised employment services to job seekers with disabilities fit for open employment. Placement Officers of LD provide job seekers with disabilities with employment counselling, conduct job matching and referrals, and provide follow-up service upon placement of the job seekers in employment. To strengthen support for employers and help employees with disabilities adapt to their new job, LD will enhance the post-placement follow-up service provided for job seekers with disabilities by extending the service period from three months to six months. LD also implements the "Work Orientation and Placement Scheme" (WOPS). Under WOPS, employers of persons with disabilities may receive a monthly allowance equivalent to two-thirds of the actual salary paid to the employee, subject to a ceiling of \$4,000, for a maximum period of six months. In addition, an eligible employer who employs a person with disabilities having employment difficulties, and provides him / her with training, support and mentorship, is entitled to a monthly allowance equivalent to the amount of actual salary paid, less \$500 per month, subject to a ceiling of \$5,500, in the first two months of employment.

20. To create job opportunities for persons with disabilities, SWD administers the "Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise" Project (3E's Project) to provide grants to NGOs for setting up small businesses. Under 3E's Project, the number of persons with disabilities employed by a business should not be less than 50% of the total number of employees. Each small business is offered a maximum grant of \$2 million for meeting the set-up capital cost incurred in the initial period of business operation, as well as the operating expenses for the first three years.

21. SWD also implements the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities to provide subsidies for employers of persons with disabilities for procuring assistive devices and carrying out workplace modifications. The programme can help persons with disabilities secure open employment and enable them to work more efficiently. An employer may receive a maximum subsidy of \$20,000 for each employee with disabilities. The maximum amount of grant for the procurement of any single assistive device and its essential accessories has been raised to \$40,000.

22. The Talent-Wise Employment Charter and Inclusive Organisations Recognition Scheme is launched by the Labour and Welfare Bureau in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Hong Kong Joint Council for People with Disabilities to pool the efforts of the Government, business sector, and public and subvented bodies to promote the employment of persons with disabilities through a host of sustainable measures which are commensurate with their modes of operation.

### Barrier-free Transport

23. The Government has been taking forward the concept of barrier-free transport through encouraging public transport operators to enhance their service facilities to cater for the needs of various passenger groups, including persons with disabilities. The public transport operators are positive towards provision of more accessible transport services by enhancing their service facilities and setting implementation targets for individual facility where feasible. For example, the franchised bus companies have completed the installation of bus-stop announcement system on all fleets in 2013 and it is anticipated that all buses in Hong Kong will be replaced by low-floor ones under operationally feasible circumstances<sup>1</sup> by 2017. At present, all facilities in the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) train compartments are barrier-free. For MTR stations, newly-built stations will be installed with lifts or direct passageway connecting the station concourse with street level to facilitate access by passengers; and all existing stations have been equipped with at least one barrier-free facility, including lift, ramp, wheelchair stair-lift or wheelchair aid, etc. For those stations without lifts connecting the station concourse with street level, if physical environment warrants, the MTR Corporation Limited will install external lifts in phases before end of 2018. Furthermore, the Government welcomes and encourages the taxi trade to introduce wheelchair-accessible taxis; and continue to assist the taxi trade to source suitable wheelchair-accessible taxi models to cater for the transport needs of persons with disabilities.

24. Since July 2008, the Government has been providing under the welfare programme a monthly transport supplement to recipients under the CSSA Scheme with 100% disability aged between 12 and 64 and recipients of DA of the same age group to facilitate their integration into the society. Later, the Government has been launching the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (the Scheme) in phases

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<sup>1</sup> Low-floor buses are not suitable for some of the roads in Lantau Island which are steep and with sharp bends.



since June 2012, enabling elderly persons aged 65 or above (regardless of disabilities) and recipients under the CSSA Scheme with 100% disability aged below 65 and recipients of DA in the same age group to travel on the general MTR lines, franchised buses and ferries at any time at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip (the Scheme will be extended to green minibuses in phases from end-March 2015). Since the launching of the Scheme, the average daily passenger trips are about 720 000, of which 630 000 being elderly aged 65 or above (including elderly with disabilities) and 90 000 being eligible persons with disabilities aged below 65.

25. The Government is also fully aware of the transport needs of persons with disabilities who are unable to use public transport. Point-to-point Rebus service is provided to convey persons with disabilities to office and school; to receive rehabilitation training; to attend medical appointments; and to participate in social activities, etc. From 2007-08 to 2014-15, the Government subsidised the replacement of a total of 71 rebususes of higher vehicle age and the procurement of 46 additional rebususes, thereby increasing the fleet to 141, representing an increase of 48%. The average vehicle age also decreased from 5.5 years in 2007-08 to 5 years in 2014-15. In 2014-15, the Government also allocated additional recurrent provision to employ additional drivers and administrative staff, with an aim to alleviating the manpower shortage of drivers and enhancing fleet management and operational efficiency in order to cater for increasing service demand. In 2015-16, the Government will continue to review the fleet size and equipment of rebususes, having regard to the service needs, with a view to improving the Rebus service.

### **Advice Sought**

26. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau**  
**Education Bureau**  
**Labour Department**  
**Social Welfare Department**  
**Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit**

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