

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Subcommittee on Poverty**

### **Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 15 March 2016**

#### **Poverty problems of and support for ethnic minorities**

##### **Purpose**

This paper summarizes past relevant discussions by the Council and its committees relating to poverty problems of and support for ethnic minorities ("EMs").

##### **Background**

2. According to the "Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities" of the 2011 Population Census published by the Census and Statistics Department ("C&SD"), there were around 451 000 EMs, constituting 6.4% of the whole population of Hong Kong (around 7 072 000). They or their ancestors were mostly from six South Asian/Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines (around 133 000), Indonesia (around 133 000), India (around 29 000), Pakistan (around 18 000), Nepal (around 17 000) and Thailand (around 11 000). Among the EM population, roughly more than half were foreign domestic helpers who were mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia. According to the Administration, various government bureaux and departments ("B/Ds") have been providing a range of services to meet the needs of EMs and facilitate their integration into the community. These services include social welfare services, employment training and support, educational support and community support services.

##### **Deliberations by Members**

###### Support measures for EMs in need

3. Some Members noted from a survey conducted by a concern group on the poverty situation of South Asian EM families that among the 133

working EMs interviewed, more than 60% of them came from families living below the poverty line. These Members were concerned about the poverty situation of and support for EMs in need. The Administration advised that working poor families of EMs could benefit from the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme, which would accept applications from May 2016 onwards. In addition, people who could not support themselves financially might apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to meet their basic living expenses. Financial assistance programmes were also launched by the Community Care Fund ("CCF") under the Commission on Poverty ("CoP") to provide assistance for people facing economic difficulties, in particular those who fell outside the social safety net or those within the safety net but had special circumstances that were not covered.

4. Some Members were concerned that some needy EM students could not benefit from the regularized assistance programme on "Subsidy to meet lunch expenses at whole-day primary schools for students from low-income families" as their schools failed to provide them with food that conformed to their religious rules. These Members considered that lunch subsidy should be provided directly for the needy EM students. The Administration advised that after thorough discussion with CoP, it had decided to directly provide lunch subsidy for the participating schools so that students could have more choices of food.

5. Some Members held the view that the publicity of CCF assistance programmes to EMs was inadequate, resulting in only a small number of EMs applying for the programmes. According to the Administration, CCF mainly promoted its assistance programmes to EMs through non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") and schools. EMs were welcomed to provide suggestions on how to step up the publicity of the assistance programmes.

#### Employment support for EMs

6. Some Members opined that the Administration lacked new initiatives to help EMs seek employment. They took the view that the Labour Department ("LD") should set up an employment services division dedicated to providing services for EMs. According to the Administration, LD provided comprehensive employment services to help all job seekers, including EM job seekers, through a network of 13 job centres, three industry-based recruitment centres, the Telephone Employment Service Centre, the Interactive Employment Service website and numerous vacancy search terminals located throughout the territory. To strengthen employment support for EMs, all job centres had set up special counters to

provide job referral services, bilingual information and interpretation services for EM job seekers. Besides, EM job seekers could meet employment advisors to obtain personalized job search advice, information on training/retraining courses, and/or to receive career aptitude assessment as appropriate. LD also encouraged employers to give employment opportunities to EMs, and advised employers placing vacancies with LD to consider the genuine occupational needs when specifying language requirements.

7. Some Members, however, were of the view that the services of the aforesaid special counters in LD's job centres did not make significant improvement to the employment of EMs. These Members requested the Administration to improve the aforesaid services, and reiterated their suggestion of setting up an employment services division for EMs. The Administration advised that the Special Needs Groups Task Force ("SNGTF") of CoP would examine the suggestion. SNGTF would also consider enhancing Chinese language programmes for working EMs and reviewing the Chinese language proficiency requirements of Government jobs to facilitate the employment of EMs.

8. Noting the low success rate of job matching by LD for EMs, some Members considered that LD should provide one-on-one job matching service for EMs. The Administration advised that as job seekers who had successfully obtained employment through direct application were not required to report their placements to LD, the success rate of LD's job referral service had not included the placements made through direct application. According to the Administration, job matching on an individual basis might not be the only effective means to help EMs find work given the large number and variety of job vacancies placed with LD (around 100 000 job vacancies a month). The personalized employment advisory services provided by LD would equip EM job seekers with skills for finding jobs through LD's job referral services or direct application.

9. Noting that LD launched the pilot Employment Services Ambassador Programme for EMs ("ESAP") in August 2014 to provide on-the-job training opportunities for young people from EM to work in LD's job centres and recruitment functions, some Members considered that the six-month training period in ESAP should be extended. Some other Members called on the Administration to provide long-term contract employment for EMs under ESAP. The Administration advised that these suggestions would reduce the number of EMs that could be engaged under ESAP. In response to Members' question about the effectiveness of ESAP, the Administration advised that ESAP had recruited a total of 32 trainees in the first two batches, of which 17 trainees intended to work and were able

to secure employment, while the rest did not want to find a job upon completion of training because of family/health reasons or pursuing further study. The aforesaid figures indicated that the provision of the six-month on-the-job training under ESAP was effective in facilitating the employment of young EM trainees in the open market.

10. Some Members considered that the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") should provide vocational training courses to facilitate the employment of EMs. According to the Administration, ERB had launched condensed language courses and motivated EMs to spare time to join training courses. In 2015-2016, ERB would provide 800 designated training places for EMs and conduct courses in Support Service Centres for EMs under the Home Affairs Department on a pilot basis to facilitate attendance of EMs. In addition, the Home Affairs Bureau would implement a new scheme to provide subsidies for social enterprises and NGOs, which would offer a total of about 2 000 to 3 000 on-site training places for groups in need, including EMs, to enhance their employment prospect.

11. Some Members expressed concern about the problem of unequal pay for equal work, which had brought about many working EMs in poverty. According to the Equal Opportunities Commission ("EOC"), the results of some of its surveys indicated that there was race discrimination in pay in Hong Kong. To promote the message of equal opportunities in employment, EOC would continue organizing talks for small and medium enterprises. In addition, any employees who felt being discriminated against were encouraged to lodge complaints to EOC.

#### Support measures for EM students

12. Some Members urged the Administration to formulate policies to ensure that EMs could have equal opportunities vis-à-vis local people in receiving education. These Members suggested that the Administration should urge all schools in the territory to admit EM students or impose conditions on applications for school registration with an aim to facilitate admission of EM students to schools.

13. The Administration advised that under the Primary One Administration and Secondary School Places Allocation systems, all public sector schools should have the chance of being allocated with any students, including non-Chinese Speaking ("NCS") students. For admission of students to fill vacant school places, the Education Bureau ("EDB") had issued guidelines to schools reminding them that their admission criteria should be in compliance with relevant laws of Hong Kong, including the

Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 602). Schools should also inform potential applicant parents/students of their admission criteria and ensure that the vacant school places were filled in a fair and just manner. The aforesaid guidelines were also applicable to kindergartens.

14. Some Members were of the view that measures should be adopted to facilitate upward mobility of EMs. The Administration should assist EM students in improving their Chinese language proficiency and facilitate them to pursue tertiary education. According to the Administration, to enhance support for NCS students to learn Chinese, EDB had provided the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework ("the Learning Framework") with supporting learning and teaching materials for secondary and primary schools. In addition, the Applied Learning Chinese Language Course (for NCS students) pegged to the Qualifications Framework had been provided at senior secondary level starting from the 2014-2015 school year in phases. SNGTF would continue to follow up with EDB on the progress and effectiveness in implementing the aforementioned measures. Some Members, however, said that it was not practical to expect that the Learning Framework could enable EMs to bridge over to mainstream Chinese Language classes. The Administration should therefore provide EMs with tailor-made Chinese language programmes to address their special needs.

15. Some Members considered that EM students' low attainment in Chinese language examinations might account for the low admission rate of EM students to the local universities. These Members called on the Administration to formulate policies in relation to the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum or imposing alternative Chinese Language admission requirements for EM students to facilitate them to pursue higher education. The Administration advised that alternative Chinese qualifications including the General Certificate of Secondary Education, International General Certificate of Secondary Education, General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level were accepted for consideration for admission to University Grants Committee-funded institutions through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System.

16. Noting that various B/Ds had been providing support for EMs under their respective purviews, some Members were of the view that a cross-B/Ds task force comprised of high-level government officials should be set up to facilitate the integration of the Administration's efforts in providing assistance for EMs. The Administration advised that SNGTF would follow up issues in this regard.

### **Latest development**

17. According to the Administration, the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2014 ("the Report") was released on 31 December 2015. In the Report, the poverty situation of EMs was analysed by adopting the CoP's analytical framework of the poverty line and using the data from the 2011 Population Census and the Survey on Households with School Children of South Asian Ethnicities commissioned by C&SD in 2014. The Administration will give a briefing on the findings of the Report and the support policies on EMs at the Subcommittee meeting on 15 March 2016.

### **Relevant papers**

18. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
10 March 2016

**Relevant papers on poverty problems of  
and support for ethnic minorities**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Legislative Council	23 February 2011	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 108-111</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	8 May 2013 (Item II)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	17 June 2013 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	17 December 2013 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	25 April 2014 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	7 July 2014 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	16 December 2014 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	23 March 2015 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Finance Committee	31 March 2015	<a href="#">Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 Pages 261-267</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	28 April 2015 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	21 July 2015 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Subcommittee on Poverty	20 October 2015 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Subcommittee on Poverty	17 November 2015 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	2 December 2015	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings Pages 107-115</a>

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