



Submissions to the Subcommittee on Poverty about Measures to Support Ethnic Minorities in Relation to Employment and Integration

Integration

The Government should not see ethnic minorities as non-locals

Ethnic minorities are part of Hong Kong. However, the government does not seem to think so and this mentality of the government hinders the integration of ethnic minorities. For example, the Education Bureau often calls non-Chinese speaking students non-locals in its documents. Another example is the mini-movie ‘The Foreign Players’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICEEyFXQys0>) produced by the Government for its population policy consultation, which ended in February this year. In the mini-movie, there are three foreign football players from Pakistan, Scotland and Nigeria respectively. All local football players in the video are of Chinese ethnicity. Also, in the video, several residents of Chinese ethnicity said that imported workers will make Hong Kong more competitive. The Government, by using this mini-movie for its population policy consultation, sends the message that most from ethnic minorities, if not all, are non-locals. This distinction of who is a Hong Konger on the basis of ethnicity by the Government is unreasonable and undermines all its policies to facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities.

The Government should promote integration because of the dignity of ethnic minorities, not because of economic development

In the above-mentioned mini-movie ‘The Foreign Players’, a question raised by the Government is that if importing workers is beneficial to our economy, how we should promote integration. One ethnic minority client of ours, upon watching the mini-movie, said that she felt the Government was only promoting integration because of the need for economic development. We would like to emphasize that ethnic minorities deserve equal opportunities in education, employment, participation in society, etc because of justice and their dignity, not because our society wants to make more money.

The Race Discrimination Ordinance and the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality



We urge the government to propose law amendment to the Race Discrimination Ordinance so that it will provide for a positive duty on the government's part to eliminate race discrimination. Also, the scope of application of the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality should be extended to all departments and the Guidelines should be statutory and strictly enforced with extra resources and mechanism so as to ensure that ethnic minority residents enjoy all the rights, opportunities and entitlements given to their Chinese counterpart.

De facto racial segregation in the public education system

To promote the integration of ethnic minorities, it is of paramount importance to eliminate the *de facto* racial segregation in the public education system. This is because the *de facto* racial segregation in the public education system contributes to *de facto* racial segregation in society at large.

In 2012/13, in at least 22 public schools, over half of the students were ethnic minorities. In at least 8 of these schools, over 90% of the students were ethnic minorities. This constitutes *de facto* racial segregation.

Many Chinese people in Hong Kong can go through the whole local education system without knowing anyone from ethnic minorities, which may lead to ignorance about ethnic minorities and therefore prejudice and discrimination.

The government claims that the *de facto* racial segregation is a result of parental choice. However, ethnic minority parents often do not have a real choice between sending their children to mainstream schools and schools that have a high concentration of ethnic minority students. The mainstream curriculum falsely assumes that all students' mother tongue is Chinese and ethnic minority students do not have an equal opportunity to learn the Chinese language well under the mainstream curriculum. Also, once an ethnic minority child enters a kindergarten or a primary school with a high concentration of ethnic minority students, chances are that the Chinese language curriculum at the schools is too easy for the child to be able to switch to a mainstream school later.

Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Hong Kong is a signatory, provides that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration of the Government in all actions concerning children. The Government cannot rely on the parental choice argument to evade its



responsibility to eliminate the *de facto* racial segregation in the public education system as such segregation is not in the best interests of both ethnic minority and Chinese children.

We will go to Geneva in May this year to lobby the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to make recommendations to the Hong Kong Government about this issue of *de facto* racial segregation in the public education system. We urge the Government to take immediate, effective measures to eliminate this *de facto* racial segregation.

Support service centres for ethnic minorities

Currently there are several support service centres for ethnic minorities under the subvention of the Government. We hope the Government would provide the number of service users of these centres disaggregated by ethnicity. If the majority of the service users are ethnic minorities and these service users spend most of their time at these centres interacting with ethnic minorities mostly, we would like the Government to explain how these centres can promote integration of ethnic minorities.

Employment

We are of the view that the support service centres can also be responsible for helping ethnic minorities seek employment, with a case manager following the progress of each job seeker and a requirement of passing a minimum successful job seeking rate. The Labour Department can also appoint such case managers with a similar function within the Department.

Regarding the low labour force participation rates of some ethnic groups such as Indians and Pakistanis, it was stated in the 2011 Population Census thematic report on ethnic minorities that this might be related to the custom of these ethnic groups. This is not entirely true because some of our female clients of these ethnic groups do want to work but they do not have the necessary education qualification or vocational skills to work or to be competitive in the job market. They also face the language barrier in both English and Chinese; some of them may know speak but not read or write English and Chinese.

The Employment Retraining Board commissioned a report in 2011 about the training needs of ethnic minorities. We would like to know whether the



Employment Retraining Board has adopted any recommendations made in the report.

Also, it is difficult for ethnic minorities who no longer study at school to learn Chinese beyond the GCSE level, which is roughly equivalent to that of the local primary two level. From our experience, at least some of the current Chinese language courses organized by various training bodies of the Employment Retraining Board are not linked to standardized benchmarks. It does not help employers determine the Chinese language level of those who have completed the courses. As such, ethnic minorities cannot overcome the language barrier to having good employment prospects even when they want to. The Vocational Training Council should set up language learning centres which organize Chinese language courses at its campuses or other public school premises at night-time.

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