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Figures of Census 2011 by the Census and Statistics Department (CSD) revealed a higher general poverty rate among EMs, notably for Pakistani families, along with Nepalese families their median income were 20% short from the general population. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre of Workers (Kowloon) (The Centre) criticizes the Government's third Poverty Report released in the Poverty Summit on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2015 breathed no word on working poverty among EM by strengthen employment support.

To understand difficulties faced by EM in a number of aspects, from knowledge towards the Labour Department (LD) as a frontline employment assistant institution to assessing its usage and its effectiveness, The Centre conducted a one-off quantitative survey between June and July 2015. 125 South Asian EMs (including Pakistanis, Nepalese and Indians) who attempted job-seeking in Hong Kong in 5 years were successfully interviewed through convenient sampling. The survey reveals:

### 1. Dire Situation for EM Job Seekers

- **67.2% regard job-seeking in Hong Kong “difficult” and “very difficult”;**
- 58% mentioned difficulties in job-seeking without Cantonese proficiency, 44% without means towards employment, and 38% expressed difficulties in job-seeking when most vacancies are written in Chinese.

### 2. Few Means to Job Opportunities

- 92% look for job opportunities thru families and peers.

### 3. Low Usage of the LD's Employment Services

- **74.4% never used any services by the LD, while 29.6% never heard of the LD**
- Among the rest who used the LD's employment services, only 1 was provided interpretation services, though the Home Affairs Department (HAD) has been funding the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) in providing different types of interpretation services since 2010. **Nearly half never heard of its availability.**
- Since September 2014 the LD launched its first batch of ethnic minority Employment Service Ambassadors (ESA), providing on-job training for young EMs while in an attempt to provide

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employment support towards EM job-seekers. However, 71.88% among those who used the LD's services never heard of the ESAs.

- Nearly half (46.88%) never heard of Employment Officers in providing different services to job-seekers.

#### **4. Inefficient LD Employment Services**

- Over 65% having experience in using employment services by the LD regarded it as “useless” or “totally useless”.
- **Over 85% never get employed through the LD's assistance.**

#### **5. The LD has to Make Prompt Improvements**

- 53.76% among 93 who never sought assistance from the LD expressed concerns of language barriers with staff.
- 59.14% stressed employing EM staff could be an incentive for them in seeking EMs' assistance from the LD.
- 55.91% wish job-matching services could be provided by the LD.

Besides figures above, service experience by The Centre educated us difficulties in job-seeking faced by EMs as well as the inefficiency of the LD are not bounded by education level or other aspects. Among The Centre's members there are reports including a Pakistani holder of U.K. Master of Laws (LL.M.) taking the Security Personnel Permit examination as his last resort; an Indian holding a Master of Accounting being introduced dishwasher and cleaner vacancies in a LD job-centre; a fluent Cantonese-speaking Pakistani attending a job-interview from the assistance of the LD being kept at the front door when his ethnicity being known to the employer; a Nepalese job-seeker was not supported with telephone interpretation service despite after a 45-minute wait in the job-center.

Employment should be an effective measure against poverty but most EMs suffer from limited spectrum of ways and means to employment, i.e. choices of industries and access to job-opening information, followed by rock-bottom salaries and exploitations. From the survey it is observed the LD does not fare well in usage, popularity, satisfaction and efficiency when it is expected to take up a proactive role. In light of the situation, The Centre hereby proposes several short-term measures and long term strategies to the Government in supporting employment among EMs to tackle poverty:

### **1. Short-term Measures**

**1.1 Enhance Interpretation Services** – The LD to pledge towards EM job-seekers to provide telephone interpretation services within 20 minutes as means to urge frontline staff to ensure equal accessibility to the LD's services;

**1.2 Restore Job-matching Service** – As The Centre's survey reveal, interview arrangements, information for vacancies and career counselling are services expected by a substantial number of EM job-seekers, which sourced from job-opportunities lost due to, for instance, discrimination, language and cultural barriers

and uninformed of local job-market. Therefore, the LD could have been a catalyst. The LD should restore Job-matching Service being cancelled in 2010 in order to intervene and encourage employers to consider EM job-seekers, following up their progress and match vacancies with their qualifications to maximize their employability.

**1.3 Employ EM staff as Supplementation for ESAs** – which is under the Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP) framework, which helps on-the-job training for EM youths but actual EM job-seekers. Many regarded ESAs as lack of job-seeking and work experience.

The Centre's survey also revealed language as a major barrier against help-seeking from the LD among EMs, however, nearly half would think twice EM staff to be made available in the LD job centres. Though the LD launches the ESA project since September 2014, each batch of ESAs is provided 6 months in the field, which few could accumulate adequate experience in assisting EM job-seekers. Therefore, the LD should also review the ESA project not only to understand how it enhance on-job training for EM youths, but also investigate its effectiveness in facilitating EM employment.

On the other hand the Government should station full-time EM staff in job-centres of different districts to supplement for the ESAs. Not only full-time EM staff could assist EM job-seekers with inadequate proficiencies in Chinese and English, but also bridge employers and job-seekers with knowledge in both EM cultures and local job-market, eventually enhance EMs' employability.

## **2. Long-term Strategies**

### **2.1 The LD to set up a Selective Placement Division for Ethnic Minorities (SPDEM)**

Short-term measures are piecemeal though could improve current services of the LD. Experience from The Centre educated us language barriers is not the only difficulties faced by EM job-seekers but also prejudice and misunderstandings. As labour shortage became prevalent, more employers would consider EM job-seekers but could hardly realize without support and means for recruitment. On the other hand, lack of information about local job market and expectations from employers also cost EM job-seekers valuable opportunities.

Therefore, The Centre advice the Government to set up a SPDEM in liaising with institutions or department in retraining programmes, so as to strengthen cooperation with NGOs in fitting needs of employers and EM job-seekers. Overseas experience could also be taken into account in employing Multicultural Service Officers in liaising with different EM communities and service units in understanding their needs and concerns, incorporating policy formulations.

### **2.2 EM Employment Subsidy Schemes and Qualification Accreditation Support for Low-income Groups**

The Employment Programme for the Middle-aged, the YETP, the Selective Placement Division and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) are existing employment subsidy schemes for groups with special needs. However, as one of the marginalized groups facing discrimination in workplace

and the job market, EMs' needs have been overlooked by the Government. Quebec, for instance, the Government provide first-time employment subsidies for employers as incentives to hire migrants with residence less than 5 years and Visible Minorities<sup>4</sup>, both with professional qualifications, also as means to promote integration<sup>5</sup>. The Centre also come across significant number of EMs with high educational attainment and with professional qualifications facing discrimination in the job market for lacking proficiency in Chinese. High fees for accrediting qualifications is another hurdle for EMs who are yet to get their first job in Hong Kong.

Therefore, The Centre advices the Government to subsidize fees required for accrediting overseas qualification for low-income groups, as well as setting up subsidy schemes as incentives for employments to hire EM job-seekers. These strategies not only could promote integration but also enhance EMs with high educational attainments to learn local languages and to excel in their disciplines.

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<sup>4</sup> 参考 <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/concepts/definitions/minority01a>

<sup>5</sup> 参考 <http://www.emploi.quebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/citizens/starting-a-new-job/employment-integration-programs/employment-integration-program-for-immigrants-and-visible-minorities-priime/>