

# 立法會

## *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)1552/12-13(02)

Ref : CB2/PL/HA

### **Panel on Home Affairs**

#### **Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 12 July 2013**

#### **Support services for ethnic minority groups**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the support services provided by the Home Affairs Department ("HAD") for ethnic minorities ("EMs") and summarizes members' concerns on issues relating to support and assistance for EMs.

#### **Background**

##### HAD's support services for ethnic minority groups

2. To help EMs adapt to the life in Hong Kong, the Administration provides a range of support services and programmes through various bureaux and departments in the areas of community services, education, employment assistance, vocational training and retraining, social welfare services, public housing and public healthcare.
3. According to the Administration, HAD is responsible for, among others, coordinating, monitoring and assessing the provision of Government's support services for EMs to enable their early integration into the local community.
4. Regarding the support services for EMs, HAD commissions non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") to operate five support service centres (namely in Wan Chai, Kwun Tong, Yau Ma Tei, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun) and two sub-centres in Sham Shui Po and Tung Chung, providing tailor-made learning classes, counselling, integration programmes and interpretation services for EMs. HAD also sponsors two community support teams for the Pakistani and the Nepalese communities to provide special

services for EM groups through members of their own community. Furthermore, it provides funding for operating radio programmes aired in five EM languages (i.e. Bahasa Indonesian, Nepali, Urdu, Hindi and Thai) to keep EMs informed of important Government notices, local news, other information and entertainment; implements two financial assistance programmes for EMs under the Community Care Fund; publishes guidebooks in English and six EM languages (i.e. Bahasa Indonesian, Tagalog, Thai, Hindi, Nepali and Urdu) on information relating to Government and NGO services for EMs; and implements the Harmony Scholarship Scheme for EM students.

#### Initiatives announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address

5. The Chief Executive announced in the 2010-2011 Policy Address that the Government would enhance collaboration with NGOs and local organizations to step up efforts to facilitate the early integration of EMs and the new arrivals from the Mainland ("NAs") into the community. In the 2011-2012 Budget Speech, the Financial Secretary announced that HAD would set up a dedicated team to strengthen and integrate the support services for EMs and NAs.

6. In 2011-2012, HAD set up the dedicated team and introduced three major initiatives, namely the District-based Integration Programme, the Expectation Management Programme and the Ambassador Scheme, with a view to enhancing the support services for EMs and NAs. The aim of the District-based Integration Programmes was to help EMs and NAs better understand Hong Kong, encourage them to participate more in the community and facilitate their early integration into the society. The Expectation Management Programmes were to help prospective settlers from the Mainland better understand the local environment before deciding to live in Hong Kong. The Ambassador Scheme aimed to provide outreach services to disadvantaged groups of EMs and NAs. Persons with similar background and experience were recruited and trained as ambassadors to reach out to the disadvantaged EMs and NAs and, where necessary, make referrals to government departments for follow up.

#### **Members' views and concerns**

7. Issues relating to support and assistance for EMs have been discussed by various committees of the Legislative Council ("LegCo"), including the Panel on Home Affairs ("the HA Panel"), the Panel on Constitutional Affairs, the Panel on Education, the Panel on Public Service and the Bills Committee on Race Discrimination Bill. The major concerns raised by members about the support and assistance for EM groups are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

### Discrimination against EMs

8. When discussing the enhanced support services for EMs and NAs at the HA Panel meeting on 9 December 2011, some members expressed concern about the unfriendliness of some frontline personnel of government departments towards EMs. They considered that the Government should provide more training to frontline civil servants to improve their communication with EMs, enhance public education and publicity on anti-discrimination programmes and experience-sharing activities to facilitate the integration of EMs into the local community and recruit more service ambassadors with background and experience similar to those of EMs to help the latter understand the Government's support services. Noting that the District-based Integration Programmes launched by some districts were well received by EMs, members urged the Administration to extend the Integration Programmes to all 18 districts.

9. The Administration advised that it had introduced initiatives to facilitate the integration of EMs into local community, such as launching the Ambassador Scheme under which persons with similar background and experience were arranged to proactively contact the disadvantaged EMs, and the District-based Integration Programmes through which districts organizations or NGOs had brought support services to EMs in need. The Administration assured members that it attached importance to facilitating the integration of EMs into local community. The Administration would consider members' views and examine the feasibility of operating more support service centres for EMs in collaboration with NGOs.

### Interpretation services

10. During the scrutiny of the Race Discrimination Bill and at the HA Panel meeting on 9 December 2011, concern was raised over the language barrier encountered by EMs in gaining access to essential public services. There was a suggestion that more EMs be employed to strengthen the simultaneous interpretation services in public hospitals/services units. According to the Administration, an effective way to address the barrier was to arrange interpretation services at various front-line units, including hospitals and welfare service units. While the Hospital Authority had provided simultaneous interpretation services in its hospitals and clinics through a service contractor<sup>1</sup> engaged under the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme, free centralized telephone interpretation services<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The services are available either on-site or over the telephone, covering 12 languages, namely Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Nepali, Bahasa Indonesia, Vietnamese, Thai, Korean, Bengali, Japanese, Tagalog and German.

<sup>2</sup> The services are provided through three-way conference calls, involving an interpreter in the support service centre, a government official or NGO representative, and an EM person.

covering seven major EM languages were also provided at one of the support service centres for EMs to handle enquiries concerning services of government departments and other public organizations.

#### After-school tutorials and Chinese language courses for ethnic minority students

11. At the meeting of the Panel on Education on 14 March 2011, concern was raised about the adequacy of after-school remedial classes for helping non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students (including EM students) to learn Chinese. The Administration was called on to consider engaging different organizations to provide the after-school classes in various locations so that NCS students could select a venue that best suited them. A similar concern about the adequacy of resources for EM students in need was also raised at the HA Panel meeting on 9 December 2011. Members requested the Administration to enhance the tutoring services in Chinese writing for EMs outside schools.

12. According to the Administration, NCS students were free to choose after-school Chinese Language programmes offered by their own schools or by the service provider commissioned by the Education Bureau ("EDB") (i.e. the Chinese Language Learning Support Centre operated by the University of Hong Kong), which delivered after-school Chinese Language programmes at various venues. In addition, NCS students might attend the after-school Chinese Language courses offered by the support service centres for EMs. In order to help NCS parents and students understand the local education system, major education policies and education services, the Administration had prepared the Non-Chinese Speaking Parent Information Package in major EM languages, and distributed it to NCS parents through schools, Maternal and Child Health Centres, NGOs and relevant bureaux and departments.

#### Support service centres

13. At the meeting of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs on 19 April 2010, some members expressed concern about the operating expenses and mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of the support service centres for EMs. As the number of NCS students (including EM students) taking after-school tutorial classes (including language classes) in the support service centres were low as compared with the EM population, concern was raised about whether the operational funding from the Administration (i.e. up to HK\$700,000 for the 2009-2010 school year and up to HK\$1.4 million for the 2010-2011 school year for after-school tutorial classes) was adequate. The Administration clarified that the total government spending on education for NCS children far exceeded these estimates, which only covered the additional provision for after-school tutorial classes provided by the support service centres. While other bureaux, such as EDB, also earmarked provision to cater for the educational needs of

NCS students, the Administration provided various support services to EMs by sponsoring NGOs in different districts.

14. Concern was also expressed about the adequacy of the services provided to EMs and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the language classes and integration programmes provided by the support service centres. According to the Administration, the operation and performance of the centres would be monitored through collecting feedback from the community and other monitoring mechanisms such as reports and user evaluation of the activities of the centres. Feedback from service users and EM communities were, in general, positive and assuring. The Administration would keep under review the support services, and consider necessary adjustment in the light of the operational experience and the needs of EM communities, before deciding on the need to open more centres.

#### Employment opportunities for EMs

15. Concern was raised about the employment problems of EMs at the HA Panel meeting on 9 December 2011 and there was a suggestion that more pre-employment training and job vacancy information should be provided to EMs in the 18 District Offices in collaboration with the Labour Department ("LD"). The Administration advised that LD was responsible for employment services. If needed, the Administration would consider incorporating employment support services in the District-based Integration Programmes being implemented by the relevant District Offices.

16. When the Panel on Public Service discussed the employment of EMs in the civil service and government-funded public bodies at its meeting on 15 April 2013, members urged the Administration to provide appropriate assistance to EMs to facilitate them to join the civil service. Pointing out the increase in the population of EMs in Hong Kong, members considered that there was a need for the Administration to recruit more EMs to assist in the daily operation of bureaux/departments. To facilitate EMs in applying for civil service jobs, the Administration should further relax the Chinese language proficiency requirements ("LPRs"). There was also a view that the racial composition of the civil service should be broadly comparable to that of the Hong Kong general population.

17. The Administration advised that while the permanent resident status was relevant to civil service appointments, the race of individual candidates was not a pertinent consideration in the recruitment process. Having regard to the principles of fair competition and meritocracy, the Administration did not impose any prescribed ratio of EMs in the civil service. In order to ensure that public services could be provided effectively and efficiently to the public, the Administration had to specify appropriate Chinese and English LPRs as part of

the entry requirements for appointment to individual grades, having regard to the operational needs and job requirements of the concerned grades. Following a comprehensive review of LPRs by all Heads of department/grade ("HoDs/HoGs") in 2010, actions had been taken to adjust the Chinese LPRs of certain grades. The Civil Service Bureau would continue to work with HoDs/HoGs in making suitable adjustments in LPRs, taking into account the changing operational needs of the grades concerned.

18. In responding to members' concern about the policy of accepting overseas Chinese language qualifications as meeting the stipulated LPRs, the Administration advised that for the purpose of appointment to the civil service, all bureaux/departments had to accept the Chinese language results of specified non-local public examinations, in addition to local qualifications. Such non-local examinations included the United Kingdom International General Certificate of Secondary Education, General Certificate of Secondary Education, General Certificate of Education ("GCE") Ordinary Level as well as GCE Advanced/Advanced Subsidiary Levels.

### **Latest development**

19. The HA Panel will discuss with the Administration the support services for EM groups provided by HAD at its meeting on 12 July 2013.

### **Relevant papers**

20. A list of the relevant papers available on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant documents on  
Support services for ethnic minority groups**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Bills Committee on Race Discrimination Bill	-	<a href="#">Report</a>
Panel on Constitutional Affairs	17.11.2008 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Constitutional Affairs	19.4.2010 (item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Education	14.3.2011 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Home Affairs	9.12.2011 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Home Affairs	16.10.2012 (Item III)	<a href="#">Agenda</a>
Panel on Public Service	15.4.2013 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>