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CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF HONG KONG  
DIOCESAN PASTORAL CENTRE FOR WORKERS – KOWLOON

**The Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Home Affairs**  
**8 July 2019 Meeting on**  
**Language support services and dedicated outreach services teams for ethnic minorities**

1. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers - Kowloon (dpcw-kln) has all along been paying close attention to the plight of the grass-root ethnic minority (EM) groups. We dedicate our all-out effort to assisting them in getting the public service and employment support provided by the government all the time.
2. The Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report (The Report) on Ethnic Minorities released in February 2018 revealed the dire poverty situation faced by South Asian ethnic minority residents. The Report also suggested that, although the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme was the most effective major recurrent cash benefits in poverty alleviation, the share of non-recipients of major cash benefits (including CSSA) was generally higher among the poor population of the major ethnic groups between 2011 and 2016, leading to a notably smaller reduction in the poverty gap brought about by recurrent cash policies (ES.27).
3. From Dpcw-kln's experience of serving the EM communities over the years, we observe that language barrier is a frequent hurdle for EMs to gain access to any public resources. EMs of poor families who have difficulties communicating in English or Chinese are facing numerous hindrances in applying for CSSA or other social security allowances. A few of the countless cases we came across in 2018-19 are briefly explained in Appendix I.

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## **Problems concluded from our experiences**

4. In 2010, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB) issued the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality (the Guidelines) to provide general guidance to relevant government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) and public authorities to ensure equal access to public services for EMs. Accordingly, relevant B/Ds, including the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have drawn up checklists of measures to assist in promoting equal access to key public services for EM groups.
5. According to the checklist of measures, SWD will arrange interpretation services as appropriate when providing social welfare services for EMs. Staff may make use of interpretation services from various sources, such as court interpretation service, the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) under the Hong Kong Christian Service and other NGOs. However, we observed that quite a number of SWD frontline workers were still unaware of the availability of the interpretation service and their responsibility to provide it to EM users. Even after the workers were informed of this service and their responsibility, they were ignorant of how to book the facilities. Some of them did not know who would pay for the service.
6. For those who had learnt of the service, they were unwilling to book the facilities for the users. They misconceived that the users were competent enough to communicate in a second language. Owing to the workers' misconception, they decided unilaterally whether language assistance should be given to the users or not. On one occasion a staff in SSFU falsely accused a user of pretending to have limited English proficiency in order to obtain language assistance.
7. More serious problems emerged in the Social Security Field Unit (SSFU). SWD has issued the "Points-to-note for providing welfare services for ethnic minorities" ("Points-to-note") since July 2017. However, the "Points-to-note" only targets at the frontline workers of Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres (IFSCs / ISCs) operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but not to staff of SSFU. Furthermore, the "Point-to-note" consists of only "working tips" for frontline workers.
8. Although the "Point-to-note" was issued, ways of assessing EM users' need for an interpreter, procedures for booking interpretation service, role of family and friends when seeking public service, preparatory arrangement for a session with an interpreter are not stated therein.
9. Details of using interpretation service by users or refusal of their request for such service were not kept in record or monitored. Neither were evaluation and review of the provision of interpretation service by government departments or bureau conducted.

## **Recommendations**

10. In order to ensure equal access by ethnic minorities to public services, we urge **all departments and bureaux to formulate a standard, comprehensive and transparent guidelines to provide services to EM service users. These procedural guidelines on booking interpretation should be mandatory and monitored by superior officers.**<sup>1</sup> We suggest the following items to be included in the guidelines:

- (i) The government should step up its obligation and make clear the purpose of the guidelines
- (ii) Clarify the reason for a client's request for interpretation service and why their family members, relatives or friends cannot act as interpreters for them.
- (iii) Design a workable method to assess the clients' need for the interpretation service and determine their choice of the preferred language.
- (iv) Decide the action to be taken in case the client does not accept the interpreter, e.g., arrange a replacement.
- (v) Set up guidelines for clients to choose the mode of interpretation (face-to-face, telephone, video conferencing)
- (vi) Establish a procedure for the frontline workers to book and pay for the interpretation service.
- (vii) Find out ways to prepare the clients for a session with an interpreter, e.g. facilities required, time allowed for the appointment.
- (viii) Give directive for the workers to deal with the client and interpreter. For example, a briefing session with the duo, and the worker should instruct the client (not the interpreter) that he/she should utter short sentences in a slow speed, so as to facilitate easy, effective and accurate interpretation.
- (ix) Take follow-up action after the appointment with the interpreter, e.g. record keeping, evaluation, etc.
- (x) Formulate a plan to monitor, evaluate and review the service periodically.

11. In any circumstances, all non-native Cantonese speakers must be informed of the availability of interpretation support. We recommend a **“Request Form for Interpretation” in EM languages together with a card showing relevant national flags (Attachment III) which should be presented to non-Chinese service users. In the light of these documents, they can ask when they need the service of an interpreter.** The following reminders should be stated clearly in EM languages in the form so that users have no qualm about using interpretation:

- (i) The service is free of charge

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<sup>1</sup> A modified “Point-to-note” issued by SWD can be taken as a reference for other departments/bureaux to formulate their guidelines. However, the “Point-to-note” should be made mandatory, not a “tip”. It should also target at staff of all units providing direct service in the departments/ bureaux. Please refer to **Appendix II** for the suggestions to modify the Point-to-note” issued by SWD

- (ii) The service users can choose the preferred gender of the interpreter
  - (iii) The interpreter is bound by code of confidentiality
  - (iv) Friends and relatives who may not have the required language competence to interpret accurately are not recommended to be interpreters
  - (v) The client should append in the form to acknowledge whether he/she accepts or declines the offer of the service.
  - (vi) If the frontline worker finds the users too illiterate to know the purpose of form, he/she should offer the service verbally. If they still do not understand, interpretation should also be provided to them. Then the frontline worker should sign on the form with the remark that the service is requested by him/her of his/her own accord.
12. At times there are cases of clients rejecting the offer of interpretation service. Procedures should be established for frontline staff to **clarify and state the reasons for the refusal**, to make sure that they are aware of their rights to such service before they make decision.
13. Frontline workers should keep the following records:
- (i) booking of interpreters
  - (ii) the time and place of booking
  - (iii) name of the client
  - (iv) the client's mother tongue which is to be interpreted.
  - (v) relevant file number (if any) .
- For service users who refused the interpretation service, the above information should also be maintained together with the reasons for the refusal. Department and bureaux should report annually on the use of interpreting and translation services.
14. Make available indoor interpretation-friendly facilities for both clients and interpreters – a conference call system set up at one of the counters or an interview room with an on-site webcam, stationery, utensils and equipment for the job.
15. **Create a statutory body Commission for Ethnic Minority Issues** to monitor the performance, measures and practice of all departments and bureaux to promote equal access and opportunities for EMs, including the delivery of interpretation service.
16. **It is of utmost important for CHEER to play a more proactive role in delivering the service.** We suggest CHEER to keep a record of request for interpretation and actual delivery of the service. Whenever a service user calls CHEER requesting for interpretation but no reply comes from the department concerned, they should follow up on the reason for the delay. If the department finally refuses to book interpretation from CHEER, they ought to ask the reason for the declination.

### Case 1

The applicant visited SSFU along with a dpcw-kln worker to apply for old age allowance. Dpcw-kln worker requested for interpretation service on behalf of the applicant. The SSFU staff informed the applicant to wait. After 20 minutes, the SSFU staff asked the applicant to approach the counter. Without an interpreter the staff told him that **SWD COULD NOT provide interpretation service and claimed that “Assistance and Interpretation Services for Ethnic Minorities” in the notice posted at the reception counter was NOT the duty of SWD staff. SWD simply helped interpretation service providers to keep their service information in the field unit but could not arrange interpretation because SSFU did not have enough resource.**

Although the dpcw-kln worker continuously insisted for 2 hours on arrangement of interpretation service, the SSFU staff still rejected the request. Eventually the dpcw-kln worker helped the applicant to complete the application process, but no interpretation service was arranged by SSFU.

### Case 2

The applicant had visited SSFU before to apply for CSSA and was told by the staff to bring some documents. As the applicant could speak neither Cantonese nor English, he was unable to express his difficulties in learning what documents he was to submit.

Therefore, he sought help from dpcw-kln. When the dpcw-kln social worker called SSFU and explained the applicant’s situation to the staff, he was informed that the applicant could understand Cantonese but **PRETENDED to be unable to communicate so as to skip handing in the necessary documents.** When the dpcw-kln social worker asked the staff to arrange interpretation service, he refused. Instead, he suggested the applicant to arrange the service by himself.

The SSFU staff called dpcw-kln EM worker several times to clarify the information. However, **instead of booking interpretation service, he asked the dpcw-kln worker to interpret for him and the applicant.**

### Case 3

A CSSA recipient approached dpcw-kln and asked the worker to enquire for him about the payment credited to his bank account. He also requested interpretation service when communicating with the SSFU officer in the future.

So dpcw-kln worker wrote a letter on the recipient's behalf explaining the case. The request for interpretation service in future communications with the SSFU officer, whether by phone or in person, was stated in the letter. It was also mentioned in the letter that a written reply was preferable to a verbal answer. However, instead of sending the recipient a letter, the officer called and told him that any explanation would be given by phone and no letter would be sent. Moreover, the recipient's enquiry was answered without interpretation. **The officer also insisted that the recipient should book interpretation service by himself and he needed to pay for the service. Obviously the 'payment' requirement is untrue and misleading.**

Although numerous efforts were made to request for interpretation, the recipient was only provided with such a service when escorted by a social worker. However, when the recipient was on his own, the service would be denied to him whether the communication was carried by phone or in person.

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**SUGGESTIONS to “Points-to-note**  
**for providing welfare services for ethnic minorities (EMs) for Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres**  
**operated by non-governmental organizations”**

Below are our suggestions for refining the “Points-to-note” issued by SWD. The document on the left hand side is the original document while the columns on the right are our suggestions.

Page 1

## 1. Introduction

- Pursuant to the “Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality<sup>1</sup>” issued by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB), all the relevant public authorities have to promote racial equality and ensure equal access to public services in the key areas concerned.
- It is the objective of Social Welfare Department (SWD) to assist all people in need, regardless of their race and nationality, by providing appropriate services for them. Measures have been taken by SWD to promote racial equality and the provision of equal access to social welfare services for ethnic minorities (EMs)<sup>2</sup>. The entry to subvented welfare services is non-discriminatory. EMs may apply for/access welfare services in the same way as other service users as long as they fulfil the eligibility criteria.
- This Points-to-note provides working tips and related resources for frontline workers of Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres (IFSCs/ISCs) operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing timely welfare services for EMs. Units-in-charge or supervisors should give the Points-to-note to every worker newly posted to the offices and circulate it to workers on an annual basis.

## 2. Working tips

### 2.1 Cultural sensitivity among different EM groups

- Social workers should be aware of the characteristics, needs, cultural and

- To ensure equal accessibility of EMs to public services, the documents must be in the form of mandatory guidelines ( instead of a “working tips”) for frontline workers.
- The applicability of the guidelines should be extended to other units which are providing direct service, e.g. SSFUs.
- Language needs of EM service users should be highlighted and be more concerned by frontline workers to ensure these users have equal access to public service.

## 2.2 Leaflets

- SWD has produced leaflets on mainstream welfare services, including family, child care, domestic violence, elderly, youth, corrections, rehabilitation and medical social service and social security schemes, which are available in six ethnic languages<sup>3</sup> in addition to Chinese and English. They are available at various venues and the SWD website.

## 2.3 Interpretation and translation services

- EMs should have right to access to interpretation and translation services whenever necessary. They should be notified of such right and the channels to access interpretation and translation services when they turn up at IFSCs/ISCs for assistance.

- For this purpose, a sample notice in multiple EM languages is given in **Appendix 2** for posting at reception counters<sup>4</sup>. When EMs turn up for enquiries/services, staff manning the reception counter could make use of the Language Identification Card (**Appendix 3**)<sup>5</sup> to facilitate the EMs to identify

<sup>3</sup> Leaflets are printed in EM languages including Bahasa Indonesia (印尼語), Hindi (印度語), Nepali (尼泊爾語), Tagalog (他加祿語), Thai (泰語) and Urdu (烏爾都語).

<sup>4</sup> If the service unit has more than one reception/drop-in area, please ensure that each of the reception/drop-in area has posted the sample notice in multiple EM languages.

<sup>5</sup> It is provided and produced by the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents under the Hong Kong Christian Service.

The paragraphs are suggested to be fine-tuned as below:

- For this purpose, the following information should be provided to EMs who turn up for enquiries / services to see if interpretation will be requested:
  1. A sample notice of interpretation service in multiple EM languages to inform the EMS of their right to use interpretation and to choose the mode of interpretation (appendix2)
  2. A Language Identification Card (Appendix 3) to facilitate the EMs to identify the languages they use
  3. A Request Form for Interpretation in the preferred language they choose if they express their need of using interpretation. Then the staff should ask the EMs to choose their preferred modes of interpretation and gender of the interpreters. Then sign on it.
- Engaging interpreters is recommended if:
  - requested by the service users
  - the service users cannot comprehend or respond to basic questions in neither Chinese nor English
  - the service users find it difficult to understand, or can only respond in a limited way
  - the service users rely on family or friends to communicate
  - the service users prefer to speak in their own languages
  - the service users speak Chinese or English as a second language, and find the situation stressful, complex or unfamiliar to him/her.
- To determine service users' level of Chinese or English proficiency, it may be useful to ask them "Why are you here today? / How can I help you?" If the users cannot respond to the question fluently, or if the response is difficult to understand, an interpreter is recommended.



the languages they used and provide them a copy of the said notice in their EM languages. The information is also available on SWD's Homepage to facilitate easy access by EMs, the public, staff of SWD and NGOs.

- Social workers will arrange interpretation service as appropriate when providing social welfare services for EMs. They may make use of interpretation service for EMs from various sources, such as interpretation service provided by the Hospital Authority<sup>6</sup>, court interpretation service<sup>7</sup>, the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) under the Hong Kong Christian Service, the Hong Kong TransLingual Services of Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (HKSKH) Lady MacLehose Centre and other NGOs, etc.
- EM service users should be informed of the availability of the interpretation and translation services. Please refer to **Appendix 4** for details about available interpretation and translation services.
- EM service users may also approach CHEER direct for free telephone interpretation by themselves.

• When EM service users propose their family members, relatives or friends to act as interpreters for them, social workers should inform them of the availability of interpretation services and encourage them to use the services as listed in **Appendix 4**.

• For sensitive cases, family members, especially children, relatives or friends, to act as interpreters should be actively discouraged. For instance, children with parents having intimate partner violence should not be arranged to act as interpreters considering their probable loyalty conflicts and the possibility of re-traumatisation. Moreover, social workers should draw social security staff's attention if such cases have to be referred to social security field units for financial assistance.

<sup>6</sup> Interpretation services are available in public hospitals/clinics/health centres under the management of the Hospital Authority through a service contractor, part-time court interpreters, volunteers and consulate offices. Healthcare staff will arrange interpretation service where necessary or upon request of patients.

We suggest addition of the following paragraphs:

- If interpretation service is still refused by the service users, it is important to ascertain the reasons so as to remove their worries. Engage the interpreter to find out the causes. The service users may have the following reasons:
  - misunderstand why an interpreter is needed
  - feel confident of their proficiency in Chinese or English, and that they can communicate effectively
  - prefer a family member or friend to act as an interpreter
  - worry that they need to pay for the interpretation service
  - concern themselves with exposure of their personal data and privacy
  - feel embarrassed when in contact with an interpreter of the opposite gender.

The paragraphs can be refined as below:

- Family members, relatives and friends can play an important role in supporting service users. However, they may not have the necessary language competence and skills to interpret accurately. In addition, they are not bound by the prescribed codes as accredited interpreters, and cannot remain impartial. Hence, family members, relatives or friends, especially children, should not be invited to participate in situations involving critical information and decision making. Therefore, when service users propose their family members, relatives or friends to act as interpreters for them, the staff should let them know the possible risk, informed them of the availability of interpretation service which is free of charge and encourage them to use the service.

## 2.5 Community resources for EMs

- To facilitate the integration of EMs into the community and enhance their access to public services, Home Affairs Department (HAD) is funding non-profit-making organisations (NPMOs) to operate Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities. The centres provide various tailor-made learning classes, after-school tutorial classes, and dedicated programmes for EM youths, as well as counselling and referral services, integration programmes, etc., to help EMs integrate into the community. Social workers could encourage EMs to join the centre activities for gaining support. List of the centres is set out in Appendix 6.

## 2.6 Sharing and training

- Service units are advised to encourage staff to attend training courses on Race Discrimination Ordinance and related guidelines, racial sensitivity and cultural diversity organised by the Staff Development and Training Section of SWD, the Equal Opportunities Commission or relevant bodies to enhance their awareness and understanding of racial equality.

## 3. **Other references -**

- Resources or references to facilitate social workers to provide services for EMs are appended below -

- All staff should be made aware of the Race Discrimination Ordinance and related guidelines, racial sensitivity and cultural diversity and relevant language services. Staff should also be trained to use the interpretation service and to work with interpreters.

We suggest addition of the following paragraphs after point 2.6:

### **2.7 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review**

- Departments/ bureaux should regularly collect data on clients and their service usage to enable:
  - better understanding of their language needs
  - monitoring the accessibility of the services provided to people who speak other languages
  - identification of potential language services gaps
- Staff who book interpretation should record the time, place, client's name, relevant file name and language used.
- Staff should also document cases of refusal to use interpretation service after the staff has advise the client intensively.
- Records should be publicized and submitted to the Commissioner for Ethnic Minority Issues (if any) or relevant statutory bodies for monitoring, evaluation and review

Appendix 2

**Assistance and Interpretation Services for Ethnic Minorities**

Welfare Assistance

- For welfare assistance or service enquiry, please approach our reception counter. You will then be arranged to meet our intake worker/responsible caseworker.

Telephone Interpretation Service

- If you would like to use telephone interpretation service for specific languages (i.e. Bahasa Indonesia, Tagalog, Thai, Hindi, Nepali, Punjabi and Urdu), please tell our intake worker/responsible caseworker for arrangement.
- Alternatively, you may contact Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents for assistance via the following hotline from 8am to 10pm, Mondays to Sundays except public holidays -
  - 3755 6811 (for Bahasa Indonesia, Tagalog and Thai),
  - 3755 6822 (for Hindi, Nepali) or
  - 3755 6833 (for Punjabi, Urdu).
- The above telephone interpretation services are free of charge.

Social Welfare Department

[Please refer to the separate files (Appendices 2(a)-2(g)) for sample notices in EM languages.]

It is essential to supplement the following information to Appendix 2:

**Interpretation Service**

- If you prefer to use any specific language (i.e. Bahasa Indonesian, Tagalog, Thai, Hindi, Nepali, Punjabi or Urdu) in the appointment, please tell our intake worker/responsible caseworker for arrangement of interpretation and sign the Request Form presented to you.
- Modes of interpretation:
  - Telephone Interpretation  
Interpret by phone and immediate service can be provided
  - Onsite (Escort) Interpretation  
Need to book in advance and attend in person
  - Videoconferencing interpretation  
Conducted using a webcam which is provided in the service units equipped with this appliance (Appendix 5)
- All the above interpretation services are free of charge.
- All interpreters are bound by the Code of Ethics which requires them to keep confidential.

We recommend to supplement the following information as Appendix to the guidelines:

### **Working with Interpreters**

#### 1. Preparing for the session

- Brief the interpreter by providing general background information, such as the reason for the session, specific terms to be used and the targets to be achieved.
- For onsite interpreting, ensure the furniture, equipment and stationery in the room are properly set. Ideally, seats will be arranged in a triangle with the handling officer facing the client
- For telephone interpreting or videoconferencing interpreting, ensure that the handling officer is knowledgeable about telephone or videoconferencing technology, and understand how to operate the system. A room should also be arranged to ensure privacy.

#### 2. Beginning the session

- Introduce the interpreter to the service user.
- Explain the interpreter's role, which is interpreting exactly what the service user and the handling officer say, without addition to, deletion from or alteration of their conversation.
- Explain the purpose of the session. Do not assume that the service user knows what the session is about.
- Explain to the service user that he/she can raise any questions or voice his/her concerns anytime during the session

#### 3. During the session

- Talk directly to the service user, not the interpreter, and maintain eye contact with the user.
- Speak to the service user as the first person and address him/her as the second person. For example, say “what time did **you** arrive today?” instead of “what time did **she/he** arrive today?”
- Speak clearly in a normal tone without rushing through the speech. If reading a text verbatim, give a copy of it to the interpreter and read it slowly.
- Use formal language and avoid slangs, colloquialisms and metaphors
- Make one point at a time and pause at the end of a full sentence. Keep questions, statements and comments short so as to allow the interpreter to grasp

what is being said and to interpret in stages

- In case there are ambiguous points to be clarified, the interpreter should be asked to explain to the service user. Then the interpreter is allowed to proceed with the clarification before interpreting.
- Summarize the discussion periodically to ensure the service user understands the information.
- If the interpreter gives his/her own personal opinions, makes inappropriate comments or discusses anything unrelated to the interpretation assignment, ask them to refrain from doing so.

4. After the session

- Complete the appropriate form to record a service and validate finalization of the case. The data should be preserved for review.
- If there are issues concerning the performance of a specific interpreter, contact the relevant language service provider.

### **References**

Using Interpreting Service: Victorian Government Guidelines on Policy and Procedures

<http://www.mhima.org.au/pdfs/using%20interpreting%20services%20Vic%20gov%20guidelines.pdf>

New South Wales Legal Aid: Guidelines on interpreting and translation

[https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/5832/Guidelines-on-interpreting-and-translation.pdf](https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/5832/Guidelines-on-interpreting-and-translation.pdf)

Outline of Procedures for Australian Government Agencies

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02\\_2018/procuring-interpreting-services.docx](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2018/procuring-interpreting-services.docx)