

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Home Affairs**

### **Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the joint meeting on 8 June 2020**

### **Language support services and dedicated outreach services teams for ethnic minorities**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides background information on language support services and dedicated outreach services teams for ethnic minorities ("EMs") and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members during previous discussions on the subject.

#### **Background**

##### The Steering Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs

2. In July 2018, the Administration established the Steering Committee on Ethnic Minorities Affairs, under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary for Administration, to enhance internal collaboration among government bureaux/departments on support for EMs. After deliberating on the views expressed by various EM organizations and service providers, the Steering Committee formulated a series of new measures covering education, employment, social welfare and social integration to enhance support for EMs.<sup>1</sup>

##### Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities

3. To facilitate integration of EMs into the community and enhance their access to public services, the Administration is funding non-profit-making organizations to operate six support service centres for EMs ("SSCs") and two

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<sup>1</sup> For details of the new measures, please refer to the press release of the Government at: [https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/10/20191027/20191027\\_093632\\_116.html](https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2019/10/20191027/20191027_093632_116.html).

sub-centres. All these centres provide counselling and referral services, integration programmes, etc., to help EMs integrate into the community. One of these centres, namely the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents ("CHEER"), provides general interpretation and translation services to assist EMs in their use of public services.

#### Support services provided by the Social Welfare Department

4. To facilitate EMs' understanding of mainstream welfare services provided by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD"), leaflets of the relevant services are printed in Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai and Urdu, in addition to Chinese and English. SWD has issued "Points-to-note in providing welfare services for ethnic minorities" to its service units (including Integrated Family Service Centres and Social Security Field Units) for reference in providing services to EMs.<sup>2</sup> SWD has also commissioned non-governmental organizations to set up three outreaching teams with employment of EM staff to proactively reach out to EMs and connect those in need to mainstream welfare services. The outreaching teams have commenced service in March 2020.

#### **Deliberations by members since 2016-2017 session**

5. Issues relating to SSCs were discussed by the Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities on 10 April and 8 May 2017. The major concerns raised by members on SSCs are summarized below.

#### Interpretation services and support provided by Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities

6. Some members considered that SSCs should employ more EMs to strengthen interpretation services for EMs so as to facilitate their access to essential public services. According to the Administration, interpretation services were available at various frontline units, including public hospitals and welfare service units. Interpretation services were available in hospitals/clinics under the management of the Hospital Authority through a service contractor, part-time court interpreters, volunteers, etc. The service was provided on site or through telephone depending on the needs in each case.

7. Members expressed concern that many EMs were unable to complete application forms for various public services (such as public rental housing and various poverty alleviation programmes) because they were not conversant in English or Chinese. Some members suggested that the services provided by

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<sup>2</sup> The Points-to-note includes ways to arrange suitable interpretation and translation services, and reminds staff of service units to inform ethnic minorities of their right to receive such services.

the six SSCs and two sub-centres should include completing application forms for EMs where necessary.

8. The Administration advised that staff of SSCs would assist EMs in applying for allowances as far as practicable, such as providing interpretation services and helping them to enquire with the concerned departments if necessary. However, it was considered inappropriate for the staff of SSCs to complete application forms for EMs.

9. Some members suggested that the Administration should provide more funding for CHEER to enhance its interpretation services. The Administration advised that the review of funding support for SSCs was carried out every two years. Factors such as rents, rates, staff salaries and inflation would be considered in reviewing the financial provision to ensure that SSCs would have sufficient resources to deliver their services.

#### Strengthening support services for ethnic minorities

10. Members raised concern that the current support services for EMs were inadequate. They urged the Administration to set up a team to centrally coordinate EM support services, including interpretation service. The Administration advised that the Home Affairs Department was responsible for providing support services for EMs to facilitate their integration into the community. The Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau had issued the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality ("the Guidelines") to provide guidance to relevant bureaux/departments and public authorities to promote racial equality and ensure equal access to public services in key areas concerned.

11. Some members considered that effective implementation of the Guidelines would address most of the problems encountered by EMs in gaining access to various public services. They enquired about the mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Guidelines. The Administration advised that bureaux/departments were responsible for taking suitable measures to ensure EMs' equal access to public services. SSCs would provide assistance, such as interpretation service, seminars to introduce various public services, etc. to assist EMs in using public services. Besides, the Equal Opportunities Commission would publish reports from time to time on EMs' access to various public services.

### **Questions raised at Council meetings**

12. Council questions on provision of support and services for EMs were raised on 9 November 2016, 4 July 2018 and 19 June 2019. Hyperlinks to these questions and the Administration's responses are in the **Appendix**.

### **Relevant papers**

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

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
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**Relevant documents on language support services and dedicated outreach services teams for ethnic minorities**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities	10 April 2017 (Item II)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
	8 May 2017 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	9 November 2016	<a href="#">Question raised by Hon Andrew WAN on "Provision of interpretation services and public services for the ethnic minorities"</a>
	9 November 2016	<a href="#">Question raised by Hon LAM Cheuk-ting on "Provision of interpretation services for the ethnic minorities"</a>
	4 July 2018	<a href="#">Question raised by Hon Claudia MO on "Provision of support and services for the ethnic minorities"</a>
	19 June 2019	<a href="#">Question raised by Hon KWONG Chun-yu on "Support provided for the ethnic minorities"</a>