

Legislative Council Bills Committee on Race Discrimination Bill

Services for New Arrivals from the Mainland

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the services provided by the Government for families with new arrivals from the Mainland and the future direction of further enhancing the provision of these services.

Guiding Principles

2. The Government has been providing services for the new arrivals from the Mainland along the following guiding principles :

- (a) facilitating the integration of new arrivals into the local community;
- (b) providing timely services that suit the immediate needs of new arrivals; and
- (c) targetting resources to meet the most pressing demands.

3. The Government has all along adhered to the principle of fairness in the provision of public services for new arrivals. They are entitled to most of the public services available to other citizens, including a wide range of medical, social and education services. This approach avoids labeling effect and should help achieve objective of facilitating early and smooth integration of new arrivals into the local community.

4. On the other hand, we are conscious that some new arrivals may encounter difficulties during the adaptation period. The Government provides a wide range of timely services upon their arrival in Hong Kong.

Services for New Arrivals

5. Since most of the new arrivals from the Mainland come to Hong Kong for family reunion, most of them are female aged between 25 and 44. Almost one-third of the new arrivals are children aged under 15.

6. Our contacts with the new arrivals reveal that they have experienced adaptation difficulty in the areas of work, living environment, family finance and the education system in Hong Kong. The services that most new arrivals from the Mainland need immediately upon their arrival in Hong Kong are:

- (a) services that enable them to achieve self-reliance (i.e. employment assistance, vocational training and language courses);
- (b) children-related services (i.e. school placement and childcare services); and
- (c) services that address their basic needs (i.e. housing, medical and health services)

Coordination and information dissemination

7. The services for new arrivals from the Mainland involve a number of government departments. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) has taken the role of coordinating the provision of these services. In particular, HAD publishes and regularly updates a “Service Handbook for New Arrivals” to apprise the new arrivals of essential information. This includes the wide range of public services available to new arrivals, basic information about living in Hong Kong (e.g. road safety guidelines, route map of public transport, personal hygiene guidelines, useful telephone number) and contingency measures to be taken during emergency (e.g. points to note during hoisting of typhoon signal).

Employment assistance and vocational training

8. Employment assistance tops the list of new arrivals’ service needs. We understand that the kinds of employment most desired by new arrivals are wholesale, retail, import/export trade, restaurants & hotels, construction, and community, social & personal services.

9. The Labour Department (LD) provides comprehensive assistance and guidance in this regard for new arrivals through its 12 job centres, telephone employment service hotline and interactive employment service website. Information corner containing useful materials tailor-made for new arrivals is set up at each job centre.

10. LD's job centres also conduct regular tailor-made employment briefing sessions to enhance new arrivals' understanding of the local job market. New arrivals with special needs can enroll in a variety of employment programmes including Job Matching Programme, Employment Programme for the Middle-aged and Work Trial Scheme.

11. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) offers full-time placement-tied training courses and part-time generic skills training courses to eligible trainees. Like other local residents, new arrivals may apply to enroll in these courses. ERB also offers a specially designed training course "Job Search Skills Course" for new arrivals to help them adapt to the local labour market and enhance their employability.

Educational support

12. Education Bureau (EDB) provides school placement service to the newly-arrived students. Students may attend a six-month full-time Initiation Programme that helps them integrate into our community and education system before their admission to the public sector schools.

13. For those newly arrived students who enter public sector schools direct, EDB provides schools with a School-based Support Scheme Grant to run support programmes for the students concerned. EDB also provides subsidies for non-governmental organizations to run a 60-hour Induction Programme which covers personal development, social adaptation as well as basic learning skills for these students.

Social welfare services and community projects

14. Social Welfare Department (SWD) and subvented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operate 61 Integrated Family Service Centres to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and therapeutic services for families with new arrivals from the Mainland and other families in need. These services include family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry service, volunteering training, outreaching service, various groups and programmes, and intensive counseling and referral service. Based on district needs, the 135 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres also run various programmes to enhance the local knowledge of new arrival children and youth and facilitate their integration into the local community.

15. Apart from these service centres, community projects supported by various Funds set up by the Government are available to help families

with new arrivals and other families in need. They are :

- (a) the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged : the Fund seeks to help disadvantaged groups, including the new arrivals, in the community, by way of promoting the development of tripartite partnership among the Government, the business community and the welfare sector. So far, 26% of the projects approved by the Fund are targeted at the needs of new arrivals from the Mainland, such as prevention of family violence, establishment of local network, and provision of women and child support services. These projects have received \$11.2 million from the Fund and sponsorship of \$13 million by the business community; and
- (b) the Community Inclusion and Investment Fund (CIIF) : the Fund seeks to encourage community-driven initiatives that apply social capital building strategies to weave mutual help network and develop cross-sectoral partnerships. Many projects supported by the Fund seek to build up the capacities of new arrivals, raise their self-esteem, and promote their integration into the local community through playing contributive roles. Most of the CIIF funded projects help the disadvantaged groups, including the new arrivals, to engage with other members of the community to form mutual help networks or co-operatives. These provide a wide range of services such as childcare, catering, household maintenance, estate mentors, language tutors, etc., so that the participants may actively contribute to the community and become an integral part of their neighbourhoods. So far, about 70% of the projects approved involve new arrivals from the Mainland and their families, with the establishment of over 440 neighbourhood mutual help networks and over 20 work co-operatives.

Housing services

16. We understand the great majority of new arrivals are living with their family members; most of them live in accommodations rented by themselves or family members; and about half of them live in public rental housing (PRH).

17. If new arrivals want to apply for PRH flats under the Waiting List (WL) by themselves, they can register on the WL, subject to the

requirements such as income and asset limits being met. Allocation of a PRH flat to a WL applicant will only be made when his or her application is due for allocation and fulfill the seven-year residence requirement, meaning that at least half of the household members in the application must have lived in Hong Kong for at least seven years and are still living in Hong Kong. Families with new arrivals or other families which fail to meet the residence requirement but have grave difficulties in meeting their imminent housing needs may apply to SWD for PRH under the Compassionate Rehousing category through which the residence requirement can be waived

18. New arrivals with the right of abode in Hong Kong may apply, on the ground of family reunion, for inclusion into PRH tenancy if they are either the spouse / children aged under 18 / dependent family members of the tenants; or the spouse and children of one of the tenant's married children. An adult child of elderly tenants, together with his / her family members, can be included in the tenancy.

Way Forward

19. We shall continue to closely monitor the service needs of new arrivals from the Mainland and ensure that the services provided by the government departments concerned meet their immediate needs during the adaptation period.

20. The government departments concerned will explore room for further strengthening immediate support services for new arrivals along the following lines:

- (a) EDB will extend the initiation and induction programmes to cover new arrival students aged under 18;
- (b) ERB plans to introduce a pilot “Community Harmony Course” (CHC), which is an enhanced version of the current “Job Search Skills Course” in Tin Shui Wai. A youth version of the CHC will also be developed to cater to the training needs of young new arrivals;
- (c) SWD plans to seek additional resources to link up the hotline operated by SWD and those run by NGOs for new arrivals, so as to enhance the provision of information on welfare services as well as support for them. Those identified to be in need will

be referred to related services for appropriate follow up;

- (d) HAD will evaluate the effectiveness of a pilot project which seeks to provide pre-migration counseling and support services for Mainland residents who plan to reside permanently in Hong Kong in the near future.

21. The Government would target resources to priority districts with more pressing service needs, taking into account the distribution of new arrival population and other social factors (e.g. the number of battered spouse cases, low-income families, single parent families and unemployed parents). For example:

- (a) SWD plans to organize more targeted programmes for new arrivals, including mutual help groups, community education, family life education, etc in these districts;
- (b) LD plans to organize more job fairs in the priority districts to assist new arrivals in seeking employment;
- (c) ERB will provide more training places for part-time generic skills training courses in these districts.

22. We would also encourage the government departments concerned to collaborate in providing more cross-disciplinary one-stop services for families with new arrivals and other needy families, while providing their respective services.

Home Affairs Department
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