

**Submission on 'Issues relating to the employment of ethnic minorities' to the
Legislative Council Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities**

We are a group of enthusiastic ethnic minority (EM) youth pursuing tertiary studies in different professions, hoping to contribute our talents to the society in the near future. However, not being able to receive Chinese Language education equivalent to the level of most Chinese students, we face severe language barrier in employment despite we study hard as every local student to get into Universities. While one out of five EM residents lived in poverty, the unemployment rate of EMs remains to be much higher (5.7%) compared to the overall population (3.7%), the Pakistani population even reaches the alarming level of 9.2%. Our group believes that the shortage of non-Chinese speaking jobs is the key of the problem.

1. Engagement

According to the report freshly released from the Commission of Youth, it was pointed out that the government is responsible to encourage greater flexibility in Chinese language requirement in order to improve EM employment. Sharing similar vision, we have provided a list of concrete recommendations for the Labour Department (LD) to consider from three main aspects – Engagement, Incentive and establishing a designated employment centre for ethnic minorities. We are also hoping that the new steering committee can be well represented by professionals and EM stakeholders including young people and can utilize the new funding to launch the below measures:

1.1 Proactively explore job opportunities that does not genuinely require Chinese Language in the private and public sector

- 1.1.1** Instead of playing a passive role in vacancy provision, the Labour Department should proactively engage employers to open-up underexplored opportunities that does not require high proficiency of Chinese Language (e.g. Drivers for public transport, Programmers, Cinematographers, etc)/ have potential demands for the non-Chinese speaking communities (medical services, counselling, etc) following with extensive job fairs to connect the employers with the EM community.
- 1.1.2** Playing the role of an initiator, the Labour Department should examine the Chinese Language Requirements within its structure, including civil servant and contracted (NCSC) positions. More EM staff should be hired in different centres at different grades, including the ranks of Employment Officers who are more mature to provide individual career consultation services.

1.2 Educate employers about Genuine Chinese Language Requirement

- 1.2.1** The Labour Department to amend terms and reminders in the employers' Vacancy Order Forms emphasising the illegality of indirect discrimination under Race Discrimination Ordinance and the respective consequences. Also, unlike other employment schemes such as the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged a remark indicating 'EM job seekers are welcome' was never shown on any of the job advertisements, even if they are searched under the option of 'welcoming application from Ethnic minorities'. The flawed system should be fixed.
- 1.2.2** The Labour Department to include Genuine Chinese Language Requirements in the screening procedure when receiving vacancy applications. Upon spotting discrepancy between job nature and the stated language requirement, officers should proactively approach employers to verify and assertively advice for corrections if necessary.
- 1.2.3** The Labour Department to publish information kit for employers about cultural sensitivity such as cultural and religious practices to facilitate them recruiting and communicating with EM staff.

2. Incentives

2.1 Provide subsidies to Small and Medium Enterprise(SME) for adopting positive accommodating measures

2.1.1 Establish a funding for 'Positive Measures' encouraging employers to create bilingual work environment such as translating internal notices and adopting respective adjustments in office setup.

2.1.2 Studies showed that EMs were discouraged to take some ERB courses mainly because of the long course hours that easily clash with their work time and the low expectation to achieve career advancement upon course completion. In respond to the phenomenon, the ERB is recommended to establish a funding for 'On-the-job Training Incentive' to encourage employers allowing EM employees attending reasonable number of both language and vocational courses during working hours on the basis that both the employers and employees can benefit from the arrangement. e.g. An EM hotel receptionist could attend a hospitality-related training for 2 hours/week within working hour in the ERB where he/she can advance both vocational knowledge and Chinese vocabularies/jargons to benefit his/her long-term development within the company or the industry.

2.2 Increase EM youth's accessibility to Employment Retraining Board (ERB) courses

2.2.1 To facilitate the execution of the above-suggested 'On-the-job Training Incentive', the ERB should accept EMs to attend subsidized vocational courses regardless of their employment status and education attainment.

2.2.2 Review all resources including application forms of the ERB website to make sure they are bilingual and equally accessible to the EM community.

2.2.3 The ERB should coordinate with the Labour Department to provide more variety of subsidized courses to align with the above-suggested measures, particularly the demands to be arisen from the 'newly explored opportunities that does not require high proficiency of Chinese Language' and 'On-the-job Training Incentive'.

3. Set up a designated employment centre for ethnic minorities

3.1 Provide dedicated services

To ensure the effectiveness of the above measures and to prevent overloading/complexing the services of the existing employment centres, the measures are strongly suggested to be executed in a designated employment centre with personalized case management, dedicated manpower and tailor-made strategies.

*The Labour Department is suggested to take reference from the Jobcentre Plus pilot scheme¹ for EMs carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions in the UK. e.g. A position called 'Specialist Employment Adviser'² was created to 'tackle discrimination and open up employment opportunities'; Account Managers were assigned to engage employers explaining benefits of recruiting a diverse workforce.

3.2 Set clear targets and service pledges

To set clear goals and statistical results to be achieved in all aspects of services, including but not limited to the effectiveness of service promotion, number of successful job matching for EMs, duration and frequency of case follow-up, number of jobs per month with reasonable relaxation of Chinese requirement to be reviewed, etc.

Submitted from:

HEY! Group (Hear the Voices of Ethnic Minority Youth)

¹ The Comptroller and Auditor General, Increasing employment rates for ethnic minorities (London: 2008)

² Nick Pettigrew, Rebecca Hardy, Amy Lee, Specialist Employment advisor evaluation (London: TSO, 2008)