



For discussion on 27 March 2018

Hong Kong Unison's Submissions to the Legislative Council Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minority on "Issues Relating to the Employment of Ethnic Minorities"

1. Hong Kong Unison is a non-governmental organization that advocates equal opportunities for education and employment of ethnic minority residents¹ of Hong Kong. We are concerned about the disproportionate number of ethnic minorities who are employed in Civil Service and low-skilled jobs, as well as those working poor.
2. Hong Kong Unison welcomes the recent move of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) to revise the Chinese language proficiency requirements (LPR) of 22 more civil service positions to reflect the actual Chinese proficiency needed. We consider this an effort to provide equal opportunity to non-Chinese (ethnic minority) candidates and to role model equitable recruitment to the private sector. However, while lowering the LPRs to the Common Recruitment Examination Use of Chinese Level 1 may seem like a significant concession, the reality is that very few ethnic minorities can attain this result, which is equivalent to Level 4 in HKDSE Chinese Examination. Also, adjusting 14 positions to require Chinese ability of only Primary 6 level will not make ethnic minorities more competitive applicants, since currently about 70% of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students graduate from 12 years of public education with only Primary 2 level Chinese ability, after being taught to sit for the alternative Chinese qualification GCSE Chinese exam. It seems that the recently announced policy will only make NCS applicants competitive for the position of Chainman. The alarming Chinese language attainment gap between NCS and Chinese students demands an immediate systemic overhaul of the way NCS students are being taught Chinese, so that ethnic minorities can genuinely compete on an equal footing. Hong Kong Unison also recommends the Civil Service Training and Development Institute to develop Chinese language courses that meet the needs of ethnic minorities and made them available to those in Civil Service so that their Chinese proficiency can be improved for career advancement.
3. Language (Chinese) proficiency is the major barrier to integration and seeking employment in Hong Kong as mentioned again in the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities (2016) released in February 2018. This is in line with the 2016 Unison research² which found that job seekers in Hong Kong who do not speak and/or write Chinese encounter immense difficulties in seeking local employment.

¹ Ethnic minorities here refer to non-Chinese permanent residents of Hong Kong, excluding foreign domestic workers, asylum seekers, torture claimants, refugees, or expatriates in Hong Kong.

² Chinese Language Requirements in the Hong Kong Job Market: A Survey on Job Advertisements which surveyed 1,500 online job postings from 16 Hong Kong-based online job search databases



4. According to the “2016 Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities”, excluding foreign domestic helpers, about 31% of the ethnic minority population were born in Hong Kong, among which Pakistanis, Nepalese and Indians had higher proportions. Unison understands it may take time for the “Learning Framework” to become effective; however, it is urgent that the Government develops systematic teacher training and an appropriate Chinese language curriculum to help ethnic minorities reach Chinese proficiency at par with their Chinese peers and hence gain access to the full range employment opportunities and integration in Hong Kong.
5. Ethnic minority job seekers are diverse; Hong Kong Unison recommends the Government to set up and implement a uniform and coordinated data intake and collection process to record disaggregated data, and conduct a systematic review of ethnic minority job-seeking patterns so that appropriate support and services such as Chinese language courses, can be provided to suit the needs of job seekers. The recent “Study on Ethnic Minorities’ Awareness and Satisfaction towards Selected Public Services” released by the Commission on Poverty, for example, pointed out that language courses at the Home Affairs Department service centres were pitched at the very basic level necessary for survival and language courses at the Employment Retraining Board had not been effective. The collection of data would assist in informing strategies for suitable support measures.
6. One cannot deny there are employers in Hong Kong who are unfamiliar or biased against ethnic minority applicants and turn them down no matter their experience and qualifications. Hong Kong Unison suggests the Labour Department develop an incentive programme such as providing on-the-job training allowance to encourage more employers hire ethnic minorities.
7. Ethnic minorities will become a major labour force in Hong Kong given the faster growth in the South Asian population. Education is crucial to better employment opportunities and upward social mobility. Unless the Government proactively tackles the education issue and the learning of Chinese, ethnic minorities will not be able to improve their employability and remain in the vicious cycle of poverty.