

**Subcommittee on Children's Rights**  
*Views on refugee and asylum seeking children*  
The Vine Community Services Limited

First, I would like to recognize what Hong Kong does for the children of asylum seekers. I think great steps have been made towards giving these children at least a chance at obtaining basic skills and education. By allowing the children of asylum seekers to attend primary and secondary schools, we are giving them the education skills that are necessary to survive in the world today.

We consider our city to be Asia's World City, a shining example of a developed, culturally diverse, advanced city, prosperous and civilized. As such, we show off our advanced infrastructure and our well-developed economy. We tout our transparency in rule of law and business dealings. We are an example to other parts of Asia that are still in the process of developing. One area that is a measurement of this development and civilization is in how we treat our most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Do we protect them? Do we include them? Do we offer opportunities for them to contribute to the strength of our great city?

The children of asylum seekers have not committed any sort of offense or crime. They are not in a position to make life decisions. They go where their parents take them. They have left the support of their extended families and entered into a new culture. The language and customs are not familiar. Many have suffered multiple potentially traumatic events. Here in Hong Kong, they are forced to live below the poverty level as their parents are not allowed to work. They live life with an extremely insecure future as they have no real sense of a place to belong. We ask the government to recognize that these children face special psychological and social circumstances and to give them the extra support they need.

These children need kindergarten to prepare them for primary school. While the government voucher is a great start, we are all aware of the other costs associated with kindergarten. The uniforms, the school supplies, and transportation to and from school both for the student and the parent, are all insurmountable for children whose parents are not allowed to work.

How can we expect a child who has no experience in a classroom, who does not know the language or the culture, who even looks different from the other children, to succeed in the Hong Kong public school system? Let us not set these children up for failure, but let us show what a civilized and developed city Hong Kong is by giving them the support they need to enter the school system. Let us provide the social and psychological support they need in order to give them a chance at life. Let us provide the tutoring they need to catch up on language, social skills, and on the academic subjects in which they are behind.

Those children of asylum seekers who have grown up here, let us give them life-tools by opening up vocational training and educational opportunities beyond secondary school. Let us give them hope by making a path to residence for those who have been here for sometimes more than a decade. With a goal in mind, these children will exceed our expectations and become valuable assets to our city.

It is our desire that Hong Kong continues to be an example to the rest of Asia of what a true world city looks like.