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Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 January 2017

Employment difficulties encountered by ethnic minorities and related support services

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed at meetings of relevant committees of the Legislative Council ("LegCo") on employment difficulties encountered by ethnic minorities ("EMs") and related support services.

Background

2. According to the 2011 Population Census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, there were about 60 000 EMs of South Asian origins in Hong Kong excluding foreign domestic helpers. Most of them were Indians (around 26 000), Pakistanis (around 18 000) and Nepalese (around 16 000). In 2011, the labour force participation rates (LFPRs¹) of EM males were generally higher than the male average of the overall population (68%) while the rates in respect of females of different ethnic groups showed variations. The LFPRs of Indian, Nepalese and Pakistani males were 84%, 86.1% and 69.7% respectively. Compared with the female average of the overall population (50.7%), the LFPR of Nepalese females (63.4%) was higher while those of Indian (40.6%) and Pakistani (12.1%) females were lower.²

¹ LFPR is the proportion of the labour force in the population aged 15 and over.

² According to the Hong Kong 2011 Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities published by the Census and Statistics Department, the female LFPR of some ethnic groups such as Indians and Pakistanis contrasted sharply with their male counterparts. This might be due to the fact that these female EMs were mostly housewives or it might be related to the traditional custom of their ethnicities. Besides, variations in industries among males and females of the same ethnic group were also noted. For Nepalese and Pakistanis, the proportions of the male working population in the "Construction" sector (23.2% and 18.9% respectively) were substantially larger than their female counterparts (1.7% and 1.8% respectively).

3. According to the Administration, the Labour Department ("LD") provides a wide range of free employment and recruitment services to job seekers, including EMs through a network of 13 job centres throughout the territory, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction industries, a Job Vacancy Processing Centre and a Telephone Employment Service Centre. Both large-scale and district-based job fairs are organized to facilitate job seekers to apply for jobs and attend interviews with employers on the spot. Apart from paying visits to job centres, job seekers may obtain the latest vacancy information through the Interactive Employment Service ("iES") website as well as the various vacancy search terminals located throughout the territory.

4. To cater for the needs of different job seekers, LD administers various specialized employment programmes providing job seekers with tailor-made employment support services. These include the provision of work trials in actual working environment and on-the-job training.

Past discussions by Members

5. Members have expressed concerns on the subject at various meetings of LegCo and its committees, including meetings of the Panel on Manpower, Panel on Constitutional Affairs ("CA Panel") and the Subcommittee on Poverty. Major concerns and views expressed by Members and deputations on the employment difficulties encountered by EMs and employment support services for EMs are summarized below.

Employment difficulties encountered by EMs

6. At the meeting of the Subcommittee on Poverty on 15 March 2016, Members shared deputations' view that in relation to employment, language barrier remained the major difficulty for EM job seekers. Concern was also raised that EMs of some origins, e.g. Nepalese, had a high LFPR but they were facing the problems of long working hours and low income. At the meeting of the CA Panel on 16 November 2015 when members discussed "An outline of the topics in the third report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination", some deputations pointed out that some EMs with high academic qualifications were only engaged in low-skilled jobs because in addition to language barriers, their academic qualifications obtained in their home countries were not recognized in Hong Kong. Some deputations suggested that LD should monitor whether the language requirements in job advertisements posted by employers were justifiable and were based on genuine job requirements. Some other deputations suggested that the Administration should introduce support measures for the young EM generation (e.g. provision

of student financial assistance and learning resources, and waiver of examination fees etc.) so that they could pursue further studies and secure employment.

Employment services by Labour Department

7. Members expressed grave concern about the difficulties encountered by EMs in finding employment due to the language barrier and cultural difference, and enquired about the specific measures in place to address the employment difficulties of EM job seekers.

8. The Administration advised that in addition to LD's general employment services and facilities, special counters and resource corners were set up in all LD job centres to provide EM job seekers with job referral service and employment information. EM job seekers may also meet the employment advisors in job centres face-to-face to obtain advice and customized employment services. Tailor-made employment briefings are also organized regularly to help EMs understand the local employment market and improve job search skills. All LD job centres offered employment services in both Chinese and English. To help EMs keep abreast of the latest labour market situation and improve job search skills, the iES website and vacancy search terminals of LD were equipped with both Chinese and English interfaces to facilitate access to job vacancy information by EMs. In addition, leaflets on LD's employment services for EMs were printed in various ethnic languages and interpretation services would be arranged for job seekers who did not speak Chinese and English.

9. The Administration further advised that in 2015, LD organized a total of two large-scale and 11 district-based inclusive job fairs to enhance the employment opportunities of EMs. Employers participating in these job fairs were encouraged to employ EMs and were advised to consider the genuine occupational qualifications of the posts when specifying the language requirement and to relax them as far as possible so as to enable more EMs to apply for the vacancies. Moreover, the Construction Industry Council had launched promotional activities and collaborated with the construction industry to stage job fairs to attract new EM entrants. The Administration assured Members that LD, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") serving EMs, would continue to arrange on-site interpretation service for EM job seekers at these job fairs.

10. At the meeting of the Panel on Manpower held on 15 March 2016 when the subject of "Employment support services for EMs" was discussed, members shared deputations' view that many EM job seekers still faced difficulties in making use of LD's employment support services and securing employment due to language barrier. In particular, the frontline staff at LD job centres could not communicate effectively with EM job seekers. Some deputations had been advised by LD staff to contact the employers direct but these EM persons had great difficulties in finding a job because of lack of proficiency in Chinese.

Besides, most of the employment information (including job vacancies) in LD job centres was displayed in Chinese only and interpretation service would be arranged for EM job seekers only upon request.

11. The Administration advised that posters regarding the provision of interpretation services to job seekers were displayed in all LD job centres. In addition, promotional leaflets on LD's employment services had been translated into English and six EM languages. According to the Administration, in 2015, the staff of LD job centres introduced the interpretation service to 1 467 EM job seekers and, in the light of their needs, arranged simultaneous interpretation service on 15 occasions³. As regards employment information, the Administration advised that key information of all job vacancies, such as job title, industry, working hours, salary, workplace, educational requirements and application procedures was translated and displayed bilingually on iES website, its mobile application and vacancy search terminals to facilitate EMs to browse vacancy information. LD was also progressively devising pre-translated sample duty lists of different posts to facilitate employers to provide the relevant information in Chinese and English simultaneously when submitting vacancy orders through the iES website. According to the Administration, in 2015 and the first three quarters of 2016, 994 and 904 EM job seekers registered for LD's employment services respectively. 1 721 and 1 645 job referrals had been arranged for EM job seekers in the respective periods.

12. Some deputations were of the view that frontline staff of LD job centres should proactively arrange interpretation services for EM job seekers, and training should be provided to LD staff to enhance their understanding and sensitivity of the specific needs of EMs. Members and some deputations called on the Administration to provide dedicated employment support for EM job seekers. According to the Administration, LD job centres maintained close contact with NGOs providing services for EMs so as to attain a better understanding of their employment needs and provide appropriate employment support services.

13. While acknowledging that employment support services had been put in place for EM job seekers, some Members took the view that the Administration should ensure that such services were accessible to the targeted EM job seekers. At the meeting on 15 March 2016, the Panel on Manpower passed a motion urging the Government to establish an EM Employment Division in one of LD job centres, at which fluent English-speaking EM staff were stationed to provide employment support services for non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") job seekers.

14. As regards employment services for job seekers with disabilities (including EM job seekers with disabilities), the Administration advised that LD

³ See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. S-LWB(L)03 in the Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2016-2017.

would conduct interviews with them to understand their job aspirations, provide them with latest information on the employment market, match them to job vacancies and refer suitable candidate to job interview where appropriate. After they had secured employment, LD would keep in view their progress and provide assistance where necessary to ensure harmonious working relationship.

15. A written question was raised at the Council meeting of 13 November 2013 regarding the number of EM persons (including able-bodied and disabled persons) who registered with LD for employment services from 2010 to 2012 and the number of those who succeeded in securing employment (with breakdown by nationality/race). The Administration's reply is in **Appendix I**.

16. As regards employment services for young EM job seekers, the Administration advised that LD launched in September 2014 the "Employment Services Ambassador Programme for Ethnic Minorities" ("the Programme"), employing trainees of the Youth Employment and Training Programme⁴ ("YETP") who could communicate in EM language as employment services ambassadors to help EM job seekers make use of various job search facilities and services at job centres, industry-based recruitment centres and job fairs. According to the Administration, the Programme would, on the other hand, enrich the working experience and qualifications of the engaged EM trainees, thereby enhancing their employability in the open market.

17. Members were also particularly concerned about the employment assistance provided for EM job seekers living in remote areas. There was a view that the Administration should proactively reach out to the EM community to enhance their awareness of Tung Chung Job Centre, which was commissioned in October 2014. The Administration advised that since the commencement of the operation of the Tung Chung Job Centre, it had all along maintained close contact with NGOs providing services in the district for groups with special needs so as to attain a better understanding of the employment needs and situation of the groups concerned. To provide a more user-friendly service to job seekers of different districts, LD would continue to organize district-based job fairs at job centres to enable job seekers to participate in job interviews without having to travel long distance.

Employment of EMs for civil service posts

18. Members were advised that in addition to enhancing job opportunities for EMs in the private sector, the Administration implemented measures to ensure that EMs have equal access to job opportunities in the Government, especially disciplinary services. Some Members, however, queried the basis for requiring

⁴ The Youth Employment and Training Programme launched by LD provides one-stop per-employment and on-the-job training for young school leavers aged 15 to 24 with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below.

EMs to meet the Chinese language proficiency requirement ("LPR") in order to secure employment in the civil service. Some Members further suggested that LPRs for EM for civil service posts and the requirement for written Chinese proficiency for disciplined service posts should be relaxed.

19. According to the Administration, in setting LPRs for recruitment to the civil service, the job nature and operational requirements of the grade concerned were the primary considerations. Under the prevailing guidelines, individual civil service grades should ensure that LPRs specified were relevant to and commensurate with the satisfactory performance of the duties of the grades concerned. The Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") had issued guidelines to bureaux and departments reminding them to review and, where appropriate, adjust LPRs of civil service grades from time to time, taking into account any changing operational needs. Since 2010, there had been a total of 20 grades which had relaxed the Chinese LPRs upon review. In addition, as a new initiative, CSB had organized Chinese language training tailored for the vocational needs of serving non-ethnic Chinese staff in the Government to facilitate their effective performance of duties and career advancement. Disciplined services departments would continue to explore the feasibility of modifying their recruitment format/requirements to facilitate EMs' applications for jobs.

Retraining services and vocational training for EMs

20. Some Members expressed concern that only 6 650 training places were allocated by the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") in 2013-2014 to courses for special service targets⁵, which covered, among others, EMs, and queried whether it was adequate to meet the employment needs of EMs. The Administration explained that apart from those 6 650 training places, EM service users could also make applications for all the courses for the general public. The training bodies of ERB could also request more resources for the provision of additional places to meet the demand from special service targets if necessary.

21. At the meeting of the Panel on Manpower on 15 March 2016 when the subject of "Employment support services for EMs" was discussed, some deputations suggested that the Education Bureau and ERB should offer more recognized Chinese courses to EMs so as to enhance their Chinese proficiency, thereby increasing their employability. According to the Administration, ERB offered full-time placement-tied courses and part-time "Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus" and generic skills training courses dedicated for EMs to meet their employment needs. Eligible EMs could make use of the training and

⁵ The special service targets covered the youth, new arrivals, EMs, persons with disabilities and persons recovered from work injuries as well as rehabilitated ex-drug abusers and ex-offenders.

employment support services, including personalized training consultancy service, at the three ERB Service Centres. To assist EMs enter the employment market, ERB training bodies provided placement follow-up services for EM trainees who had completed full-time placement-tied courses. The Administration added that ERB collaborated with the Home Affairs Department to offer courses at its Support Service Centres for EMs on a pilot basis in 2015-2016. In 2016-2017, ERB planned to reserve 800 training places to provide dedicated training courses⁶ for EMs and would subsidize training bodies on a pilot basis to provide supplementary training materials and support measures to facilitate the attendance of EMs who could comprehend Cantonese in training courses other than the dedicated courses, thereby enhancing the training options for EMs.

22. According to the Administration, the Vocational Training Council ("VTC") offered a wide range of vocational and professional education and training programmes. For NCS students who did not possess Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Chinese Language qualifications, alternative qualifications such as those of General Certificate of Secondary Education/ International General Certificate of Secondary Education/ General Certificate in Education in Chinese Language or HKDSE Other Language subjects would be considered in meeting the admission requirements on a case-by-case basis. Members were also advised that VTC offered different language courses to NCS youth and adults to meet their training needs. In 2015-2016, VTC offered eight courses on vocational Chinese, Cantonese, Chinese reading and writing and Putonghua. The estimated number of NCS students enrolled into these programmes was around 300.

23. At the meeting of the CA Panel on 16 November 2015, some deputations expressed concern that vocational training organizations, such as the Construction Industry Council, offered very few training courses in English for EM to enhance their vocational skills. On the other hand, with respect to the "EMs Skills Enhancement Course – Pilot Scheme" rolled out by the Construction Industry Council in December 2015 providing 60 training places, some Members called on the Administration to work in collaboration with NGOs serving EMs to attract more EM new entrants into the construction industry. The Administration advised that 12 EMs were receiving training under the Pilot Scheme and the remaining training places would be offered in 2017. The Administration advised that it had all along been working in collaboration with Education Bureau, ERB, VTC as well as NGOs serving EMs to provide support to EMs to improve their employability.

⁶ ERB provides dedicated training courses delivered in English to suit EMs' aspirations and training needs.

Latest development

24. At the meeting of the Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities on 2 November 2016, members have expressed concerns about the employment difficulties encountered by EMs and enhancing employment support services for them. Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan has made suggestions of various enhanced measures in her letter dated 2 November 2016 [LC Paper No. CB(2)116/16-17(01)]. The suggested measures include establishing an EM Employment Division and employing English-speaking EM staff to provide support services for NCS job-seekers, providing other additional employment support measures funded by the Community Care Fund for EMs and subsidizing accreditation of overseas qualification for low-income EMs.

25. The Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities will discuss various issues relating to employment support services for EMs at the next meeting on 9 January 2017.

Relevant papers

26. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 January 2017

Appendix I

Press Releases

LCQ18: Employment services for the ethnic minorities

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Kwok-che and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (November 13):

Question:

Some social workers providing support services for the ethnic minorities have relayed to me that as the ethnic minorities often encounter difficulties in seeking employment, the Labour Department (LD) should set up an employment services division dedicated to providing, free of charge, the ethnic minorities and the employers concerned with employment placement and recruitment services. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of able-bodied persons from the ethnic minorities who registered with LD for employment services in each of the past three years and, among them, the number of those who succeeded in securing employment, with a breakdown by nationality/race (e.g. Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Japanese, Thais, Koreans, other Asians and Caucasians);

(b) of the number of disabled persons from the ethnic minorities who registered with the Selective Placement Division of LD for employment services in each of the past three years and, among them, the number of those who succeeded in securing employment, with a breakdown by nationality/race (e.g. Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Japanese, Thais, Koreans, other Asians and Caucasians); and

(c) whether LD will set up an employment services division dedicated to providing services for the ethnic minorities; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Cheung Kwok-che is as follows:

(a) In 2010, 2011 and 2012, the numbers of able-bodied persons from the ethnic minorities who registered with LD for employment services were 1 234, 901 and 981 respectively. A breakdown of these job seekers by ethnic origin is provided in the table below:

Ethnic Origin	No. of job seekers		
	2010	2011	2012
Pakistani	284	220	245
Indian	285	160	185
Filipino	170	178	158
Nepalese	146	84	98
Indonesian	109	78	69

Thai	59	66	67
Other ethnicity	181	115	159

Total	1 234	901	981

Able-bodied job seekers who have registered with LD for employment services may be placed into employment either through the referral services of LD or by direct application to employers who advertise their vacancies through LD. Currently, over 90% of the vacancies advertised through LD are open for direct application by job seekers. Those who have secured employment through direct application are not required to report their placements to LD. In 2010, 2011 and 2012, 105, 72 and 61 placements were secured for able-bodied job seekers from the ethnic minorities through the referral services of LD. A breakdown of these placements by ethnic origin is provided in the table below:

Ethnic Origin	No. of placements		
	2010	2011	2012

Pakistani	21	11	8
Indian	11	10	4
Filipino	23	12	18
Nepalese	6	4	1
Indonesian	12	13	14
Thai	13	14	8
Other ethnicity	19	8	8

Total	105	72	61

(b) In 2010, 2011 and 2012, the numbers of ethnic minority job seekers with disabilities registered with the Selective Placement Division (SPD) of LD for employment services were 24, 22 and 16 respectively. A breakdown of these job seekers with disabilities by ethnic origin is provided in the table below:

Ethnic Origin	No. of job seekers		
	2010	2011	2012

Pakistani	6	3	4
Indian	2	1	1
Filipino	3	3	3
Nepalese	7	11	3
Indonesian	1	1	1
Thai	0	0	0
Other ethnicity	5	3	4

Total	24	22	16

In 2010, 2011 and 2012, 4, 11 and 9 placements were secured for ethnic minority job seekers with disabilities through the employment services of SPD of LD. A breakdown of these placements by ethnic origin is provided in the table below:

Ethnic Origin	No. of placements		
	2010	2011	2012

Pakistani	0	0	0
Indian	0	0	0
Filipino	2	3	0
Nepalese	0	0	2
Indonesian	0	1	4
Thai	0	0	0

Other ethnicity	2	7	3

Total	4	11	9

(c) At present, LD provides comprehensive employment services to help able-bodied job seekers, including ethnic minority job seekers, through a network of 12 job centres, two industry-based recruitment centres, the Telephone Employment Service Centre, the Interactive Employment Service website and numerous vacancy search terminals located throughout the territory. In addition to a wide range of employment services available for all job seekers, LD has set up special counters and resource corners at all its job centres to provide job referral services to assist ethnic minority job seekers. Furthermore, tailor-made employment briefings are organised regularly to help them better understand the local employment market situation and improve job search skills. Ethnic minority job seekers can meet Employment Officers who will provide them with information on the employment market situation and training/retraining courses, conduct career aptitude assessment, and/or provide job search advice in accordance with their individual needs. Employment Officers will also assist job seekers to participate in LD's various employment programmes to enhance their employability.

Furthermore, LD liaises with employers to canvass vacancies suitable for ethnic minority job seekers and encourages them to give employment opportunities to ethnic minorities. LD advises employers placing vacancies with LD of the need to consider the genuine occupational needs when specifying the language requirement. Large-scale and district-based job fairs are also organised to enhance the flow of vacancy information and provide on-the-spot job interview opportunities so as to help job seekers, including those from ethnic minorities, find work early and employers recruit staff. LD has strengthened its collaboration with non-governmental organisations providing services to ethnic minorities, and has also made use of the community network of the Police Community Relations Office of the Hong Kong Police Force, to actively publicise LD's employment services and disseminate information on the job fairs to ethnic minorities.

In respect of the employment of persons with disabilities, SPD of LD provides personalised in-depth employment services to job seekers with disabilities (including ethnic minority job seekers with disabilities) for open employment. The placement officers will conduct interviews with job seekers to understand their job aspirations, provide them with the latest information on the employment market, match job seekers to vacancies offered by employers and refer suitable candidates to job interviews where appropriate. After job seekers have successfully secured employment, the placement officers would keep in view their progress and provide assistance where necessary to ensure harmonious working relationship.

These show that LD has been providing dedicated and personalised employment service respectively for the able-bodied persons and persons with disabilities from the ethnic minorities. We have no plans to set up an employment services division for the ethnic minorities.

Ends/Wednesday, November 13, 2013
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Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	27.2.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 68 – 71 (Written question)
	13.11.2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 126 – 130 (Written question)
Panel on Manpower	19.11.2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	3.4.2014	Agenda Minutes
Subcommittee on Poverty	25.4.2014	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	16.12.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	19.5.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Constitutional Affairs	16.11.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Subcommittee on Poverty	17.11.2015	Agenda Minutes
	15.3.2016	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	15.3.2016 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
House Committee	20.5.2016	Report of the Subcommittee on Poverty

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	9.11.2016	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 78 – 84 (Written question)
Panel on Manpower	15.11.2016 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

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