



For information on 9 January 2017

**Submission on “Employment support services for ethnic minorities” to the
Legislative Council Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities**

1. Hong Kong Unison is concerned about the disproportionate number of ethnic minorities¹ (especially those of South and Southeast Asian descent) who work in low-skilled jobs, are unemployed and are working poor². The main difficulties encountered by ethnic minorities in employment are summarized as follows:

Language barrier

2. Language proficiency is the major barrier to integration and seeking employment in Hong Kong, as revealed in the *Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2014*, a 2015 Equal Opportunities Commission Report³ and 2016 Hong Kong Unison research *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. The key findings of the Unison research further prove that job seekers in Hong Kong who do not speak and/or write Chinese encounter immense difficulties in seeking local employment.
3. Key Findings of the 2016 Unison Research:
 - a) Over 90% of jobs required Chinese language abilities from applicants.
 - b) Spoken Cantonese and written Chinese are both highly valued by employers.
 - c) Almost 70% of the job postings that did not explicitly state Chinese language requirements expected job seekers to have command of Chinese.
 - d) Job seekers who do not know read and write Chinese can only access 19% of all advertised jobs.
 - e) The ability to speak other languages might not offset the disadvantage of not knowing Chinese.
4. Ethnic minorities who do not have Chinese language proficiency have fewer opportunities in employment in the local job market.

Overseas education qualifications not recognized

5. Higher education qualifications acquired in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia are often not recognized by local employers; as a result, educated ethnic minorities are

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 Details please refer to the *Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2014* published by the HKSAR Census Department

³ Flora Lau, ‘Breaking through the barriers – Ethnic minority success stories and their implications for policy intervention in Hong Kong’ (Equal Opportunities Commission, June 2015)



unemployed or are forced to work in labour or low-income jobs. It is very costly for overseas qualifications assessment under the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications. For unemployed ethnic minorities, this only adds to their financial burden.

Gaps in the Labour Department's employment support services for ethnic minorities

6. There is a lack of job matching services. Though some employers welcome ethnic minorities, they do not know how to recruit them. At the same time, there are employers who are unfamiliar or biased against ethnic minorities, and turn down ethnic minority job applicants no matter their experience and qualifications. The Labour Department employment services have not provided effective support to help ethnic minority job seekers reach out to employers.
7. Ethnic minority job-seekers with higher education qualifications said that they have not been able to find jobs on the Labour Department's website which commensurate with their academic qualifications. When they visit the Labour Department for assistance, staff frequently do not provide the job vacancy information in light of their academic qualifications.
8. Employment Services Ambassador Programme: different groups have lobbied the Labour Department to hire ethnic minority ambassadors to better serve the community. However, the *pilot* "Ethnic Minority Ambassador Programme" launched by the Labour Department since July 2014 has not been effective. The scheme only provides six months of employment to youth aged 15 to 24 with associate degree or below after training. Although this is the 3rd year in operation, the Labour Department refuse to make ethnic minority ambassadors into contract or permanent positions.
9. Interactive Employment Service Website: Most vacancies shown on the Labor Department's Interactive Employment Service website contain Chinese information, making it difficult for ethnic minority job seekers to use the website. A random sample⁴ survey found that only about 60% of the vacancies published on the Labour Department's website were translated into English. Important information such as duties and qualifications are not in English.

Policy Suggestions

1. Improve the support services provided by Labour Department

The Labour Department should develop an employment programme for ethnic minorities with reference to the "Employment Programme for the Middle-aged" and other similar measures. The programme should provide appropriate support to ethnic minority job seekers to overcome language barriers and other difficulties, and provide encouragement and incentives

⁴ 香港融樂會 2014-15 年抽樣調查勞工處互動就業服務網站 168 個職位空缺，58%有部分重要資訊只有中文版本。Hong Kong Unison randomly sampled 168 job vacancies on the Labour Department's Interactive Employment Service website in 2014-15 and found that 58% of the job vacancies contain crucial information only available in Chinese.



for employers to hire ethnic minorities. The Labour Department should initiate such project and be a role model to other employers.

The Labour Department should raise the awareness of employers on whether the job really requires Chinese proficiency when posting vacancies. Employers should be reminded that they must be able to justify any language requirement or condition by showing that it is relevant to and not more demanding than what is required for doing the job as an unjustifiable requirement can lead to claims of indirect discrimination.

2. Adult Chinese language classes

The government should enhance its efforts in providing accredited adult Chinese classes to residents who need them. Although some organizations (including the Employees Retraining Board, Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities funded by the Home Affairs Department, and tertiary institutions) operate government-funded Chinese language classes, there is a lack of coordination between these courses. They are mostly beginners' level or without standard accreditations, making it difficult for learners to progress to advanced classes in other institutions. The government bears great responsibility because there are few Cantonese-based Chinese classes in the private market.

3. Chinese language learning in post-secondary education

The Education Bureau should encourage and support post-secondary education institutions to provide appropriate Chinese language learning opportunities to students where Chinese is a second language, in order to increase their competitiveness for the job market after graduation. There is a need to bridge students from GCSE/GCE level to higher proficiency.

4. Chinese language education for second-language learners

Many ethnic minority residents graduate from the public education system without adequate Chinese language skills because there has not been an effective Chinese as a second language policy. The government should implement an effective Chinese as a Second Language policy that includes appropriate curriculum, teaching materials, learning objectives, assessment tools and teacher training in order to help ethnic minority students access the full range of employment opportunities. The government should also study the level of Chinese needed to allow full access to economic opportunities and community life in Hong Kong, and design the Chinese-language curriculum accordingly.

5. Promoting social integration of new arrivals

We urge the Government to set up a comprehensive social integration programme for ethnic minority new arrivals so as not to neglect their needs. The programme can draw on the support services provided to Mainland new arrivals before 2004, including:

- a. The Immigration Department should collect details of new arrivals and their contact information and convey them to the Regional Support Services Center for Ethnic Minorities;



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- b. District-based support services centers are required to provide outreach support services for new arrivals;
- c. Assess new arrivals' command of Chinese and English;
- d. Provide short-term practical Chinese and / or English training for new arrivals and to provide courses on social systems, resources, rights and interests protection, local culture and values in Hong Kong and to provide incentives to encourage them to participate in the society

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