

Follow-up on 2021 Policy Address for the Government to Take the Lead in Providing Ethnic Minorities with More Employment Opportunities

Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission

Purpose

This paper aims to provide the views and recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on further employment support and initiatives for the non-ethnic Chinese (NEC) population and efforts at improving racial inclusion in the city. This is in response to the Chief Executive's announcement in the 2021 Policy Address that "the Government will set an example by taking the lead in providing ethnic minorities with more employment opportunities". All matters raised below reflect feedback gathered from important stakeholders and racial groups.

Employment of NEC

2. The NEC population face a number of barriers in securing jobs and building careers that align with their potential and skills. There is discrimination (on the grounds of their racial background and religious practices, etc.) and tangible hurdles (e.g. language proficiency requirements) which stand in the way of equal opportunities to employment for many NEC community members. Removal of barriers that currently prevent them from securing a job as well as positive action are required to level the playing field. The government can take the lead in providing more job opportunities for the NEC population and help remove impediments they face thereby setting an example for other employers to follow.

Key recommendations for promoting employment in Government

3. One of the barriers facing some NEC community members is the lack of accommodation for cultural or religious practices that impact their appearance or dress code. A typical example is the turban that is required to be worn by male members of the Sikh community (some Sikh women also wear turbans). Other examples are the kippah for Jewish men, kufi for Muslim men and the hijab for Muslim women. Restrictions on head gear in individual disciplined services impact these communities as South Asians in Hong Kong have a long history of being in those professions. We advise the Government to review and adjust the head gear requirements exercised in some departments following the example of the Correctional Services Department which allows the turban to be worn as part of its uniform. Jurisdictions across the world including Canada and the UK have turban-wearing Sikhs in their police and military.

4. Riding on a few successful initiatives such as Project Gemstone run by the Yau Tsim Police District and Internship Programme for NEC University Students under the Civil Service Bureau, the Government is recommended to create trainee positions in civil services, especially for NEC graduates as a positive action to address their limited opportunities¹. Training may include Chinese language learning with a view to prepare them with adequate Chinese language proficiency for the Common Recruitment Examination.

5. The EOC also recommends that the Government intensify the review of Chinese language proficiency requirements in civil service recruitment, especially in professional grade positions, with the consideration of introducing in-service language enhancement schemes for candidates not meeting the Chinese requirement but excelling in other skills and expertise for the jobs. The review should measure the response to language relaxation policies in terms of the actual recruitment of NEC candidates since the introduction of the revised criteria.

Embracing cultural diversity and integration

6. Racial bias and stereotyping is one of the primary reasons that prevents many employers from hiring NEC staff. A lack of interaction between communities leads to unfamiliarity and low awareness about NECs resulting in biases and prejudices. It is clear that more awareness, interactions and mainstreaming will help with the integration of NEC community members in the workplace and Hong Kong society as a whole. Below are two areas the Government can take the lead in to help with the integration of diverse races and change the majority mindset that goes against the principle of inclusion.

Key recommendations for promoting cultural integration by Government

7. In order to showcase Hong Kong's rich diversity, the Government is recommended to introduce the practice of making official announcements on the occasion of important festivals celebrated by the city's NEC communities, such as Diwali for Indians, Eid for Muslims, Dashain for Nepalese, Songkran for Thai, etc. This not only educates the mainstream public on the cultural practices of respective religious and racial groups, but only conveys a valuable message of respecting cultural difference and diversity.

¹ Equal Opportunities Commission: *Code of Practice on Employment under the Race Discrimination Ordinance*, Section 5.3.18, p45

(https://www.eoc.org.hk/Upload/cc26d004-b785-4ee7-8673-f92925df889f/RDO_CoP_Eng_1154.pdf)

8. For helping to shift mindsets and accepting diverse races as part of Hong Kong, it is recommended that the Government encourage public authorities to depict NEC community members in their publicity materials and communication. While a few government Departments and Bureaus have consistently included NEC faces in their publicity materials, more should be encouraged as well as required to do so. Another approach is having more NEC community members in roles involving public interface. It will definitely and effectively dispel the misconception that NEC staff can only serve the NEC community and are not hired for serving mainstream Chinese people in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

9. As the young NEC population grows, many of whom call Hong Kong their only home, it is important that they are provided equal opportunities to contribute meaningfully and without distinction. Given the right environment, they can be a vital resource for our city. The Government has committed to take the lead and we hope others will follow. Not only must employment opportunities be provided, but a welcoming and inclusive environment is equally essential if Hong Kong is to be seen as home to its entire population, notwithstanding their colour, language, race or religion.

Prepared by Ethnic Minorities Unit

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