

## **Equal Opportunities Commission**

### **Submission for the Panel Meeting on Public Service on 20 July 2015** **on Employment of Ethnic Minorities in the Civil Service**

#### **Purpose of the Paper**

The vision of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is to create a pluralistic and inclusive society free of discrimination and where there is no barrier to equal opportunities. One of EOC's current work focuses is promoting education and employment opportunities for ethnic minorities (EMs) and access to goods, services and facilities. This paper sets out to provide EOC's views for the Panel on Public Service to facilitate the employment of EMs in Civil Service.

#### **Education and Employment Opportunities of Ethnic Minorities**

EMs from the six most identifiable but marginalized ethnic groups (Filipinos, Indians, Indonesians, Nepalis, Pakistanis, and Thais) make up 1.7 percent of the Hong Kong population (113,815)<sup>1</sup>. Many of them have been encountering systemic barriers in upward social mobility. For those who are educated in Hong Kong, they face enormous hardship in their education process stemming primarily from their struggle to master Chinese due to a lack of systematic support. Consequently, they are far more likely than their Chinese counterparts to drop out of school: 21 percent of Nepali and 16 percent of Pakistani youths aged 13-19 drop out before Form 5, compared to 6 percent of their Chinese peers. And while 29 percent of Chinese youths aged 19-22 are receiving university education (locally and overseas), only 4 percent of Pakistani and 8

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<sup>1</sup> Hong Kong Council of Social Service (2013). *Poverty in Focus 2013: Poverty Situation of South & Southeast Asian Ethnic Minorities*.

percent of Nepali youths are studying in university<sup>2</sup>.

Finding employment is another major obstacles they face, due in part to the difficulties in learning Chinese and acquiring the appropriate language qualifications. Few of those who were born and raised in Hong Kong receive higher education and have the requisite proficiency in Chinese (e.g. a pass in HKCEE / HKDSE Chinese examination). Moreover, the higher degrees EMs obtained from their home countries are often not recognized in Hong Kong. Thus, they were often relegated to low-pay, blue collar work. According to 2011 statistics from the Census and Statistics Department, 42 percent of Hong Kong's Nepalese and 36 percent of Pakistani population engage in elementary occupations, compared to 20 percent of the whole population<sup>3</sup>.

### **EOC's Work on the Issue**

After the implementation of the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) in 2009, EOC issued the Code of Practice on Employment under RDO to give practical guidance on how to prevent discrimination and harassment on the ground of race, and to promote racial equality and harmony in the employment field. In paragraph 5.3.12 (1), the Code of Practice stipulates that “employers must ensure that any language requirement (including academic qualification, fluency and accent requirement) for a job is relevant to and should be commensurate with the satisfactory performance of a job”. This requirement in recruitment, selection and promotion of employees is constantly elaborated in EOC's regular training to both the public and private sectors.

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<sup>2</sup> Hong Kong Institute of Education (2013). *Study on Educational Inequality and Child Poverty among Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong*.

<sup>3</sup> Census and Statistics Department (2011). *Thematic Report : Ethnic Minorities*.

In 2014, EOC formed a dedicated multi-ethnic unit to strengthen its work on EMs. The unit is building up partnership with different industries and is regularly providing training to employers. Apart from promoting RDO, these partnerships and training also aim at raising cultural sensitivity of employers and encouraging them to hire EMs.

### **Recommendation to the Administration**

To address the issue, EOC has asked the Hong Kong SAR Government (Government) to take a lead to employ more EMs in order to set an example to promote multi-cultural workforce. In recent years, the Government took some steps to hire more EMs by reviewing the language proficiency requirements (LPRs), accepting results of non-local public examinations, making adjustments in recruitment selection process and implementing employment initiatives specific to ethnic minorities.

To further strengthen the support for EMs, EOC recommends the Government to give consideration to the following areas :

1. To carry out the leading role, the Government needs to encourage more departments and bureaux to review the LPRs and extend the adjustments to more ranks in order to show the commitment to establish a multicultural workforce. In-service training and advancement support can also be strengthened to help EM civil servants of a lower-ranking grade meeting prescribed assessment criteria for selection to promotion.
2. As the principal public-service provider, the Government has to develop multilingual abilities to appropriately serve the diverse community. If there are more police, health care, welfare and

housing professionals, etc., who can speak a third language, services to EMs would surely be strengthened.

3. Data on EMs in civil service could facilitate officials and legislators to keep track of the progress and identify areas for further follow-up. It's recommended for the Government to update regularly the numbers, races and ranks of ethnic minority employees in different departments and bureau as well as their measures to facilitate the employment of EMs.

*Prepared by the Equal Opportunities Commission in July 2015*