

Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

Briefing by the Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities to Participate in Society

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities (PWDs). The report outlines the EOC's efforts through three key areas: (1) community inclusion; (2) access to education; and (3) employment participation.

Background

2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has entered into force for the People's Republic of China since 2008, and is applicable to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The purpose of the UNCRPD is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all PWDs, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Articles 9, 24, and 27 of the UNCRPD respectively stipulate that PWDs have the right to access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public; as well as the right to education and to work.

3. The Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) (DDO) of HKSAR implements the provisions of the UNCRPD that prohibit disability discrimination. The DDO renders unlawful disability discrimination within specified public domains, including access to premises; provision of goods, services and facilities; education and employment. The EOC is responsible for enforcing the DDO by eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for PWDs. The EOC fulfills its statutory functions through law enforcement, prevention, and education to promote equal opportunities for PWDs. In terms of law enforcement, the EOC

handled 602, 679, and 712 complaints related to disability discrimination respectively over the past three years, of which around 69% of cases were related to the employment field and 31% were related to non-employment field (see Annex 1). The work of the EOC on education and advocacy to prevent discrimination and facilitate the social participation of PWDs is detailed below.

(I) Promoting Community Inclusion for PWDs

4. Facilitating the inclusion of PWDs in the community is not only a marker of social progress but also an embodiment of the spirit of diversity and inclusivity. Ensuring PWDs' full participation in society requires not only the provision of physical infrastructure but also a shift of societal attitudes to break down biases and stereotypes, as well as the treatment PWDs from an equitable perspective. The EOC actively strengthens public education and advocacy to raise society's awareness of the rights and needs of PWDs. At the same time, the EOC promotes digital accessibility for inclusive technology to benefit everyone and publishes guidelines for different sectors to ensure the provision of appropriate services and accessible facilities. These efforts together facilitate the independent participation of PWDs in society for the realization of their potential.

(i) Promoting Universal Design and Creating Synergy with Stakeholders

Universal Design Award Scheme

5. To raise public awareness of universal design and encourage stakeholders to build an accessible environment, the EOC launched Hong Kong's first Universal Design Award Scheme (UDAS) in February 2024. The UDAS recognises organisations that excel in adopting universal design principles, attracting 270 applications from Government departments, public bodies, private organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Applicants included locations frequently visited by the public, such as shopping malls and retail spaces, offices, restaurants, sites with recreational, sports and cultural purposes and revitalised sites. The EOC hosted an award ceremony in November 2024, presenting 281 awards in the presence of over 300 attendees.

6. Building on the success of the first UDAS, the EOC will launch the second UDAS at the end of this year. Two additional application categories will be introduced in the new round, covering public and private residential buildings and higher education institutions, aiming to engage housing estates across eighteen

districts of Hong Kong and encourage more premises to demonstrate good universal design practices. Besides, the EOC will also review and update the assessment criteria of the UDAS, expand the list of universal design provisions for applicants to make reference and conduct self-assessment, in order to encourage applicants to continuously upgrade their facilities and service management standards. By recognising outstanding premises, the UDAS serves to motivate industries and more organisations to implement universal design practices.

Collaboration with the Property Management Services Authority

7. Additionally, the EOC continues to promote the mainstreaming of universal design through publicity and educational initiatives among various sectors and stakeholders. Even if a premises has good accessible design, its accessibility cannot sustain without regular inspection, maintenance and related support services. In this regard, the property management industry plays a crucial role in preserving the accessibility of premises. Accordingly, the EOC has collaborated with the Property Management Services Authority (PMSA) again to host a continuing professional development webinar in February 2025 under the theme ‘Inclusive Property Management Services’ to promote the concept and applications of universal design to approximately 2 400 PMSA members. EOC representatives shared good practices in universal design observed at awarded premises from the first UDAS and provisions that exceed the requirements of the *Design Manual: Barrier-Free Access 2008*. Examples include installation of automatic doors at various entrances of premises to accommodate users with different needs, provision of electric wheelchair charging stations and the use of illuminated vacancy indicators for accessible parking spaces. These examples enable industry professionals to understand how to further improve the accessibility of premises through practical cases.

Hosting Sharing Sessions with Industry Representatives

8. Besides community facilities that affect daily commute, the accessibility of office spaces is equally important. In April 2025, the EOC hosted a sharing session on ‘Application of Universal Design in the Workplace’ to promote the good practices of awarded premises from the first UDAS. Representatives from three awardees coming from a statutory body, a public utility and a private company respectively were invited to share case studies and engage in panel discussions from the perspectives of human resources, architectural engineering and property management. The event also served as a platform for exchanging innovative

examples of universal design, attracting not only the UDAS awardees but also representatives from engineering, property management and social welfare sectors who are interested in participating in the next round of the UDAS. To sustain the synergy and momentum generated by the sharing session, the EOC will host a second sharing session in the latter half of 2025, inviting other awardees of the first UDAS to share insights on applying universal design principles in shopping malls and delivering appropriate services.

Compilation of the ‘Points to Note: Observations from the Universal Design Award Scheme 2024/25’

9. The EOC has compiled a list of good practices and areas for improvement based on observations from different premises under the first UDAS along with relevant recommendations in the form of ‘Points to Note: Observations from the Universal Design Award Scheme 2024/25’. The Points to Note was released in April 2025 via the EOC’s website and social media platforms. The Points to Note also explores innovative design elements that can be applied in future development, renovations or modifications for public reference. For example, to enhance safety, additional handrails can be installed for staircases, making it more accessible for individuals of varying heights, such as elderly and children; emergency alarm systems can be installed in accessible toilets to detect falls or fainting incidents to ensure prompt assistance in emergencies. The Points to Note will also be disseminated through the promotion channels of PMSA and the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management, providing valuable references for practitioners in the property management and human resources industries.

Participation in the Consultation for the ‘Design Manual: Barrier-Free Access 2008’

10. In the long run, implementing universal design in new construction and renovated premises is crucial for shaping Hong Kong into an accessible city. The 2023 Policy Address proposed the incorporation of universal design and accessibility concepts into the *Design Manual* of the Buildings Department. In relation to the Development Bureau’s submission to the Legislative Council Panel on Development on 26 November 2024, titled ‘Promoting Elderly-Friendly Building Design’, and the review of the *Design Manual: Barrier-Free Access 2008*, the EOC was invited to attend consultation meetings organised by the Buildings Department in January and April 2025. During these meetings, the EOC engaged in discussions with representatives from the Buildings Department, the PMSA,

renowned scholars, social innovation sector, NGOs and architectural consulting firms. By referencing local and international universal design guidelines and case studies, as well as observations from site audits conducted during the first UDAS, the EOC proposed suggestions for enhancing overall accessibility in the built environment. These suggestions include amending requirements to facilitate the mobility of PWDs and elderly and incorporation of measures to enhance safety.

Inviting Stakeholder to Participate in Educational Promotional Videos

11. To raise public awareness of universal design, the EOC invited boccia athlete and Paralympic gold medalist Ms. HO Yuen-kei to collaborate on a promotional video earlier this year. Ms. HO is dedicated to promoting social inclusion and founded the Love Inclusion Charity Association Limited in 2025, aligning with the EOC's mission to promote equal opportunities. Accordingly, the EOC invited Ms. HO to be featured in a video showcasing her first-hand experiences as a wheelchair user while visiting two awarded premises from the first UDAS. The video will also introduce accessibility features and services provided by different types of premises. For example, smaller restaurants can flexibly accommodate different users' needs by providing portable ramps and movable tables and chairs. To reach out to the younger generation, the EOC is also producing short videos for Instagram Reels. By leveraging interactive content on social media, these videos help youths understand the challenges faced by individuals with different needs when accessing various locations. These short videos will be released in June on the EOC website and social media platforms to draw public attention to the topic of universal design.

(ii) Promoting Digital Accessibility

Support for the Digital Accessibility Recognition Scheme

12. Hong Kong is rapidly advancing as a smart city, digital inclusion is an indispensable part of this development. The EOC is committed to collaborating with stakeholders to create an accessible digital environment that enables PWDs to participate independently and seamlessly in digital activities. From 2013 to 2017, the EOC and the Digital Policy Office (DPO) (formerly known as the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO)), jointly organised four rounds of the 'Web Accessibility Recognition Scheme' (the Scheme) to recognise and commend enterprises and organisations which had adopted accessible design in their websites and mobile applications, thereby promoting the widespread use of accessible design within the industry. Since 2018, the Scheme has been taken

up and organised by the Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation Limited, with the DPO serving as a co-organiser, and the EOC serving as an independent advisor. Starting from 2024, the Scheme has been renamed from ‘Web Accessibility Recognition Scheme’ to ‘Digital Accessibility Recognition Scheme’. The goal of the Scheme is to encourage more organisations to enhance the accessibility features of their websites and mobile applications for the fostering a future of digital inclusion.

Seminar

13. Given the widespread adoption of digital ordering systems in restaurants, the EOC held a seminar titled ‘Application of Accessible Technology in Catering Services’ in November 2023. The seminar aimed to explore solutions for providing accessible ordering technology with representatives from the catering and technology industries. A speaker with visual impairment was invited to discuss applications of digital accessibility, while representatives from the catering industry and food delivery platforms shared good practices in adopting accessible technology within the sector.

Policy Advocacy

14. The EOC also regularly makes submissions to the Government and public bodies to promote policies for creating an accessible digital environment. In response to the 2024 Policy Address Public Consultation, the EOC made a submission recommending the Government to consider issuing guidelines to bureaux and departments to ensure that human alternatives to digital services will be provided as an option in the provision of public services. In addition, the EOC submitted position papers to both Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau in 2022 and 2024, respectively. The submissions proposed that listed companies' electronic communications should comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 at AA level or higher, facilitating access to information for various PWDs, such as persons with visual impairment (PVis), persons with hearing impairments (PHIs), and people with cognitive impairments, thus promoting a digitally accessible city.

(iii) Publishing Guidelines to Foster a Culture of Respect and Inclusion across Sectors

General public

15. In recognition of the diverse disabilities in the PWDs community, including both visible and hidden disabilities, the EOC regularly produces guidelines to raise public awareness and acceptance of PWDs. Guide dogs serve as important companions for PWDs, enabling them to travel freely and participate in community activities. In May 2024, the EOC published the ‘Guide Dogs: A Practical Guide’ (the Guide). The Guide introduces the definition and identification methods of guide dogs, shares the daily experiences of guide dog users and provides practical tips for stakeholders in different sectors, including transportation, restaurants and hotels, property managers and employers. Additionally, the EOC has promoted the Guide to stakeholders in the transportation sector through the Transport Department. The Department then incorporated some of the content related to guide dogs in the pre-service courses for taxi, public light bus and public bus drivers, and shared practical tips regarding guide dogs with non-franchised bus drivers through bulletins.

16. Dementia is a significant public health issue, yet misconceptions about the condition remain prevalent in society. Many mistakenly believe that dementia is a condition exclusive to the elderly, whereas it can affect individuals of all ages. The EOC released the ‘How to Support Employees with Dementia at Work – A Practical Guide for Employers’ (the Dementia Guide) in September 2024. The Dementia Guide not only outlines the common challenges faced by persons with dementia but also clarifies widespread misconceptions about the condition. It further provides employers with recommended work arrangements to support employees with dementia as well as carers of family members with dementia. The Dementia Guide has received positive feedback from various organisations, including the Employers’ Federation of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Patients’ Voice, which welcomed the Dementia Guide as a valuable resource emphasising the importance of supporting employees with dementia.

Media

17. Mental health issues have gained increasing attention in recent years, and the media plays a crucial role in helping the public understand these issues. In June 2024, the EOC released the ‘Media Guidelines for Reporting on Mental Health Issues’ (the Guidelines) to encourage media practitioners to report on

mental health issues or incidents in a fair and objective manner, ensuring that the public receives accurate information about mental health conditions. The Guidelines recommend that media practitioners adhere to five key principles: ‘Ensure Accuracy’, ‘Minimise Harm’, ‘Protect Privacy’, ‘Use Proper Language and Images’ and ‘Help and Support’. By promoting the proper use of language and visuals, and reducing stigma and negative labelling of people with mental health needs and those in recovery, the Guidelines aim to foster social acceptance and reintegration of people with mental health needs. Following the release of the Guidelines, various media outlets referenced these principles in their reporting. The EOC observes that recent coverage of incidents involving injuries to persons has become more balanced, focusing on factual reporting while refraining from unnecessary speculation, thus reducing the stigmatisation of individuals with mental health conditions.

Catering Industry

18. Dining is an essential aspect of daily life. However, the EOC observed that many PWDs encounter difficulties when dining out. Therefore, in October 2023, the EOC published the ‘How to Support Persons with Disabilities – Practical Guide to Universal Design for Catering Services’ (the Guide) to provide guidance to the catering industry. The Guide covers the typical dining process, from entering a restaurant to ordering and the dining environment. It offers insights on how accessibility facilities, digital technology and a welcoming attitude can enhance services for individuals with different needs.

Service and Property Management Industries

19. There are still occasional incidents of PWDs encountering unfriendly attitudes in their daily commute in the society, often stemming from unconscious biases and stereotypes held by the general public. To enhance public understanding of the needs of PWDs and eliminate negative labeling, the EOC will develop a guideline in 2025 regarding the removal of operational and attitudinal barriers in the provision of goods, services and facilities, as well as management of premises. The guideline will incorporate case studies from complaints previously handled by the EOC and consolidate good practices, offering targeted recommendations for reference by the service and property management industries.

(II) Promoting Equal Opportunities in Education for PWDs

20. The EOC supports integrated education (IE), which allows students of different abilities to enjoy equal rights to education and fully realise their potential. According to the Education Bureau (EDB), the number of students with special educational needs (SEN) studying in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools increased from 49 080 in the 2018/19 school year to 64 220 in the 2023/24 school year, marking a rise of about 30%. IE improves the independent living skills of students with SEN, helping them to adapt to society and make contributions after completing their studies.

(i) Continuous Review of the Effectiveness of Implementing Integrated Education in Primary and Secondary Schools

Study on Equal Learning Opportunities for Students with Disabilities under the Integrated Education System

21. In 1997, the Government launched the Integrated Education Pilot Project that emphasize a ‘whole-school approach’, which was in line with the advocacy of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. From 1999 onwards, the IE programme was officially implemented in a number of primary and secondary schools. To understand the general attitudes of stakeholders, such as educators, students with SEN, average students and parents, toward the IE Policy and to identify the difficulties they encountered, the EOC conducted a research and provided recommendations on how to implement the IE Policy more effectively. The EOC announced the findings of the ‘Study on Equal Learning Opportunities for Students with Disabilities under the Integrated Education System’ in November 2012. The study revealed that the IE system at that time was not satisfactory, primarily due to insufficient resources, training and support. Some schools did not meet the policy requirement of having 10% of teachers with special education training. In addition, nearly 40% of the interviewed teaching staff (particularly teachers) lacked knowledge about IE. The Study proposed several recommendations, including appointment of designated Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) to manage the affairs of students with SEN.

22. The Legislative Council Panel on Education decided in December 2012 to set up a Subcommittee to study the policies regarding IE. The EOC made two submissions to the Subcommittee in 2013/14, sharing the views on the

importance of promoting equal learning opportunities for students with SEN. In its study report in 2014, the Subcommittee on Integrated Education of the Legislative Council Panel on Education recommended the EDB to implement a pilot scheme to establish the post of SENCO in certain schools. The EDB adopted the recommendations and later initiated a three-year ‘Pilot Project on SENCOs’ in the 2015/16 school year. Subsequently, starting from the 2017/18 school year, by phases in three years, the EDB provided each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school with a graduate teacher post to facilitate the school’s assignment of a designated teacher to take up the role of SENCO.

Study on Challenges, Effective Policies, and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong

23. The EOC released the findings of the ‘Study on Challenges, Effective Policies and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong’ in June 2023. The Study identified the difficulties encountered by ordinary schools in implementing IE and offered recommendations. The difficulties include a majority of school principals (81.6%), teachers (85.3%) and SENCOs (85.8%) surveyed agreed that the most difficult aspect of implementing IE was the tight teaching schedule/ heavy teaching workload. Additionally, over 70% of principals (70.2%) and SENCOs (70.9%) expressed that the administrative work brought about by IE was heavy. The EOC’s Study recommended, inter alia, enhancing the flexibility of current school resource utilization, establishing permanent positions for professional support personnel and strengthening support for SENCOs to reduce their workload. In August 2023, the EOC wrote to the EDB, outlining the major findings and recommendations of the Study. The EDB replied, promising that it would continue reviewing and enhancing the measures to support students with SEN with timely and appropriate support services.

Advocate for Enhanced Measures

24. On the other hand, since 2022, the EOC has consistently made submission to the Government in response to the Policy Address Public Consultations, promoting the need for school-based professional support for students with SEN. These include advocating for an increase in the availability of educational psychology service and speech therapy service, as well as reducing the workload for SENCOs. The EOC noticed that the EDB has implemented relevant measures to improve the IE system. For instance, since the 2016/17

school year, the EDB has implemented the ‘Enhanced School-based Educational Psychology Service’ to gradually increase the ratio of educational psychologists (EPs) to schools to 1:4 for schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN. The number of public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools benefiting from this initiative has increased gradually from 321 in the 2021/22 school year to 511 in the 2024/25 school year, allowing more students with SEN to receive comprehensive educational psychology service. In addition, starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB has created school-based speech therapist (SBST) posts in the public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools by phases to allow schools to form clusters to employ SBSTs through the implementation of the enhanced school-based speech therapy service (Enhanced SBSTS). Before that, schools did not have SBST permanent posts. The Enhanced SBSTS had been fully implemented in the 2023/24 school year, with a total of about 410 SBST posts created to provide more support to student with SEN. Regarding the expansion of teaching staff, at present all public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools are provided with a SENCO. Besides, if the total amount of learning support grant reaches a specific threshold, schools will have 1 to 3 additional regular teaching post(s) in the teaching staff establishment, titled special educational needs support teacher (SENST) to support SENCOs in handling affairs and teaching work associated with IE. In the 2023/24 school year, the EDB created a total of 1 355 additional SENST posts under this measure to provide schools with a more stable teaching team to support the needs of students with SEN.

(ii) Support for University Students with SEN

Regular Meetings with Universities

25. The EOC has been coordinating regular meetings with local universities to promote and share good practices for supporting students with SEN. Over the past decade, there has been a notable rise in the enrollment of PWDs in higher education. The number of the sub-degree and undergraduate students with SEN from the University Grants Committee-funded Programmes increased from 318 in the 2014/15 academic year to 1 525 in the 2023/24 academic year, marking a fivefold increase. Since 2014, the EOC has been conducting regular meetings with 10 local universities, enabling university representatives to discuss their policies, measures and facilities for supporting students with SEN and share insights. The meetings occasionally invite other stakeholders, such as representatives from the EDB to introduce updates on the ‘Special Education Management Information

System’ to assist universities in identifying and supporting incoming students with SEN. In addition, representatives from the Labour Department and NGOs were invited to discuss strategies for supporting PWDs in career development and providing reasonable accommodation.

Advocate for UGC funding to Support Students with SEN in High Education Institutions

26. In 2014, the EOC held a meeting with the UGC to discuss about setting up a dedicated funding to support the needs of students with SEN, in addition to the block grant. The UGC agreed to EOC’s suggestion and the ‘Special Grant for Enhancing Support for Students with SEN’ has been launched since 2015 to provide additional resources for universities to take forward three key objectives: improving the educational experience of students with SEN, enhancing staff training and promoting an inclusive campus. The funding, initially set at \$20 million in 2015 and 2018 respectively, gradually increased to \$30 million in 2020, and later rose to \$67.5 million for the three-year period from 2022 to 2025, indicating a threefold increase and a heightened focus on the needs of students with SEN. The EOC also played an important role in providing advice on how the universities can effectively allocate the funds to offer accommodation and protect the rights of students with SEN.

Collaborative Production of Online Teaching Materials

27. In 2023, the EOC co-operated with two local universities to develop part of the SEN online training modules to further encourage member of the university and the public to create an inclusive learning environment for students with SEN. The online teaching materials comprise a series of five animated videos¹ designed to educate the public, particularly tertiary students, about SEN. The videos explain the concept of equal opportunities, introduce the DDO, define ‘reasonable accommodation’, address the issue of whether to disclose a disability, and offer advice on the etiquette for interacting with PWDs.

¹ Understanding Disability Series: Students with Special Educational Needs
<https://www.eoc.org.hk/en/training-and-education/teaching-resources/online-training-platform/understanding-disability-series-SEN>

Support for the School-to-work Transition

Study on Effective Strategies to Facilitate School-to-work Transition of Young Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong

28. Although more young PWDs are entering the workforce after completing higher education, the transitions from secondary school to post-secondary institutions and subsequently to the workplace have received little attention. Therefore, the EOC conducted a research to identify strategies that can facilitate students with SEN in achieving their academic and career goals. The findings of the ‘Study on Effective Strategies to Facilitate School-to-work Transition of Young Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong’ was released in June 2023. The Study revealed that young PWDs, whether with or without post-secondary educational attainment, encountered significant obstacles in transitioning from school to work. Amongst others, of the young PWDs in post-secondary education settings, 44.8% reported that their teachers had failed to understand or had difficulty in understanding the learning difficulties caused by their disabilities. Additionally, 31.3% of those who completed post-secondary education and were in the labour market considered their employers had misunderstood their disabilities and assigned tasks that were too simple for them. On the other hand, 34.8% considered their employers had ignored their disabilities and assigned tasks that were too difficult for them. In response to the challenges faced by young PWDs. The Study offers recommendations from both educational and employment perspectives, including enhancing support for PWDs, promoting more diversified school-to-work transition pathways for young PWDs and engaging the business sector in workplace inclusion. In this regard, the Qualification Framework, set up by the EDB, published the ‘Reference Guide on Work-based Learning (WBL)’ in December 2024, setting out the guiding principles include making reasonable accommodation and support for learners with SEN and disabilities in order to facilitate learners’ access to WBL opportunities.

Enhance Stakeholders’ Understanding of Students with SEN and Encourage their Inclusion into the Workplace

29. Alongside providing assistance in educational settings, higher education institutions are placing greater emphasis on the transition of students with SEN into the workplace after graduation. The EOC was invited by two local universities to be guest speakers at four seminars promoting employment opportunities for students with SEN between 2024 and 2025. The seminars focused on strategies to

enhance employment opportunities for PWDs from individual, organisation and institutional levels. They brought together stakeholders committed to fostering workplace inclusion, such as employers, social enterprises, policymakers, higher education personnel, students and graduates with SEN, to explore ways to create accessible and inclusive work environments. Representatives from the EOC presented previous research findings on employment of PWDs and shared effective practices of how to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace. For example, employers should ensure an equal recruitment process that emphasises the skills possessed by candidates rather than their disabilities. Accommodation may involve changes to work hours and work arrangements, modification of the workplace or provision of assistive devices.

30. Despite the advancements in the educational achievements of students with SEN, there remains a common misconception that they are incapable of attaining significant success in their careers. Nevertheless, with appropriate accommodation and support, they can reach their full potential and even pursue professional career development. In June 2024, the EOC met with representatives from the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, the Faculty of Medicine of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the LKS Faculty of the University of Hong Kong. At the meeting, EOC representatives explained how the DDO protects students with SEN in the education sector, shared examples of reasonable accommodation, and discussed how to balance the awarding of professional qualifications with provision of reasonable accommodation. The three organisations subsequently issued a Consensus Statement² with respect to the education and training of medical students and specialist trainees requiring special accommodation due to disability or SENs, thereby promoting equal opportunities for PWDs and students with SEN in the medical field.

(III) Promoting Equal Opportunities in Employment for PWDs

31. According to the Census and Statistics Department, in 2020, there were approximately 534 200 PWDs in Hong Kong (including persons with multiple disabilities), accounting for 7.1% of the total population. Among the 96 900

² Consensus Statement issued by the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine (HKAM), the Faculty of Medicine of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the LKS Faculty of the University of Hong Kong (HKUMed) with respect to the education and training of medical students and specialist trainees requiring special accommodation due to disability or special educational needs (SENs)
<https://www.hkam.org.hk/sites/default/files/PDFs/2024/2024%20Consensus%20Statement%20re%20SEN%20with%20HKU%20and%20CUHK.pdf?v=1734605188200>

economically active PWDs, the unemployment rate is 11.0%. In 2020, the unemployment rate of the total population is 5.8%. The EOC is deeply concerned about the challenges faced by PWDs in the employment field. To address this issue, the EOC employs various strategies to encourage more employers to hire PWDs. These strategies include conducting research, publishing guidelines, and supporting initiatives initiated by Government departments and NGOs that advocate for disability inclusion.

Support for Employees with Mental Health Needs

32. In recent years, mental health has become a major issue of public concern. There is increasing attention to the mental well-being of those in the workforce. The EOC released the findings of the ‘Study on Perceptions of Stigmatization and Discrimination of Persons with Mental Illness (PMIs) in the Workplace’ in February 2023. Amongst others, the Study found that around 80% of the employed persons (81.7%) and PMIs (78.5%) considered that discrimination against PMIs in Hong Kong was very prevalent or quite prevalent. Around 70% of the interviewees believed PMIs were ‘having fewer opportunities for promotion’ (71.3%) and ‘not hired because of mental illness’ (67.5%). The Study recommends the Government to consider strengthening public education to promote awareness and understanding of disability discrimination, and employers to offer reasonable work accommodation to employees as a mental health-friendly employment practice.

33. To promote the supportive measures in the workplace, the EOC accepted Labour Department’s invitation to speak at the Human Resources Managers’ Clubs (HRMC) of the Workplace Consultation Promotion Division. During the event, the EOC addressed over 130 human resources practitioners from various industries about the findings of the above study and shared examples of effective measures to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with mental illness. A summary of the talk was published in the HRMC newsletter to allow more members to understand the importance of mental health-friendly employment practices.

Developing Guidelines to Enhance Society’s Understanding of Different Disabilities

34. By publishing guidelines, the EOC aims to raise employers’ awareness of different disabilities and assist them in building an inclusive workplace. In addition to the guidelines mentioned in paragraphs 15 to 19 above, the EOC will release a guideline titled ‘How to Support Employees with Mental Health Conditions’ along

with some animation in 2025. This guideline will address the stigma surrounding mental health issues, discrimination on the ground of mental illness, personal experiences from both employees and employers, and provide examples of reasonable accommodation. The aim of this guideline is to encourage employers and employees to jointly build inclusive workplaces.

Proactive Support for Different Organisations in Promoting Disability Inclusion

35. Employment opportunities not only provide PWDs the chance to earn a living, but also enhance their integration into the community. To promote the employment opportunities for PWDs, the EOC actively collaborates with different organisations to enhance inclusion and job prospects for PWDs. In 2021, the EOC co-operated with a NGO CareER as a Knowledge Partner to develop the Disability Inclusion Index (DII). The DII is a comprehensive tool that allows organisations to assess their progress in building a disability-inclusive workplace. Prior to the launch of the DII, the EOC conducted a sharing session with CareER's staff. Since 2022, the EOC has continued to be a supporting organisation of the DII, and participate in CareER's inclusive recruitment fairs to advocate for the employment of PWDs by different employers. Furthermore, the EOC actively supports PWD employment initiatives developed by several NGOs, such as SENsational Foundation and WISE Employment, by serving as Guests of Honour and speakers at seminars and recruitment fairs, encouraging more employers to understand the needs of PWDs.

36. The EOC also serves as a strategic collaborator for the 'Caring Employer Medal', which is co-organised by the 'Diverse Abilities · Inclusive Workplace Recognition Scheme' launched by the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the 'Jockey Club Collaborative Project for Inclusive Employment'. The Medal recognises employers who proactively hire PWDs and provides an action checklist as a reference to help organisations reflect on their current practices and set appropriate goals to achieve inclusive employment. Capacity building programme will also be organised to enhance organisations' knowledge and skills in promoting inclusive employment. The EOC also encourages employers to make good use of relevant support schemes provided by the Government to assist PWDs in employment. For instance, the 'Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities' provides employers of PWDs with a one-off subsidy for procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications to facilitate employees with disabilities in discharging their duties at the workplace and enhance their work efficiency.

Conclusion

37. Promoting equal opportunities for PWDs to participate in all aspects of life involves changing existing stereotypes of the perception of PWDs and raising public awareness about the abilities and needs of diverse disability groups. Building an inclusive society requires the collective efforts of all sectors of the community. The EOC will continue to work with the relevant Government bureaux and departments, and stakeholders from various sectors (including public bodies, professional bodies, private organisations and NGOs, etc.) to promote a caring and respectful culture in society, and create a diverse, inclusive and universally accessible environment. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Equal Opportunities Commission
June 2025

Annex 1

Number of Disability Discrimination Complaints Handled by the EOC from 2022 to 2024

| Year | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | Total (by nature) |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|-------------------|
| Employment field | 400 | 466 | 508 | 1374 |
| Non-employment field | 202 | 213 | 204 | 619 |
| Total (by year) | 602 | 679 | 712 | 1993 |