

Executive Summary
Equal Opportunities Commission
Submission on 2026-27 Budget Consultation
Advancing Accessibility and Well-being for a Resilient and Inclusive Economy

Highlights (5 Themes, 10 Recommendations)

Promoting Accessible Tourism in Hong Kong

1. Allocate budget to ensure availability of real-time accessibility information on digital travel platforms
2. Allocate budget to enrich Hong Kong Tourism Board 's Greater Bay Area portal with inclusive travel information
3. Incorporate equal opportunities and accessible tourism training initiatives into subsidised programmes for the travel industry
4. Integrate accessibility elements into tourism events subsidised by the Government

Driving Digital Inclusion and Cultural Accessibility

5. Provide translation and transcribing devices for lending / on-site usage at key public service locations
6. Encourage the film industry to develop initiatives addressing diverse needs and promote inclusive film-watching experience
7. Establish funding scheme offering low-interest loans as seed funding for domestic free and pay TV programme service licensees to harness Artificial Intelligence for enhancing TV programme accessibility

Prioritising Safety and Accessibility in Built Environments

8. Prioritise accessible fire safety upgrades via Building Improvement Support Centres

Advancing Inclusive Employment

9. Allow for more flexibility in budget deployment for piloting job sharing and top sharing schemes for public roles

Strengthening Youth Mental Health and Well-being

10. Enhance youth mental health through school-based extra-curricular programmes

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Introduction

Hong Kong is at a pivotal moment in building a truly inclusive society. Creating a caring society is not merely a policy objective but also a strategic economic imperative. An inclusive and accessible city attracts talent, investment, and visitors while reducing social and healthcare costs in the long run. By embedding accessibility and equal opportunities into government policy and budgetary initiatives, Hong Kong can unlock benefits across multiple industries, level the playing field for disadvantaged groups, and enhance the well-being of all residents and visitors. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) recognises that disadvantaged groups form an integral part of the economy. This submission puts forward 10 recommendations under 5 themes to catalyse economic growth, strengthen social cohesion and promote well-being across the city. We believe by giving due consideration to these recommendations, Hong Kong will strengthen its competitive advantage as a world-class city while advancing equal opportunities for all residents and visitors—creating an economy and society that no one is left behind.

I. Promoting Accessible Tourism in Hong Kong

1. With the global population becoming more diverse, the demand for accessible tourism is growing rapidly. Accessible tourism enables travel for everyone—regardless of race, age, or ability—while driving economic growth and enhancing Hong Kong’s reputation as a welcoming international city.

Enrich the user experience of digital travel platforms

2. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (“HKTB”) is developing the Live Travel Map (“Map”) and Smart Itinerary Planner (“Planner”), as outlined in *The Development Blueprint for Hong Kong’s Tourism Industry 2.0*. As a platform serving diverse visitors worldwide, essential accessibility features such as screen reader compatibility, multi-language support, customisable font sizes, voice input, heaptic feedback, etc., should be implemented to ensure seamless use by users with diverse needs.

3. **The Government is recommended to allocate a budget to ensure the continuous collection and updating of real-time accessibility information on digital travel platforms**, so that the data remains accurate and inclusive. Given Hong Kong’s role as a hub for mega events, the Map and Planner should also provide real-time updates on road closures and alternative routes to assist visitors unfamiliar with the city. The Planner can consider providing customisable accessibility filters for selecting preferences such as accessible routes, family friendly, elderly friendly, low stamina

required, Muslim-friendly itineraries and Halal-certified dining options. As an example, the German National Tourist Board has created a similar portal with choices to filter search results by accessibility needs.¹

4. To deepen integration between Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area (GBA) through tourism, **the Government may consider allocating a budget to enrich the HKTB’s existing GBA portal**². This would ensure inclusive travel information across GBA cities and foster collaboration with these cities to gather and publish information on accessible tourist spots. The goal is to provide a seamless, connected travel experience between Hong Kong and the GBA, thereby realizing the advantages of interconnected tourism in the GBA.

Advance Inclusive and Accessible Tourism through Industry Training and Event Support

5. **The Government may consider incorporating equal opportunities and accessible tourism training initiatives into subsidised programmes for the travel industry.** The Airport Authority Hong Kong has allocated HK\$10 million to establish the *Development Fund for the Travel Industry*, which provides subsidies to travel agents for initiatives that enhance the overall competitiveness of the local travel sector. Under this fund, travel agents, tour escorts and tourist guides may apply for subsidies to support their participation in training activities. It is recommended that training activities on equal opportunities and accessible tourism be included into these subsidised programmes. For example, Australia provides “Accessible & Inclusive Host Training Program”³ to tourism operators to embrace accessible tourism. Such training would equip frontline staff to better serve visitors with diverse needs, and strengthen Hong Kong’s competence to receive visitors of different cultures and abilities, showcasing the city as a diverse and inclusive society while maintaining a leading edge in the Asia-Pacific region.

6. **Integration of accessibility elements into tourism events subsidised by the Government is recommended.** The Government has allocated funding to the HKTB to launch the *Pilot Scheme for Characteristic Local Tourism Events* ("Pilot Scheme"), supporting tourism projects with local characteristics and potential to enhance Hong Kong's premium tourism image. The scheme currently targets non-profit organisations hosting events with over 5,000 on-site attendees (at least 10% inbound visitors) and total costs of HK\$2 million or more. Accessibility-focused events and elements are suggested to be integrated into future funding rounds. Specifically, lowering the cost and attendance thresholds would enable smaller non-profit organisations to participate while upholding quality standards. For example, cultural festivals featuring wheelchair-

¹ The German National Tourist Board. “Accessible Germany”. Retrieved from: <https://www.germany.travel/en/accessible-germany/tourism-for-all-validated-travel-options.html>

² Hong Kong Tourism Board. “Greater Bay Area”. Retrieved from: <https://www.discoverhongkong.com/anz/greater-bay-area.html/1000>

³ “Accessible & Inclusive Host Training Program” is provided by the Australian Tourism Export Council and Tourism Australia. Retrieved from: <https://traininghub.atec.net.au/courses/atec-s-accessible-host>

accessible routes, braille and tactile docent materials, and prayer facilities (temporary for outdoor events) or music festivals providing the loan of backpack-like devices for persons with hearing impairment to feel the music vibration. Additionally, accessibility elements should be considered for incorporation into assessment criteria for other funded tourism events, ensuring visitors with diverse needs can fully participate and enjoy their experience in Hong Kong.

II. Driving Digital Inclusion and Cultural Accessibility

Translation and transcribing devices for lending / on-site usage

7. Hong Kong is an international metropolis serving a linguistically diverse population. The ageing people may also experience communication at slower pace and may have lower accuracy in hearing. In addition, there are moral and legal obligations to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities (“PWDs”) in accessing services and facilities, and communication is key. Available technologies can facilitate the effective communications of diverse groups.

8. In Japan, airports, information centres of major stores and tourist information centres provide handheld translation devices (like Pocketalk) for visitors to borrow, while train stations may have fixed devices for on-site usage.⁴ These devices are used to facilitate basic communication for people speaking different languages, and for people with needs. In South Korea, public health centres and some district offices offer on-site “Translation Kiosks” or lend out tablet-based devices pre-loaded with real-time translation software to assist foreign nationals with limited Korean proficiency in accessing public services.⁵ In the United States of America, certain local governments also use similar technologies to assist older people and diverse racial groups in their communication.⁶

9. **The Hong Kong Government can consider allocating funds to procure a batch of portable instant translation and speech-to-text devices for lending or on-site usage at key public service locations** such as but not limited to Hong Kong International Airport, museums, tourist hotspots, public clinics and hospitals, District Offices, law enforcement agencies and statutory bodies. This would facilitate communication for local residents, including ethnic minorities, and PWDs who may face communication barriers, while also enhancing accessible tourism by supporting

⁴ See: SourceNext Co., Ltd., “ソースネクスト、翻訳機『Pocketalk (ポケトーク)』を発売” [Soursunext, releases translation device ‘Pocketalk’]. Retrieved from:

<https://sourcnext.co.jp/pressrelease.html/JS/2018/2018090702> . See also: (Video) Reuters, “Tokyo station installs face-to-face translation tool.” Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCrEdH1QgF0>.

⁵ “Seoul Deploys Multilingual Interactive Translation Kiosks.” *Smart Cities World*, January 17, 2023. <https://www.smartcitiesworld.net/inclusivity/seoul-deploys-multilingual-interactive-translation-kiosks>

⁶ City of Newburyport, Massachusetts. “City of Newburyport Helps Bridge Communication Barriers with Pocketalk Translation Devices.” Retrieved from: <https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/home/news/city-of-newburyport-helps-bridge-communication-barriers-with-pocketalk-translation-devices>

tourists with diverse linguistic or accessibility needs, thereby improving their overall experience in Hong Kong and reinforcing the city's reputation as an inclusive international hub.

Offer incentives for film and TV industries to provide accessible programme content

10. There has been a continuous public call for the film industry to consider accommodations for audiences with diverse needs, for example, providing more screenings of audio-described films for persons with visual impairments or films with closed captions for persons with hearing impairment. To build on the legacy of Hong Kong films as a cultural heritage while promoting inclusive film-watching experience, **the Government may encourage the applicants from the film industry interested in the *Film Development Fund* to develop initiatives that address viewers with diverse needs by applying for its “Other Film-related Projects”**. The guideline for the said scheme may be revised to include examples of best practices in inclusive cinema and events to promote audio-description, helping applicants better understand how to create more accessible films and theatre environments. These efforts could also constitute part of the accessible tourism and arts initiatives, enhancing Hong Kong as a tourist hub that meets the demands of diversity and inclusion.

11. Additionally, television (“TV”) is a key channel for public information and entertainment. **The Government may consider setting up a funding scheme offering low-interest loans as seed funding for domestic free and pay TV programme service licensees to kickstart proposals for harnessing Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) to enhance TV programme accessibility**. Taking advantage of the current licence renewal window, licensees are encouraged to adopt AI to create audio description contents, as well as automated captioning and sign language interpretation for more live and pre-recorded programmes.⁷ While manual inspection may still be required to correct possible inaccuracies generated by AI, general adoption of AI technology can enhance efficiency, reduce production costs, thereby creating a win-win situation for licensees and diverse audiences.

III. Prioritising Safety and Accessibility in Built Environments

Prioritise Accessible Fire Safety Upgrades via Building Improvement Support Centres

12. The Wang Fuk Court fire tragedy has exposed critical fire safety vulnerabilities in older buildings. This incident disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, PWDs, who encountered barriers in evacuating high-rise structures amid rapid fire spread. It underscores the urgent need to prioritise fire safety

⁷ For more details on the examples and advantages of utilising AI to create / enhance accessibility features in TV programmes, please see EOC's submission to Communications Authority at https://www.eoc.org.hk/Upload/submission/EOC's%20Submission%20to%20Communications%20Authority_4423.pdf.

enhancements in aging districts where many vulnerable groups reside and call for systematic review of overall policy and execution oversight.

13. Established in 2023, the Fire Services Department (“FSD”) Building Improvement Support Centres (BISCs) serve as one-stop hubs to assist owners of old composite and domestic buildings in completing fire safety improvement works. According to the Buildings Department (“BD”), there were 8 977 private residential buildings aged 50 years or above by 2024.⁸ The number is projected to rise further to 13 900 in 2030 and 21 700 in 2040.⁹ To enhance safety for vulnerable groups, **the Government may consider strengthening collaboration between the FSD and the BD, utilising the existing BISCs as a communication platform to assist owners of older buildings in incorporating universal design (UD) elements**—such as accessible evacuation routes, ramps, and audio-visual alarms—to facilitate safe egress during emergencies. This could include expanding BISC’s role from free consultations for owners to training on UD compliance to ensure practical implementation. Allocation of budget to subsidise older buildings to upgrade their fire safety facilities with the integration of UD elements is also recommended to prevent future tragedies.

IV. Advancing Inclusive Employment

Allow for more flexibility in budget deployment for piloting job sharing and top sharing schemes for public roles

14. Hong Kong’s long-term economic prospects are increasingly being challenged by an ageing population and a shrinking labour market. Apart from the Post Retirement Contract Staff Scheme launched in November 2015 to address the loss of experienced staff in the civil service, the Government may consider new models that look after the socioeconomic well-being of both working carers and their careers. Job sharing and top sharing (sharing of leadership roles) have proven to be successful in other jurisdictions and are worthy of consideration.¹⁰ Figures provided by a local large employer also show that women who have had strong family roles, such as carers and housewives looking to rejoin the workforce, may benefit from job-sharing schemes as 70% of the applicants for job-sharing are women.¹¹

⁸ The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. “LCQ17: Mortgage terms for aged buildings.” 10 September 2025. Retrieved from:

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202509/10/P2025091000373.htm>

⁹ Development Bureau. “LC Paper No. CB(1)776/2022(05). Proposed Measures to Update and Streamline the Compulsory Sale Regime.” 22 November 2022. Retrieved

from: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2022/english/panels/dev/papers/dev20221122cb1-776-5-e.pdf>

¹⁰ Irenka Krone-Germann, ““Top sharing” Allows Access to Leadership Roles while Remaining Part-time” (Switzerland: SME Portal for small and medium-sized enterprises, 2023). Retrieved from:

<https://www.kmu.admin.ch/kmu/en/home/new/interview/2023/top-sharing-allows-access-to-leadership-roles-while-remaining-part-time.html>

¹¹ Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management, 2024, “Sharing Job, Sharing Talent – Nature of Job Sharing and How It Helps Tackle Manpower Challenges.” Retrieved from: <https://www.hkihrm.org/sharing-job-sharing-talent-nature-of-job-sharing-and-how-it-helps-tackle-manpower-challenges/>

15. Taking the example of the United Kingdom (“UK”) Government, job sharing across departments through the dedicated “Civil Service Job Share Finder” platform has enabled Government staff members to make career progress while balancing increased family responsibilities.¹² The UK Civil Service’s job-sharing system includes those with senior leadership roles such as Director General-level officers. This proves the model’s viability for critical, high-responsibility functions and provides a tangible pathway for women to progress into senior management without sacrificing work-life balance. Similarly, in Switzerland, “top sharing” by which managerial roles can be shared is implemented along with job sharing. Top sharing is slightly more prevalent in the public sector (33%) than in the private sector (31%), while job sharing is more prevalent in the private sector (83%) than in the public sector (80%)¹³.

16. **The Hong Kong Government can consider piloting job sharing and top sharing schemes for public roles.** Between 2018 and 2024, the number of civil service vacancies has almost tripled to 19 120, lifting the concurrent vacancy rate from 3.7% to 9.9%. The measures may address the need for talents in the civil service in view of the vast number of vacancies not only at the lower ends of the hierarchy, but also at the higher levels and directorate levels of the Government.¹⁴

V. Strengthening Youth Mental Health Support and Well-being

Enhance youth mental health through school-based extra-curricular programmes

17. Youth mental health issues in Hong Kong are increasingly concerning. Research indicates that around 1 in 6 young people experienced mental health illnesses.¹⁵ A recent study revealed that nearly half of secondary school students reported feeling anxious frequently or almost daily over the past two weeks. Furthermore, 82.4% of these students believed that seeking psychological counselling would lead to labelling and stigma.¹⁶ This highlights the ongoing need to destigmatise mental health, build emotional resilience and promote help-seeking behaviours on campuses.

18. To address this challenge, the **Government may consider allocating additional funding to support experiential learning activities that prioritise mental health-**

¹² UK Government, “Civil Service Job Share Finder.” Retrieved from: <https://www.civil-service-careers.gov.uk/guide-to-job-sharing/>

¹³ University of Applied Sciences and Arts. 2024. “Job and Top Sharing in Switzerland”. Retrieved from: <https://www.fhnw.ch/++api++/de/die-fhnw/hochschulen/hsw/pmo/forschung-und-dienstleistung/job-und-topsharing-schweiz/media/job-and-top-sharing-in-switzerland.pdf/@@inline-file/file>

¹⁴ Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat. 2025. “Manpower Situation of the Government”. Retrieved from: https://app7.legco.gov.hk/rpdb/en/uploads/2025/ISSH/ISSH12_2025_20250609_en.pdf

¹⁵ [Only Chinese] 〈我們的六分之一〉。《am730》，2023年10月12日。

<https://www.am730.com.hk/column/%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/%E6%88%91%E5%80%91%E7%9A%84%E5%85%AD%E5%88%86%E4%B8%80/404931>

¹⁶ [Only Chinese] 〈調查：近半中學生每周運動少於2小時 世衛：熒幕時間取代運動壓力焦慮增〉。《明報》，2026年1月9日。<https://health.mingpao.com/%e8%aa%bf%e6%9f%a5-%e8%bf%91%e5%8d%8a%e4%b8%ad%e5%ad%b8%e7%94%9f%e6%af%8f%e5%91%a8%e9%81%8b%e5%8b%95%e5%b0%91%e6%96%bc2%e5%b0%8f%e6%99%82-%e4%b8%96%e8%a1%9b-%e7%86%92%e5%b9%95%e6%99%82%e9%96%93/>

focused extra-curricular programmes at school under the existing *Life-wide Learning Grant*¹⁷ managed by the Education Bureau as part of its mental health strategy, focusing on non-stigmatising interventions that engage youth effectively.

19. For example, embedding art therapy programmes in schools would strengthen prevention by building emotional resilience and stress management skills while also engage students reluctant to seek traditional counselling. Art therapy is globally recognised as an effective mental health intervention and a non-stigmatising approach that reduces mental health problems.¹⁸ For instance, in Melbourne, the Victorian Government’s “Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu”¹⁹ provides direct government funding for creative therapies including art therapy. In the UK, art therapy is formally recognised as an Allied Health Profession²⁰ within the National Health Service and is delivered across schools, hospitals and rehabilitation programmes by registered art therapists.

20. Another example is introducing a programme that trains students as Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) to promote mental health awareness among their peers through creative video content. A local survey reveals that nearly 40% of the primary and secondary school students interviewed aspire to be influencers.²¹ In addition, young people often spend several hours on social media every day.²² This awareness-raising KOL programme leverages the influence of peers and social media platforms. The videos could be shared on popular platforms like Instagram and Threads, effectively engaging

¹⁷ Life-wide Learning Grant is an annual recurrent grant provided by the Education Bureau to primary and secondary schools to organise out-of-classroom experiential learning activities that enrich students' five essential learning experiences and promote whole-person development, with emphasis on patriotic education, STEAM education, and student mental health. Retrieved from: https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/life-wide-learning/LWL-Grant/EDBC%2023_2024_LWL%20Grant_Eng.pdf

¹⁸ See: “New research highlights health benefits of using heritage art practices in art therapy”. Science Daily. 19 May 2025. Retrieved from:

https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/05/250519131139.htm?utm_source=copilot.com; See also: “Lost for words? Research shows art therapy brings benefits for mental health”. The Conversation. 9 April 2024 Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/lost-for-words-research-shows-art-therapy-brings-benefits-for-mental-health-221309?utm_source=copilot.com

¹⁹ State Government of Victoria. “Schools Mental Health Fund and Menu”. Retrieved from:

<https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/schools-mental-health-menu>

²⁰ UK National Health Service. “Allied Health Professions”. Retrieved from:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/ahp/role/>

²¹ [Only Chinese] 調查：港三成中小學生曾開社交媒體直播 當中近四成想做「網紅」。《HK01》。2018年7月22日。

<https://www.hk01.com/%E7%A4%BE%E6%9C%83%E6%96%B0%E8%81%9E/213663/%E8%AA%BF%E6%9F%A5-%E6%B8%AF%E4%B8%89%E6%88%90%E4%B8%AD%E5%B0%8F%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E6%9B%BE%E9%96%8B%E7%A4%BE%E4%BA%A4%E5%AA%92%E9%AB%94%E7%9B%B4%E6%92%AD-%E7%95%B6%E4%B8%AD%E8%BF%91%E5%9B%9B%E6%88%90%E6%83%B3%E5%81%9A-%E7%B6%B2%E7%B4%85>

²² [Only Chinese] 〈青協公布「社交媒體使用習慣與情緒健康」調查結果〉。《香港青年協會》，2025年6月27日。

<https://hkfyg.org.hk/zh/2025/06/27/%E3%80%8C%E7%A4%BE%E4%BA%A4%E5%AA%92%E9%AB%94%E4%BD%BF%E7%94%A8%E7%BF%92%E6%85%A3%E8%88%87%E6%83%85%E7%B7%92%E5%81%A5%E5%BA%B7%E3%80%8D%E8%AA%BF%E6%9F%A5%E7%B5%90%E6%9E%9C/>

young audiences. Research shows that peer-led mental health interventions can enhance awareness by creating a supportive, relatable, and culturally sensitive environment.²³ Moreover, since young people often seek informal support from their peers, normalising conversations about mental health on campuses will encourage a greater willingness to seek help.²⁴

Equal Opportunities Commission

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²³ Chow, D., Matungwa, D. J., Blackwood, E. R., Pronyk, P., & Dow, D. (2024). A scoping review on peer-led interventions to improve youth mental health in low- and middle-income countries. *Global mental health (Cambridge, England)*, 12, e1. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2024.149>

²⁴ King, T., & Fazel, M. (2021). Examining the mental health outcomes of school-based peer-led interventions on young people: A scoping review of range and a systematic review of effectiveness. *PLoS one*, 16(4), e0249553. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249553>