

Meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

**Work Progress and Key Focuses of the
Equal Opportunities Commission**

PURPOSE

This paper provides an update on the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in 2022-23 and its key focuses for 2023-24.

BACKGROUND

2. Established in 1996 under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO) (Cap 480), the EOC is an independent statutory body tasked with implementing Hong Kong's anti-discrimination ordinances, which currently include the SDO, the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) (Cap 487), the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (FSDO) (Cap 527) and the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) (Cap 602).

Functions and powers of the EOC

3. The vision of the EOC is to create a pluralistic and inclusive society where there is no barrier to equal opportunities. As set out in the four anti-discrimination ordinances, the main functions and powers of the EOC are to:

- Work towards the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, breastfeeding, disability, family status and race;
- Promote equal opportunity between men and women, between people with disability and those without, and irrespective of family status and race;
- Work towards the elimination of sexual harassment, breastfeeding harassment, and harassment and vilification on the grounds of disability and race;
- Investigate complaints lodged under the ordinances and encourage conciliation between the parties in dispute;
- Provide other forms of assistance, including legal assistance, to eligible applicants when a settlement cannot be reached through conciliation;
- Undertake self-initiated investigations into situations and issues giving rise to discrimination concerns under the ordinances;
- Develop and issue codes of practice under the ordinances as practical guidance;
- Review the working of the ordinances and draw up proposals for amendment; and
- Conduct research and educational activities on issues of discrimination and equal opportunity.

WORK PROGRESS IN 2022-23

4. Under the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 of the EOC, there are five strategic goals, namely:
- Setting in place a stronger anti-discrimination legal framework;

- Maintaining an efficient, effective and victim-centric redress system for complaints;
- Developing a stronger knowledge base about discrimination;
- Reducing inequality among communities at higher risks of discrimination; and
- Delivering organisational excellence.

Building around these goals, the EOC implemented a range of initiatives and activities through a three-pronged approach of law enforcement, prevention and education in 2022-23. Simultaneously, the EOC has been responding to the latest developments and conditions in society, adjusting its work strategies where needed to tackle the discrimination problems faced by community members. In early 2022, the fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic dealt a heavy blow to the economy of Hong Kong and people's livelihood. In the face of the epidemic, the EOC focused on addressing the inequality and discrimination problems faced by the disadvantaged communities, while appealing to community members to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, and fight against COVID-19 in solidarity. As Hong Kong gradually stepped out of the epidemic gloom since mid-2022 and society got back on track, the EOC continued to push forward its endeavours. To tie in with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the EOC launched a citywide awareness and promotional campaign 'Equal Opportunities Month: Together for an Equal and Inclusive Hong Kong', which served to mobilise different sectors to build a fairer, more caring and inclusive society. The paragraphs below summarised the work progress of the EOC on the enforcement, prevention and education fronts in 2022-23.

I. LAW ENFORCEMENT

Enquiry and complaint handling

5. The main function of the EOC is to handle enquiries and complaints lodged by members of the public under the anti-discrimination ordinances. In the first 10 months of 2022-23 (April 2022 to January 2023), the EOC handled 7 411 enquiries, 18% less than the figure (8 996) in the same period of 2021-22 (April 2021 to January 2022). Among these:

- 4 767 were general enquiries about provisions under the ordinances and events organised by the EOC; and
- 2 644 were about specific scenarios or incidents that might become complaints.

6. As for complaints, in the first 10 months of 2022-23, the EOC received 749 complaints for investigation, 13% less than the figure (865) in the same period of 2021-22. The EOC also conducted self-initiated investigations into 28 cases. These were incidents noticed by the EOC or brought to the EOC's attention by third parties or aggrieved persons who did not wish to be involved in an investigation, most of which were related to recruitment, accessibility of premises and the provision of goods, services and facilities. Altogether the EOC handled a total of 1 052 complaints during the period, including cases carried forward from the previous year. Annex A presents a breakdown of the complaints handled in the first 10 months of 2022-23 by ordinance.

Conciliation

7. The performance pledge of the EOC is to conclude 75% of the complaints within six months. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the EOC was able to conclude 85% of the complaints within six months. The average handling time of each complaint case was 109 days, which is shorter than the targeted handling time (180 days). As stipulated in the anti-discrimination

ordinances, the EOC would encourage the parties in dispute to settle through conciliation, which is entirely voluntary. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, 119 out of the 139 cases that underwent conciliation reached a settlement, translating into a success rate of 86%, as compared to an average of 60% to 70% in previous years. During the period between April 2022 and end-January 2023, the EOC managed to secure \$6.41 million of monetary payment for complainants through conciliation.

8. Under the anti-discrimination ordinances, the EOC may also decide not to conduct, or to discontinue an investigation into a complaint for any of the following reasons:

- The EOC is satisfied that the alleged act is not unlawful by virtue of a provision under the ordinances;
- The EOC is of the opinion that there is no desire on the part of the aggrieved persons for the investigation to be conducted or continued;
- More than 12 months have elapsed since the act;
- The EOC determines, in the case of a representative complaint, that the complaint should not be a representative complaint (in accordance with the relevant rules dealing with representative complaints); or
- The EOC is of the opinion that the complaint is frivolous, vexatious, misconceived or lacking in substance.

In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the EOC decided not to conduct investigation for 63 cases, and discontinued investigation for 595 cases. Annex B sets out the breakdown of the cases concluded based on their outcome.

Legal assistance

9. The anti-discrimination ordinances provide that if an individual has lodged a complaint with the EOC but there has not been a settlement of the case, the complainant may apply to the EOC for other forms of assistance, such as legal assistance, which may include providing initial legal advice, conducting legal proceedings for successful legal assistance applicants, and appearing in court on behalf of assisted persons. Upon receipt of applications for legal assistance, the Legal Service Division of the EOC would analyse the information and consolidate the information gathered by the Complaint Services Division during the complaint-handling process, and prepare a report for consideration by the Legal and Complaints Committee of the EOC to decide whether legal assistance should be granted to the complainant. The Legal and Complaints Committee would consider a wide range of factors on a case-by-case basis in deciding whether to grant legal assistance or not. These factors include:

- Whether the case raises a question of principle;
- Whether the complexity of the case or the parties' relative positions make it too difficult for the applicant to deal with the case unaided;
- Strength of the evidence and likelihood of success in court;
- Whether the case can set an important legal precedent;
- Whether litigation can lead to effective remedy for the applicant, and whether the case can be effectively used to enhance public awareness and promote equal opportunities; and
- The attitude and behaviour of the parties.

10. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the EOC received and handled 10 applications for legal assistance. Six applications were granted legal assistance. A breakdown of the number of

applications for legal assistance by ordinance handled in the last three years is available at Annex C.

11. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the EOC initiated legal proceedings for three cases concerning disability discrimination in employment. The complainants of two of the cases, who were both infected with COVID-19, were either refused employment notwithstanding a prior job offer or dismissed. The complainant of the third case alleged that his former employer (the Respondent) discriminated against him by terminating his employment on the grounds of his disability (i.e. Left Lower Limb Cellulitis). By taking these cases to the court, the EOC hopes to reinforce public awareness and remind employers that it is unlawful to discriminate against anyone in the workplace, particularly job applicants or employees infected with or recovered from COVID-19.

12. As regards the third case mentioned above, the District Court ruled in favour of the Claimant on 31 January 2023 in the absence of the Respondent from the court. The Court ordered the Respondent to pay the Claimant \$20,000 as damages for injury to feeling and to pay legal costs. The Court was of the view that the Respondent's termination of the Complainant after learning of his disability was an obvious act of discrimination. The court has to send the public a clear message that any acts of discrimination, regardless of the severity, are unacceptable and the acts will bear legal consequences.

Other areas of legal work

13. In addition to handling legal assistance applications and representing complainants in legal proceedings, the Legal Service Division is responsible for the following major legal work:

- Providing legal support at various stages of the complaint-handling process by assigning internal legal counsels to pair up with case-handling officers in the Complaint Services Division in conducting complaint investigation;
- Reviewing the four anti-discrimination ordinances and making recommendations for amendments;
- Conducting research on new protected grounds to explore the possibility of expanding the scope of protection of the ordinances and making submissions to the Government accordingly;
- Drafting codes of practice, guidance and other publications to explain the ordinances to the public;
- Advising on legal issues arising from the daily operation of the EOC;
- Reviewing contracts and agreements to which the EOC is a party;
- Providing legal support in cases where the EOC is a party; and
- Providing legal support to issues relating to the corporate governance of the EOC.

Discrimination Law Review

(a) Publicising legislative amendments

14. On the review of legislation, the EOC made a submission to the Government in 2016 on the Discrimination Law Review, covering a number of recommendations for law reform. Eight of the recommendations, including prohibiting sexual, disability and racial harassment between persons working in common workplaces, and discrimination against breastfeeding women, were implemented through the Discrimination Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2020 enacted on 11 June 2020. The Legislative Council further

passed the Sex Discrimination (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 on 17 March 2021 to protect breastfeeding women from harassment. The two ordinances came into effect on 19 June 2020 and 19 June 2021 respectively. In order to widely publicise the new legislative protections to community members, the EOC embarked on a range of publicity and public education activities since 2021-22. These included distributing booklets, organising talks and training, broadcasting television and radio Announcements in the Public Interest, and arranging for light box poster display in MTR stations.

(b) Legal studies

15. In 2021-22, the EOC submitted the findings of two legal studies to the Government, namely to explore how to tackle discrimination, harassment and vilification between people from Hong Kong and those from the Mainland through legislation, as well as to expand the protection from sexual harassment under the SDO. During the course of 2022-23, the EOC continued to liaise closely with the Government regarding the relevant studies and the recommendations made therein, and provided the Government with the necessary information to facilitate its consideration of the recommendations. Currently, the EOC is conducting another legal study to explore the possible options for legislating against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status under the current legal framework. Because of the sensitive and controversial nature of the study, the EOC has been handling it with care. To date, the internal study remains in progress.

II. PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION

Policy research and advocacy

16. On the prevention front, the EOC continued to monitor the trends of discrimination prevalent in society through research studies, and make policy enhancement recommendations to the Government and relevant parties. In 2022-23, the EOC released the following studies:

- A Territory-wide Representative Survey on Sexual Harassment in Hong Kong 2021 (released in May 2022);
- A Study on Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Secondary Schools of Hong Kong (released in November 2022); and
- A Study on Perceptions of Stigmatisation and Discrimination of Persons with Mental Illness in the Workplace (released in February 2023).

The EOC plans to release the following two studies by the second quarter of 2023-24:

- Study on Challenges, Effective Policies and Best Practices of Ordinary Schools in Educating Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong; and
- Study on Effective Strategies to Facilitate School-to-Work Transition of Young Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong.

17. The EOC has also provided funding support to nine research projects conducted by academia and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) under the Funding Programme of Research Projects on Equal Opportunities 2020-21. As at end-February 2023, the findings of the following eight studies have been released:

- A Study of Online Media Representation of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong and Their Experiences of Online Racial Discrimination (Department of Media and Communication, City University of Hong Kong) (released in May 2022);
- Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy Checklist – Research Report on Tertiary Institutions (2020-2021) (The Association for the Advancement of Feminism) (released in May 2022);
- Admitting Ethnic Minority Kindergarteners: Overcoming Challenges and Identifying Opportunities (School of Education and Languages of Hong Kong Metropolitan University and Hong Kong Child-riety Association) (released in June 2022);
- An Exploration of the Challenges and Enablers of Parental HPV Vaccination Decision for Adolescent Daughters among South Asian Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong (The Nethersole School of Nursing, The Chinese University of Hong Kong) (released in July 2022);
- Exploring Intersectional Experiences of South Asian Ethnic Minority Students and Families in Special Educational Context in Hong Kong (Caritas Institute of Higher Education) (released in September 2022);
- Family Caregivers of Persons with Advanced Illnesses (Caritas Institute of Higher Education) (released in January 2023);
- Creating a Barrier-Free Online Learning Environment for Primary School Students with Special Educational Needs in Hong Kong (The University of Hong Kong) (released in February 2023); and
- Exploring the Experiences and Needs of College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (The Chinese University of Hong Kong) (released in February 2023).

The findings of the remaining research project is scheduled for release in the second quarter of 2023-24.

18. These research projects, whether commissioned or funded by the EOC, have provided important data and evidence of discrimination. Many of them were widely reported by the media, which reports helped arouse the public’s concern and enhance their understanding of discrimination issues. For example, the Territory-wide Representative Survey on Sexual Harassment in Hong Kong 2021 released in May 2022 showed that young people aged between 18 and 34 are more vulnerable to workplace and online sexual harassment. This study has aroused public concern about sexual harassment of the young generation. Not only can the data be used to raise public awareness about the prevention of discrimination, but it can also help different sectors, such as the higher education sector, to formulate policies and measures to overcome the problem.

Submissions on policy recommendations

19. Apart from making recommendations in research reports, the EOC also made submissions on public policies to the authorities concerned. For example, the EOC made a submission to the Government in response to the 2022 Policy Address Public Consultation, calling on the Government to increase the support for students with special educational needs (SEN), persons with disabilities (PWDs), non-ethnic Chinese (NEC) population and carers, to implement sexuality education, to promote family-friendly flexible working arrangements, and to empower small and medium-sized enterprises in preventing and combatting workplace sexual harassment. In February 2023, the EOC made a submission to the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited on the proposal to expand the paperless listing regime and other rule amendments, with a view to ensuring that listed issuers will comply with the web accessibility principle when disseminating corporate communications electronically.

Training courses, workshops and seminars

20. The EOC endeavours to equip different sectors with knowledge of the anti-discrimination ordinances by conducting calendar and customised training programmes for human resources practitioners, executives, managers, business owners and employees alike in both public and private sectors. The topics covered include: introduction to the anti-discrimination ordinances, how breastfeeding women are protected under the SDO, managing recruitment and selection processes, and issues in human resources management under the DDO. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the EOC conducted 403 training sessions with a total of 21 992 participants from various sectors.

21. The training team of the EOC also provided policy review services for various organisations and consultancy services for organisations in drafting training materials about equal opportunities. In 2022-23, the EOC produced a new set of training materials for government departments and public bodies to explain the principles of the anti-discrimination ordinances through videos and games.

Anti-sexual harassment campaign

22. Preventing sexual harassment is always one of the work focuses of the EOC. In November 2020, the EOC established a dedicated Anti-Sexual Harassment Unit (ASHU), which is tasked with promoting public awareness on anti-sexual harassment policies and measures; conducting a holistic review of the current legal regime to identify protection gaps and recommend legislative amendments where appropriate; and acting as a first port of call for those affected by sexual harassment.

23. The ASHU has set up a dedicated hotline at 2106 2222 to provide the public with information on provisions of the law on sexual harassment, advice on where to lodge complaints and seek redress, and referral to counselling, shelter or other services when necessary. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the ASHU received 341 enquiries about sexual harassment. These were made through the ASHU's hotline, the general enquiry hotline, forms submitted online, by mail or SMS, and in person at the EOC office. Out of these enquiries, more than half were raised by aggrieved persons hoping to seek redress, while nearly 20% were made by human resources practitioners, or those representing employers on handling internal complaints or establishing anti-sexual harassment mechanism. Other enquirers included bystanders or prospective witnesses, education practitioners, prospective respondents and the general public. In addition, the ASHU has set up a dedicated website on sexual harassment. Entitled COMPASS, the website serves as a resource platform and contains a host of information, such as introduction to the legislation, court cases, research reports, training toolkits, policy development guidelines, and publications and videos on preventing sexual harassment.

24. Besides handling enquiries, the ASHU also engages in education and publicity work. Riding on the growing popularity of stickers in instant messaging applications, the ASHU held the first-ever sticker design competition in Hong Kong from January to March 2022. Under the theme of Equality and Respect: Stop Sexual Harassment, participants were encouraged to design stickers to raise public awareness and understanding of sexual harassment, to help individuals understand how they can use their words and take action to create a safe environment, and to foster respect and equality with a view to eliminating sexual harassment. Although the competition was held amid the fifth wave of the epidemic, nearly 300 entries were received. During the award ceremony held in June 2022, champions from the Open and

Senior Secondary School categories were invited to share the creative concepts behind their works and the takeaways from joining the sticker competition. The teacher from the school which was awarded the Most Supportive School also shared at the ceremony the experience in carrying out anti-sexual harassment education at school. Winning entries were available for download from COMPASS after the ceremony. As at end-January 2023, over 4 600 downloads were recorded.

25. To combat sexual harassment, the EOC has been adopting targeted strategies to help different sectors devise preventive measures, such as formulation of policies and mechanism to handle complaints. Training was also provided for individuals to raise their understanding of sexual harassment. The sectors and related work include:

(a) Education sector

- The EOC released the report of the ‘Break the Silence: Territory-wide Study on Sexual Harassment of University Students in Hong Kong’ (Break the Silence report) in 2019. The results showed that nearly one-fourth (23%) of the student respondents had been sexually harassed within 12 months before the survey was conducted. Upon release of the report, the EOC has been liaising with the nine participant universities to help them eliminate sexual harassment on campus. To follow up the progress, the EOC wrote to the Presidents/Vice Presidents of the nine universities in May 2021, inviting them to share the latest situation of their anti-sexual harassment measures. After receiving detailed replies from the universities, the EOC consolidated them into a follow-up report and released it in May 2022. According to the follow-up report, an average of 13 out of 16 recommendations made in the 2019 Break the Silence report were implemented by the nine universities, an evidence that the universities were committed to building a safe learning environment free of harassment for students. It is particularly worth noting that all nine universities have implemented the EOC’s proposal concerning complaint-handling mechanism. They have clearly laid out the division of labour among departments for handling sexual harassment complaints, and specified that confidentiality and protection against victimisation are guaranteed in their anti-sexual harassment policy and complaint procedures.
- On 27 May 2022, the EOC held a roundtable discussion for the higher education sector where the above report was released. The roundtable was aimed at providing a platform for universities to share their experiences and challenges in combatting sexual harassment. The universities also discussed how to strengthen governance, formulate policies, improve the complaint-handling mechanism, and effectively implement anti-sexual harassment training and education programmes. Besides the representatives from the nine universities, the EOC also invited representatives from other tertiary institutions and NGOs to attend the roundtable to share their good practices conducive to eliminating sexual harassment.
- The EOC was engaged by the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) to produce an online training module on the prevention of sexual harassment on campus for their students and staff members. The universities started to use the training module from December 2022. Currently the EOC is developing another online training module for the students of non-UGC-funded tertiary institutions. The training module is expected to be launched in 2024-25.
- In addition to producing online training modules, the ASHU also gave talks and training courses about prevention of sexual harassment in schools, covering topics such as encouraging victims and bystanders to speak up and reminding staff members of the principles when handling internal complaints. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, the

ASHU conducted training sessions for a secondary school and two universities with an attendance of 78 and 773 students respectively.

(b) Sports Sector

- The EOC continued to organise training for the sports sector in 2022-23. Between February 2018 and December 2022, 20 training sessions for 973 employees from 10 sports organisations were conducted.
- The ASHU provided a talk on anti-sexual harassment for around 100 coaches and staff members of the Windsurfing Association of Hong Kong, explaining the definition of sexual harassment and ways to prevent and handle sexual harassment in the course of coaching.

(c) Religious Sector

- The EOC continued to organise training for the religious sector in 2022-23. Between July 2018 and December 2022, 20 training sessions for 1 076 staff and members of the congregation of 18 churches were conducted.

Advancing equal opportunities of the ethnic minorities

26. Another major focus of the EOC is advancing the equal opportunities of the ethnic minority (EM) communities. Due to language and cultural differences, EMs encounter many obstacles in education, employment, and access to services and facilities. Their situation was exacerbated under the COVID-19 pandemic. Many foreign domestic helpers and food couriers reported being discriminated against in different forms. In view of this, the EOC strengthened its publicity effort by launching territory-wide publicity campaigns in 2022-23. For example, a bus body advertising campaign entitled ‘Fight the Virus Together as One Human Race’ was organised in April 2022 to remind the public to fight against the epidemic together, regardless of gender, race, age, and occupation. Moreover, to support International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is observed annually on 21 March, the EOC launched a bus and MTR advertising campaign entitled ‘Interrupt Bias, All Races As One’ since mid-March 2023. Coupled with social media publicity, the campaign is aimed at widely disseminating the message of eliminating race discrimination. Meanwhile, the EOC Chairperson also releases feature articles in major newspapers from time to time to call for greater understanding of EMs and avoidance of bias and stigmatisation.

(a) Education

27. The EOC has been striving to promote racial equality in education to different target groups. Upon the invitation of the Education Bureau, the EOC conducted two sharing sessions in August and September 2022 for community workers and school administrators on the importance of non-discriminatory kindergarten admission and promotion of racial inclusion in schools. In addition, the EOC uploaded four videos, two in Nepali and two in Urdu, on its YouTube channel to inform Nepalese and Pakistani parents of their rights and essential resources in kindergarten application.

28. To tackle the difficulties encountered by non-Chinese speaking students in learning Chinese as a second language, the EOC continued to proactively urge the authorities concerned in 2022-23 to critically review and enhance the present curriculum, and develop a full-fledged Chinese as a second language curriculum complete with specific pedagogy, teaching tools and textbooks, with a view to filling the gaps in the current Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework. The EOC also suggested that teachers should be required to undergo pre-employment or in-service training on teaching second language learners, and that

more Chinese language examination options should be provided. These will serve to motivate non-Chinese speaking students in raising their language proficiency to meet job-related needs, and should secure wide recognition from employers.

29. To facilitate the creation of a racially inclusive school environment, the EOC held a ‘All Races As One Seminar for Schools’ on 18 March 2023. Targeted at school management staff and teachers, the seminar was aimed at promoting a racially inclusive school environment and providing schools with policies and teaching resources. Apart from explaining the importance of racial inclusion in schools, the EOC also presented the newly released ‘School Policy Framework for Prevention of Racial Discrimination and Harassment’ and ‘All Races As One: Learning Kit on Eliminating Racial Discrimination’ during the seminar.

30. For the second year, the EOC partnered with Zubin Foundation to provide NEC tertiary students who took part in the EMerging Talent Internship Programme with internship opportunities. The EOC invited signatories from its Racial Diversity and Inclusion Charter for Employers to provide placements for students to gain more work exposure, thereby enhancing their career prospect. As a result of the active promotion of the EOC, 43 placements were provided for 38 students in 24 host companies over the summer. Over 80% of the internship positions were provided by signatories of the Charter.

(b) Employment

31. The Racial Diversity and Inclusion Charter for Employers, launched in August 2018, provides a set of nine good practices for employers. It aims to help employers remove barriers in their employment policies for staff and job seekers, cultivate cultural awareness, sensitivity and acceptance among staff members, and establish a racially inclusive environment for employees. As at end-February 2023, over 280 organisations from both public and private sectors have signed the Charter. The EOC organises online and offline seminars for the signatories from time to time. For example, two sharing sessions were organised in August and December 2022 to provide opportunities for the signatories to network and share racially inclusive practices. The EOC also organised an activity entitled ‘Tracking Racial Diversity & Inclusion Progress’ at HKEX Connect Hall on 25 November 2022. Apart from celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Charter at the event, an Advanced Annual Review Form of the Charter was launched during the occasion. With more detailed, concrete and targeted questions on the goals, commitment and results of racial diversity and inclusion initiatives, the form can help the signatories track their progress on racial diversity and inclusion in the workplace so that the efforts to improve diversity and inclusion can be sustained.

32. The EOC also organises training on the RDO and cultural sensitivity for organisations in the public and private sectors regularly. In the first 10 months of 2022-23, a total of 81 training sessions were organised for over 4 000 participants.

(c) Access to services and facilities

33. The EOC learned from representatives of different racial groups and NGOs that EMs are still facing unfavourable or even discriminatory treatment when accessing services or facilities, especially in tenancy. Some estate agents and landlords simply refused to provide them with services or rent accommodation to them. In this connection, the EOC carried out the following publicity and education activities in 2022-23:

- In September 2022, the EOC ran an MTR compartment advertising campaign entitled ‘Racially Friendly Customer Services for All’ to appeal to providers of goods and services to cater to the needs of diverse customers in an equal and friendly manner;
- In December 2022, the EOC ran a bus body advertising campaign entitled ‘Open Your Doors to Tenants of All Ethnicities’ to encourage all landlords to be open and welcoming to tenants from all ethnicities and backgrounds;
- The EOC continued to cooperate with the Estate Agents Authority to provide training sessions for estate agents; and
- In 2022, the EOC released a video entitled ‘What You Should Know as a Tenant under the Race Discrimination Ordinance’ in nine languages to enable EMs to understand how their equal rights in tenancy are protected under the ordinance.

(d) Racial integration

34. In a bid to integrate EMs into the community, the EOC liaised and cooperated with various racial and religious organisations. For example, in early 2022 and in the third quarter of 2022, the EOC co-organised workshops with the Consulate General of Bangladesh and Sri Lankan Buddhist Cultural Centre respectively to explain the protections under the anti-discrimination ordinances. In the fourth quarter of the same year, the EOC met with Hong Kong Council of Social Service and Indian Association Hong Kong to discuss the discrimination encountered by EMs in job seeking and renting accommodation, and to explore solutions to the problem. Moreover, the EOC co-organised seminars with NOGs to look into ways of creating a working environment free of discrimination for foreign domestic helpers, and continued to provide training for foreign domestic helpers to help them understand the protections under the anti-discrimination ordinances.

Protecting the equal rights of PWDs

(a) Education

35. Similar to the EM communities, PWDs also faced grave challenges during the COVID-19 epidemic. For instance, students with SEN faced suspension of in-person regular training and support. As a result, they were unable to benefit from skills development or even experienced emotional distress. The EOC holds great concern about whether students with SEN can obtain appropriate support. Over the years, the Commission has conducted a number of studies and carried out policy advocacy work to ensure that students with diverse abilities can have access to an equal and happy learning environment where they can achieve effective learning outcomes. The Education Bureau’s figures show that in 2020/21 school year,¹ there were around 56 640 students with SEN in public sector ordinary schools (28 650 in primary schools and 27 990 in secondary schools), representing a sharp increase from 33 830 students in 2013/14. With due regard to the continued increase in the number of students with SEN, the EOC put forward a wide range of proposals on enhancing the support for the students. The proposals include:

- In the light of the long-term shortage of professional support for students with SEN, including counsellors, educational psychologists and speech therapists, the EOC

¹ Legislative Council (2021). Administration’s paper on providing professional support to ordinary schools for implementing integrated education (Follow-up paper).

Source: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr20-21/english/panels/ed/papers/ed20210604cb4-1701-1-e.pdf>

suggested the Government train more specialists to address the needs arising from the increasing numbers of students with SEN;

- The EOC recommended that the Government should consider providing more places and funding for universities to provide educational psychology, counselling and speech therapy programmes, creating designated academic modules on pedagogical support to students with SEN in teacher training or programmes like Postgraduate Diploma in Education, and enhancing existing policies to attract specialists from places outside Hong Kong; and
- To safeguard the rights of students with SEN in receiving adequate support measures, relevant authorities should consider the possibility of establishing a legal framework, which serves to guarantee the rights and appropriate support provided by educational establishments and how the support should be given. The framework should cover such areas as early identification and assessment, individual educational plan and school arrangements and compliance.

36. The EOC is also very concerned about NEC students with SEN. In the 2019/20 school year, there were about 1 106 NEC students with SEN studying in public sector ordinary schools and special schools in Hong Kong. According to the Caritas Institute of Higher Education's research on Exploring Intersectional Experiences of South Asian Ethnic Minority Students and Families in Special Educational Context in Hong Kong funded by the EOC, language barrier and cultural difference have made studying more difficult for NEC students with SEN. In fact, their racial backgrounds and language barrier have affected the assessment and follow-up of their SEN to a large extent. Language support is also seriously inadequate for subsidised special educational training, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy. In this connection, the EOC encouraged the Government to review its resources and study the feasibility to conduct English classes in special child care centres and schools, or to establish English-speaking special child care centres and schools, so that NEC students with moderate to severe disabilities can be exclusively attended to.

37. To help universities continue their support for students with SEN, the EOC urged the Government to regularise the special grant provided by UGC for universities. The EOC also strongly proposed that the Government should provide universities with additional funding to set up Equal Opportunities Offices. With designated personnel and resources, universities can mainstream equal opportunities on campus through student activities and staff engagement at departmental and faculty levels, thereby creating a safe and inclusive place for study and work.

(b) Employment

38. To address PWDs' employment difficulties, the EOC carried out a wide range of advocacy work in 2022-23 to encourage more employers to employ PWDs. The EOC also participated in the activities organised by various organisations, including:

- The EOC served as the supporting organisation of the Disability Inclusion Index developed by CareER and participated in its Inclusive Recruitment Fair in October 2022;
- The EOC attended the webinar on Disability Discrimination in the Workplace hosted by different organisations in May 2022, and discussed the existing barriers faced by PWDs in Hong Kong, tips on how companies can move from good intentions to actual hiring of PWDs with adverse abilities, and how businesses can support employees with disabilities;

- The EOC provided training for different organisations to facilitate their understanding of the obligations and rights under the DDO, and information on how the public can support PWDs. For example, the EOC published two booklets entitled ‘How to Support Persons with Epilepsy at Work’ and ‘How to Support Persons with Tourette Syndrome’ in February 2022; and
- The EOC released a series of animated videos entitled ‘Understanding the Disability Discrimination Ordinance’ to explain the protection available under the ordinance against disability discrimination, harassment and vilification in the workplace. The content was based on the radio programmes under the Employment Equality Project in collaboration with Radio Television Hong Kong Radio 1, while the animation was created by members of the social enterprise Let’s Talk ADHD, which supports persons with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder.

(c) Equal access to justice for persons who are deaf and hard of hearing

39. In view of reports in recent years that people who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHoH) have encountered barriers at different stages of the legal process due to misunderstanding or miscommunication, the EOC published the ‘Equal Access to Justice for Persons Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing: A Guide for Persons with Disabilities, Legal Practitioners, and Parties Involved in the Judicial Process’ in November 2022. The Guide serves as a practical tool to enhance communication among stakeholders involved in the legal process, such as DHoH persons, legal practitioners and sign language interpreters, and to ensure that all PWDs including DHoH persons enjoy equal rights before the law and have effective access to justice.

40. The Guide not only covers general principles for communicating with DHoH persons, but it also includes recommendations for parties involved in the judicial process, such as solicitors, barristers, legal aid officers and sign language interpreters, and suggested points of consideration for judges and judicial officers. For instance, the EOC recommended that the judge and judicial officials should ask both the DHoH persons and the interpreters (or speech-to-text reporters or lipspeakers) before hearing commences whether they are able to understand and communicate with one another and the court. Before offering any auxiliary aids and services, it is imperative to always ask each DHoH person about his or her needs and to identify the appropriate accommodation measures.

(d) Barrier-free access and facilities

41. The EOC attaches great importance to the barrier-free access and facilities in Hong Kong, given that these have a direct bearing on whether PWDs and other community groups, such as elderly persons, can fully participate in and be integrated into society. Since its establishment, the EOC has been closely liaising with the Government, rehabilitation sector and other stakeholders to promote a barrier-free society and the concept of universal design through policy advocacy, accessibility inspections, research projects and public education, etc. Under the Community Participation Funding Programme on Equal Opportunities, eligible organisations are granted funds to organise activities for promoting equal opportunities. Universal design was one of the specific themes of the Funding Programme in 2022-23. Among the funded projects were the production of videos on the concept and application of universal design, and workshops to create apparel with universal design.

42. The concept of accessibility is not limited to buildings but also digital inclusion. While the epidemic in the past few years has accelerated the application of digital technology, it has also exposed the gaps and inequalities in the application of information and communications

technology. The EOC proposed that the relevant authorities should bridge the digital divide between different communities to ensure that PWDs can have access to information and maintain barrier-free communication with external parties. The EOC served as the independent advisor of the Web Accessibility Recognition Scheme, which is organised by the Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation Limited and co-organised by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. The Scheme aims to facilitate digital inclusion by recognising organisations and enterprises which have adopted accessibility design in their websites and mobile applications.

III. PUBLIC EDUCATION

43. The EOC carried out various online and offline education activities in 2022-23 to encourage the public to eradicate prejudice and discrimination, and to build a caring and inclusive society. Riding on the 25th year anniversary of the HKSAR, the EOC launched a citywide awareness and promotional campaign ‘Equal Opportunities Month: Together for an Equal and Inclusive Hong Kong’ in June 2022. Featuring a plethora of activities and promotions across multiple platforms, the campaign aimed to highlight the importance and shared benefits of equal opportunities, and mobilise community members to embrace the values of diversity and inclusion, as the Hong Kong society resumed to normalcy. The major highlight of the campaign is a series of short movies produced in collaboration with veteran actor, singer, and director Steven MA Chun-wai. Entitled ‘Under the Same Sky’, the short movies depict experiences of prejudices and discrimination in different forms, and how they impact the lives and relationships of the people concerned. The production is expected to appeal to a wide audience and let them understand the adverse impact of discrimination. The short movie series is in the post-production stage and is scheduled for release in the first quarter of 2023-24.

44. The EOC also stepped up its youth engagement work in 2022-23. To further promote the values of equal opportunity and inclusion to the young generation, the EOC launched a new Equal Opportunity Youth Ambassador Programme in October 2022 targeting tertiary students. By recruiting tertiary students to become Equal Opportunity Youth Ambassadors, the Scheme aims to enhance students’ understanding of the needs and situations of different groups and to encourage them to promote equal opportunity on campus and among their peers. From November 2022 to March 2023, the Youth Ambassadors participated in a wide range of experiential activities, for instance, sporting activities with athletes with disabilities, visits to religious establishments and training centre for guide dogs, talks on anti-discrimination ordinances, visit to a company which employs EMs and persons with diverse abilities, and mentoring activities. The EOC shares the Government’s goal of nurturing young people to develop international vision and embrace the values of diversity and inclusion, and positive thinking, thereby contributing to the nation and Hong Kong.

KEY FOCUSES FOR 2023-24

45. Looking into 2023-24, the EOC will continue to adopt a three-pronged approach of enforcement, prevention and education to protect the public from discrimination, raise public awareness of preventing discrimination, and encourage various sectors to embrace diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I). Since Hong Kong was under the influence of COVID-19 in the past few years, particularly the fifth wave of the epidemic in 2022, the EOC was unable to take forward its work in full swing. The strategic retreat originally scheduled for the third quarter of 2022-23 to map out a new work plan was ultimately shelved due to the requirement to maintain social distancing. The EOC therefore sought approval from the EOC Board in

December 2022 to extend the current strategic plan for one year until end 2023. Under the strategic plan, the EOC's objectives include:

- Enhance protection against discrimination under the anti-discrimination ordinances;
- Eradicate the inequalities faced by the disadvantaged communities;
- Combat sexual harassment in different sectors; and
- Strengthen awareness of preventing discrimination among community members.

The paragraphs below summarised the key work focuses of the EOC in 2023-24.

Enhance protection against discrimination under the anti-discrimination ordinances

46. One of the higher priority recommendations put forward in the EOC's submission on the Discrimination Law Review in 2016 was to include in the DDO a distinct duty to provide reasonable accommodation for PWDs. According to the Equal Opportunities Awareness Survey released in November 2021, in respect of the importance level of the forthcoming work on equal opportunities, 92.5% of the respondents considered that the Government should be urged to take forward the above legislative amendment to safeguard the equal right for PWDs. In the light of the public's view, the EOC will continue to follow up the proposed legislative reform with the Government.

47. As mentioned above, the EOC submitted two legal studies to the Government in 2021-22. The studies are about addressing the discrimination between people born in Hong Kong and those from the Mainland China, and expanding the protection against sexual harassment. The EOC will maintain contact with the Government in 2023-24 to follow up the studies and the recommendations therein. In addition, the EOC will continue the legal study on legislating against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. Stakeholders will be consulted upon completion of the draft proposal.

48. According to the Equal Opportunities Awareness Survey released in November 2021, almost half (49.9%) of the respondents considered that age discrimination was prevalent in Hong Kong. One in eight of the general public (12.7%) claimed that they had experienced discrimination or harassment during the 12 months before the survey. Among them, 54.3% experienced age discrimination. The EOC plans to conduct a legal study to explore the protection from age discrimination in other jurisdictions and the useful references for Hong Kong to address the problem of age discrimination.

Eradicate the inequalities faced by the disadvantaged communities

49. Although Hong Kong has stepped out from the COVID-19 epidemic and is steadily resuming to normalcy, the epidemic over the past years had exacerbated the plight of the disadvantaged and marginalised communities. In particular, PWDs and EMs face grave difficulties in employment. At the same time, the structural and systemic inequality suffered by the disadvantaged communities remained unresolved. For example, non-Chinese speaking students are unable to learn Chinese effectively because of the lack of a full-fledged Chinese as a second language curriculum. While all sectors are devoting their effort to prepare for new changes, to seize the emerging opportunities and promote Hong Kong's active integration into national development, the disadvantaged communities should not be left behind. The EOC considers it imperative that these communities enjoy the equal right to take part in society's development and the opportunity to give full play to their potentials. Towards this end, the EOC will proactively promote the equal opportunity of the disadvantaged in education,

employment, and access to services and facilities by adopting a multi-thronged approach in enforcement, policy advocacy and education.

(a) Building an inclusive campus to promote equal learning opportunities

50. To build a caring and inclusive society, the school is the best place to start. In order to promote equal learning opportunities for students with SEN and NEC students, the EOC will undertake the following initiatives in 2023-24:

Students with SEN

- The EOC will release 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 to enable stakeholders and the public to understand the situation and needs of students with SEN, and the implementation of inclusive education in Hong Kong; and
- The EOC is producing a series of online training courses on special educational needs in higher education in Hong Kong in collaboration with the Hong Kong Baptist University and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Acting as the consultant for the course, the EOC has been working on materials on the DDO and equality-related issues, covering such topics as disability discrimination, reasonable accommodation, and the etiquette in interacting with PWDs. The training course is in the post-production stage and the two universities have indicated that they expect to launch the course in the first quarter of 2023-24.

NEC students

- The EOC will continue to follow up with the Government on the EOC's recommendations on enhancing the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language for NEC students, urging the Government to strengthen support for them;
- The EOC will liaise with EM groups to collect their views on education policies and convey them to the relevant parties in a timely manner; and
- The EOC will promote the 'School Policy Framework for Prevention of Racial Discrimination and Harassment' and the 'All Races As One: Learning Kit on Eliminating Racial Discrimination' to all schools in Hong Kong, and encourage them to adopt the Policy Framework in formulating policies for preventing discrimination in schools and building an inclusive campus.

(b) Expanding the diverse talent pool for equal employment opportunities

51. As highlighted by General Secretary Xi Jinping in the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, talent is the "primary resource" and innovation is the "primary driver of growth". Talent is undoubtedly a key factor in enhancing Hong Kong's competitiveness and promoting economic development. In last year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced a series of measures to "compete for talents" in the hope of enriching the talent pool of Hong Kong, enhancing its competitiveness and adding value to society. In fact, PWDs, EMs, women and even the elderly possess a wide range of talents that can supplement the depleted workforce and enrich the human resource pool of Hong Kong. The EOC has been advocating the adoption of DE&I employment policies in both the public and private sectors and for organisations to employ people with different abilities, backgrounds and ethnicities. With its years of expertise and experience, the EOC has provided consultation services and advice to many organisations on how to enhance cultural sensitivity for employees, and how to provide reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities.

The EOC is also committed to serving as a bridge between the business community and NGOs to foster cross-sectoral collaboration on creating job opportunities for PWDs and EMs.

52. The EOC believes that to improve the employment situation of the disadvantaged groups, more proactive measures must be taken. Specifically, decision-makers and managers in different sectors should be mobilised to embed the principles of equality and inclusion in their daily operations and increase the recruitment of diverse talents. To this end, the EOC will liaise with the Government, academia, the social welfare sector, the business sector and community organisations to explore ways of expanding the pool of diverse talents in Hong Kong. Other efforts to promote equal employment of PWDs and EMs are as follows:

PWDs

- According to the latest Study on Perceptions of Stigmatisation and Discrimination of Persons with Mental Illness (PMIs) in the Workplace released by the EOC, 81.7% of the employed persons and 78.5% of the PMIs considered that the discrimination against PMIs in Hong Kong is very prevalent or quite prevalent. The most observed situations of workplace discrimination against PMIs were “having fewer opportunities for promotion” and “not hired because of mental illness”. The study also revealed that most of the employers and supervisors lacked knowledge of the stigmatisation and discrimination of PMIs in the workplace. There were no policies or procedures in their company for managing PMIs in the workplace, nor were there separate guidelines, procedures, or dedicated staff to handle complaints of discrimination against PMIs. In view of the recommendations by the research team, the EOC will explore the possibility of working together with the Government and Advisory Committee on Mental Health to give seminars to the management of businesses on reasonable accommodation for employees with mental illnesses and their responsibilities and rights under the DDO;
- The EOC will also continue to promote the concept of “reasonable accommodation” through various channels, in particular by explaining to employers how to provide suitable arrangements and accommodation measures for staff with disabilities; and
- According to the Special Topics Report No. 63: Persons with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases published by the Census and Statistics Department in 2021, the employment rate of PWDs with tertiary education is only 43.5%, compared to 69% for the whole population with the same level of education, indicating that even PWDs have attained tertiary education, they still face difficulties in finding employment. One of the reasons for the employment difficulties of graduates with disabilities may due to their inadequate understanding of the job market and their abilities. The EOC plans to release the findings of the Study on Effective Strategies to Facilitate School-to-Work Transition of Young Persons with Disabilities in Hong Kong in the second quarter of 2023-24, with a view to enhancing different sectors’ understanding of how to help young people with disabilities improve their employment prospects, for example, through career planning services.

EMs

- In 2020, the EOC released the findings of the ‘Study on Education and Career Pathways of Ethnic Minority Youth in Hong Kong’ and published the ‘Education and Career Pathways of Ethnic Minority Youth in Hong Kong: A Practical Guidebook’. In 2023-24, the EOC will continue to follow up the recommendations made in the research report, such as encouraging the authorities concerned to produce multilingual materials and guidelines on career planning and development;
- The EOC will mobilise more organisations to sign the Racial Diversity and Inclusion Charter for Employers; organise workshops, seminars and other sharing sessions for the signatories to exchange and share best practices on workplace racial inclusion; and

connect Charter signatories with NGOs to provide job opportunities and career pathways for the EM communities; and

- Training on the RDO and cultural sensitivity will be provided to both the public and private sectors to reduce stereotyping of EMs among employees and to promote understanding and social inclusion.

(c) Support for carers

53. The epidemic in the past few years has highlighted the immense pressure on carers. Not only did they have to shoulder caring responsibilities, but many were often discriminated against and offended because of their identity as women, single parents and PWDs. The EOC has been advocating for a comprehensive policy to support carers, both for the well-being of the carers and the cared for, and for the overall stability of society. According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service in 2021,² 77.4% of the carers surveyed felt “very difficult” or “quite difficult” to take a break from their caring responsibilities, with 56.6% of them saying that the reason was the lack of services in the community to meet their needs. In addition, nearly 70% of the respondents indicated that they would like to have access to respite services, hotline and support groups. In response to the needs of carers, the EOC will continue to lobby the Government to strengthen respite care and other support services. The Government may also consider making reference to the practices of a number of overseas jurisdictions and legislate for a certain number of days of respite care per year for home-based carers (e.g. Japan: 84 days; Australia: 63 days; Canada: 60 days; Taiwan: 21 days) so that they can have some breathing space.

54. To raise public awareness of the situation and needs of carers, and recognition of carers’ contribution to society, the EOC has funded an external organisation to organise the ‘Caring for Carers – Storytelling Campaign’ under the Community Participation Funding Programme on Equal Opportunities 2022-23. Under the campaign, which is meant to inspire a supportive community and family-friendly workplace culture, the public have been invited to share and submit stories of carers. The organiser will review the stories collected and shortlist five carers’ stories, which will then be made into short videos and released online for the public to vote for their “My Favourite Carer’s Story”. The videos are expected to be released in the second quarter of 2023-24.

55. In addition, the EOC, through advocacy and promotion, will continue to encourage different sectors to adopt policies for creating a family-friendly working environment, so that employees who need to take care of their families can balance their family and work commitments. In fact, over the past few years, many enterprises around the world, including those of Hong Kong, have changed their mode of operation due to the impact of the epidemic, with working from home or flexible working arrangements becoming more common. Some businesses have even introduced a hybrid work model that allows employees to work remotely and in office in a flexible manner. At the same time, employees are increasingly concerned about their health and work-life balance, and will choose to resign if their work does not allow them to take care of their families. The adoption of family-friendly employment policies therefore can definitely attract and retain talents.

² Hong Kong Council of Social Service (2021). *Study on the Respite Needs of Carers* (《照顧者喘息需要研究》). Source: <https://www.hkcss.org.hk/%e3%80%8a%e7%85%a7%e9%a1%a7%e8%80%85%e5%96%98%e6%81%af%e9%9c%80%e8%a6%81%e7%a0%94%e7%a9%b6%e3%80%8b/?lang=en>

56. According to a study on family status discrimination in the workplace commissioned by the EOC, the greatest difficulties of employees with family care responsibilities are leave application and leave taking. While employers believe that employees with family care responsibilities take too much leave, many employees say that it is difficult to apply for leave to take care of their family members. To raise awareness of the benefits of family-friendly employment policies and the provisions of the FSDO, the EOC plans to make use of various platforms, such as the network of the EO Club, training, seminars and events like expositions, to spread the message to businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises.

Combat sexual harassment in different sectors

57. According to the findings of the Equal Opportunities Awareness Survey 2021, 91.0% of the respondents considered it an important forthcoming work on equal opportunities to encourage businesses and organisations to formulate anti-sexual harassment policies and to set up a mechanism to handle sexual harassment complaints. This ties in with the ongoing work priorities of the EOC. In addition, the EOC released the findings of the Territory-wide Representative Survey on Sexual Harassment in Hong Kong in May 2022, which revealed that about one in eight respondents had experienced workplace sexual harassment and that the risk of sexual harassment was higher in companies or organisations without anti-sexual harassment policies and measures in place, if other factors remained unchanged. In view of this, the EOC will continue its efforts to promote the importance of combatting sexual harassment and to provide relevant assistance to different sectors in 2023-24. The EOC's ASHU will continue to handle the public's enquiries on sexual harassment made through the telephone hotline, online forms, letters, facsimile, messages and face-to-face meetings; liaise and work with stakeholders; and organise activities and social media promotions to promulgate its work, enhance the knowledge of anti-sexual harassment in different sectors, and encourage and assist organisations of all sizes to develop policies and measures to prevent and deal with sexual harassment.

Strengthen awareness of preventing discrimination among community members

58. In 2023-24, the EOC will continue to raise awareness of the concept and issues of equal opportunities through research to identify trends in discrimination. Based on the findings of research, the EOC will undertake policy advocacy to protect the equal rights of different groups. The EOC plans to conduct a study on breastfeeding facilities to assess breastfeeding women's understanding of the provisions on breastfeeding under the SDO, the prevalence and experience of breastfeeding in publicly accessible premises, and the effectiveness of breastfeeding facilities.

59. In terms of public education, the EOC will seek to deepen the public's understanding of the anti-discrimination ordinances, raise their awareness of discrimination prevention and disseminate the message of equality and inclusion through publicity campaigns, online and offline promotional activities, which include:

- Producing short videos on discrimination for screening on television and online channels with publicity on different platforms to shed light on the negative impact of discrimination;
- Promoting messages of equality and inclusion through social media platforms, especially to the younger generation;
- Organising the Equal Opportunity Youth Ambassador Scheme to promote equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion among university students; and

- Providing funding support to NGOs, community organisations and schools under the Community Participation Funding Programme on Equal Opportunities for organising activities that serve to enhance public understanding of the principle of equal opportunities and the anti-discrimination ordinances, and to encourage the public to cast aside prejudice and discrimination.

STAFFING AND FINANCIAL SITUATION

60. Primarily funded by the Government in the form of a lump sum allocation, the EOC's operation is founded on the principles of prudent fiscal management and efficient use of resources. The EOC's projected expenditure for 2022-23 is approximately \$137.43 million, while its projected total income, including Government subventions and other income, is approximately \$138.20 million. As at 31 January 2023, there were 102 full-time staff members in the EOC.

61. The EOC restored its financial position to a healthy level following the relocation of its office in November 2017, and has since been able to maintain a stable financial status. Nevertheless, the EOC projects that any rental change upon future lease renewal may affect its financial stability, and will, therefore, continue to closely monitor the financial situation.

CONCLUSION

62. Hong Kong is on the path to normalcy. The Government is now striving to tell the world the good stories of Hong Kong, promoting its strengths, achievements and opportunities. Hong Kong's strengths include not only a sound legal system, but also a mechanism to protect the equal opportunities of its citizens. Over the years, the EOC has built up profound experience and a solid foundation in performing its statutory functions to eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities. Looking ahead to 2023-24, the EOC will continue to work with the Government, civil society and other stakeholders to promote a more caring and inclusive society. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and comment on the work plan of the EOC (paragraphs 45 to 59).

Equal Opportunities Commission
March 2023

Annex A

Number of Complaints Handled by the EOC in the First 10 Months in 2022-23
(April 2022 to January 2023) (by ordinance)

Ordinance	Sex Discrimination Ordinance	Disability Discrimination Ordinance	Family Status Discrimination Ordinance	Race Discrimination Ordinance	Total
Complaint investigation					
Employment field	308	368	36	26	738
Non- employment field	68	171	6	38	283
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>376</i>	<i>539</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>1 021</i>
Self-initiated investigation	10	20	0	1	31
Total	386	559	42	65	1 052

Breakdown on Complaint Cases Concluded under Complaint Investigation in the First 10 Months in 2022-23 (April 2022 to January 2023)

Outcome	Number
Investigation not conducted	63
Investigation discontinued	595
Early resolution with respondent	17
Early conciliation successful	110
Conciliation successful after investigation	9
Conciliation unsuccessful	20
Total	814

Number of Applications for Legal Assistance

Year	No. of applications processed (including those brought forward from the previous year)		Ordinances			
			Sex Discrimination Ordinance	Disability Discrimination Ordinance	Family Status Discrimination Ordinance	Race Discrimination Ordinance
2020-21	<i>Given</i>	8	2	5	1	0
	<i>Not given</i>	4	1	2	0	1
	<i>Withdrawn</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Under consideration</i>	5	3	2	0	0
	Total	17	6	9	1	1
2021-22	<i>Given</i>	11	7	4	0	0
	<i>Not given</i>	6	0	6	0	0
	<i>Withdrawn</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Under consideration</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	17	7	10	0	0
First 10 months in 2022-23	<i>Given</i>	6	3	3	0	0
	<i>Not given</i>	3	1	2	0	0
	<i>Withdrawn</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Under consideration</i>	1	1	0	0	0
	Total	10	5	5	0	0