

Meeting of the Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

Report on the Work of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2024 and its Efforts in the Promotion of Support to Diverse Communities for Equal Opportunities

Purpose

This paper reports on the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in 2024-25 and its key focuses for 2025-26, which include (1) **Promoting family-friendly work environments and strengthening support for carers;** (2) **Creating an accessible community for all and fostering a barrier-free society;** (3) **Building a diverse and equal society to attract talent from around the world;** (4) **Enhancing the younger generation's understanding of diversity, equality and inclusion;** (5) **Combating sexual harassment and conducting research on gender norms;** and (6) **Showcasing the EOC's achievements over the past 30 years.**

Introduction

2. The EOC is tasked with implementing Hong Kong's anti-discrimination ordinances, which currently include the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (Cap 480), the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap 487), the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (Cap 527) and the Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap 602).

3. Having considered the social, economic and demographic developments in Hong Kong, and with input from EOC Members and stakeholders, the EOC drew up the Strategic Plan 2024-2026 in December 2023 to map out the work priorities for the upcoming three-year period starting from 2024. The plan has identified the following six strategic goals:

1. Enhance capacity building and strengthen the reputation of the EOC's complaint-handling and conciliation mechanism through professional development and knowledge sharing;
2. Promote talents from marginalised communities, and foster a diverse and inclusive workforce;
3. Advance accessibility, promote universal design, and realise smart city living;
4. Build a respectful culture and foster social inclusion in a diversifying society;
5. Empower young people with equal opportunities, promote diversity and inclusion to the next generation; and
6. Maintain high standards of corporate governance and ensure long-term operational sustainability.

4. Based on these goals, the EOC implemented a range of initiatives and activities through a three-pronged approach of law enforcement, prevention and education in 2024, while adapting its strategies as needed to promote social harmony and inclusion. Meanwhile, the EOC actively promoted the concept of universal design to the public and engaged with different sectors to develop accessible and inclusive living environments. The EOC also continued to work in partnership with various stakeholders to encourage local employers to employ talents from diverse backgrounds, thereby improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged and marginalised communities. In addition, the EOC has been engaging in exchanges with local and overseas organisations to promote equal opportunities, share its knowledge in the area of complaint handling, and hence foster an inclusive and caring society. The work of the EOC in 2024 is detailed below.

I. Law Enforcement

(i) Enquiry and complaint handling

5. In 2024, the EOC handled 9 975 enquiries in total, representing a decrease of 2% from 10 198 enquiries in 2023. Among these:

- 5 085 were general enquiries about provisions in the ordinances and events organised by the EOC; and

- 4 890 were about specific scenarios or incidents that might become complaint cases.

6. As for complaints, the EOC received a total of 1 075 complaint cases in 2024,¹ of which 763 (71%) were related to the employment field. The EOC also conducted 26 self-initiated investigations. Most of these cases were related to recruitment, the accessibility and management of premises and the provision of goods, services and facilities. The self-initiated investigations were mostly cases first noticed by the EOC or cases that were brought to the EOC's attention by third parties or aggrieved persons who did not wish to be involved in an investigation. Together with 312 cases carried forward from the previous year, the EOC handled a total of 1 413 complaints in 2024. Annex 1 presents a breakdown of the relevant figures by ordinance and nature of the case.

Conciliation

7. The EOC's performance pledge is to have 75% of the concluded cases each year completed within six months. In 2024, the figure was 90%. The average handling time of each complaint case was 89 days, which was half of the target handling time of 180 days. As stipulated in the anti-discrimination ordinances, the EOC should encourage the parties in dispute to settle through conciliation, which is entirely voluntary. In 2024, 144 out of the 162 cases that underwent conciliation reached a settlement, translating into a success rate of 89%. The EOC also secured over HK\$6.01 million in monetary payment for complainants through conciliation.

8. Under the anti-discrimination ordinances, the EOC may 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 of the ordinances;
- The EOC is of the opinion that there is no desire on the part of the aggrieved person for the investigation to be conducted or continued;
- More than 12 months had elapsed since the act;

¹ 2% more than the figure (1 050) in 2023.

- 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 2024, the EOC decided not to investigate 52 cases and discontinued the investigation of 866 cases. [Annex 2](#) sets out the breakdown of the cases concluded based on their outcomes.

(ii) 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 includes providing initial legal advice, conducting legal proceedings for successful legal assistance applicants and appearing in court on behalf of assisted persons. The EOC's Legal and Complaints Committee would consider relevant factors in deciding whether to grant legal assistance. 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 in dispute.

10. In 2024, the EOC received and handled 15 applications for legal assistance, nine of which were granted. A breakdown of the number of applications for legal assistance handled in the last three years by ordinance can be found in [Annex 3](#).

11. In 2024, the EOC initiated legal proceedings in a disability discrimination case in the employment field. The claimant worked as a customer service officer for the respondent, which was a company that operated piano learning centres.

During her probationary period, the claimant was diagnosed with hyperthyroidism and had to take sick leave. The respondent terminated her employment during her sick leave. By taking this case to court, the EOC hopes to raise public awareness and remind employers that it may be unlawful to dismiss an employee on the grounds of disability or related sick leave. A judgment in favour of the claimant was handed down by the District Court in 2024. The respondent was required to pay the claimant HK\$143,000 in compensation for injury to feelings and loss of income. In this case, the EOC's in-house lawyer represented the claimant in conducting the case and attending court hearings.

12. In 2024, the EOC issued legal proceedings on behalf of a part-time foreign law clerk who alleged that her former employer (the first respondent) had sexually and racially harassed her by frequently addressing her with sexually explicit and racially derogatory terms. She also alleged that her former immediate supervisor (the second respondent) not only abetted the first respondent to sexually harass her but also personally sexually harassed her on numerous occasions. The claimant suffered severe emotional distress, which eventually led to her resignation. By taking this case to court, the EOC hopes to raise public awareness, and remind employers and employees that it is unlawful to sexually or racially harass employees or colleagues in the workplace. As of the end of 2024, the case remained ongoing.

13. The EOC issued legal proceedings in a disability discrimination case in 2023, where the claimant was dismissed on the grounds of manifestation of COVID-19 infection. The pre-trial phase of the case concluded in 2024, and the case has been set for trial in July 2025.

(iii) Other areas of legal work

14. Regarding the review of anti-discrimination legislations, the EOC continued to maintain liaison with the Government in 2024 to study the expansion of the protection against sexual harassment under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance.

II. Prevention of Discrimination

(i) Research study

15. In August 2024, the EOC released the ‘Study on Breastfeeding at Publicly Accessible Premises in Hong Kong’. The study found that over 80% of the female respondents, who had breastfed or expressed milk, believed that there is a need for more breastfeeding or milk expressing facilities in public places. Most of the breastfeeding respondents in focus groups said their work environments are barriers to breastfeeding, as there are very few designated spaces for breastfeeding in the workplace. Some supervisors and colleagues also lacked understanding and empathy for their breastfeeding needs. The study recommends that the Government should provide more incentives for establishing breastfeeding facilities. It also advises the Government to consider revising the Buildings Department’s Practice Note on ‘Provision of Babycare Rooms and Lactation Rooms in Commercial Buildings’ to encourage commercial buildings to provide more than one babycare and lactation room. At the same time, employers and employees should follow the guide and booklet developed by the Department of Health and the EOC to establish breastfeeding-friendly workplaces. Employers should also provide comprehensive awareness training for employees to emphasise the importance of accommodating breastfeeding mothers in the workplace.

16. The findings of the study were widely covered by the media. The EOC also sent a letter to the Health Bureau and relevant departments and stakeholders to explain the findings. The EOC subsequently received a reply from the Bureau, indicating that they are actively considering the recommendations in the study. In addition, the EOC collaborated with various bodies, such as the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management and the Human Resources Managers’ Club of the Labour Department, to explain – through their electronic communications – to over 7 000 employers, human resources professionals and members of the public the protection against breastfeeding discrimination and harassment afforded to women under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, encouraging them to create breastfeeding-friendly workplaces.

17. Separately, the EOC launched the Funding Programme of Research Projects on Equal Opportunities 2025-26 in November 2024. Through the provision of funding, the initiative encourages academics and non-governmental organisations to undertake research projects related to the four anti-discrimination ordinances, thereby prompting society to discuss developments and causes of discrimination, as well as propose solutions. Applications for the scheme will close on 25 February 2025.

(ii) Policy advocacy

18. In 2024, the EOC made the following submissions to the relevant authorities on public policies:

- In January, the EOC made a submission in response to the 2024-25 Budget Consultation, recommending the Government to allocate resources to promote the application of universal design and inclusive technology to facilitate remote work for persons with disabilities, and develop accessible tourism in Hong Kong;
- In January, the EOC made a submission in response to the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau's public consultation on promoting paperless corporate communications for Hong Kong companies. It was recommended that the electronic corporate communications of listed companies should conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 at Level AA or above;
- In August and September, the EOC made two submissions to the Government in response to the 2024 Policy Address Public Consultation. The former put forward recommendations on the curriculum, teacher training, examination system and career planning to enhance Chinese language learning and educational support for non-ethnic Chinese students; the latter included proposals to implement universal design principles in Hong Kong, empower people with disabilities and their carers, build a family-friendly community and foster harmonious relations between diverse ethnic communities; and
- In August, the EOC made a submission in response to the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited's consultation paper on Review of Corporate Governance Code and Related Listing Rules. It expressed support for various proposals, including the requirement for issuers to have at least one director of a different gender on the nomination committee and the requirement to disclose the gender ratio at all levels of the company in the Corporate Governance Report. The submission also made recommendations on comprehensive employment policies to promote diversity.

(iii) Training courses, workshops and seminars

19. In 2024, the EOC conducted 590 training sessions for a total of 39 957 participants from various sectors, representing an all-time high in both the number of sessions and participants. Apart from frontline staff, civil servants at all levels, management of public and private organisations and senior staff members of tertiary institutions also joined the training courses. In addition, the EOC designed new customised programmes for different disciplined services. Participants included a number of directorate officers.

(iv) Preventing sexual harassment

20. In November 2020, the EOC established a dedicated Anti-Sexual Harassment Unit (ASHU). Through prevention, research and policy advocacy, advising on policy and training and acting as a first port of call for those affected by sexual harassment, the ASHU serves to strengthen the work on anti-sexual harassment.

Anti-sexual harassment hotline

21. The ASHU has set up a dedicated hotline at 2106 2222 to provide the public with information related to sexual harassment. In 2024, the ASHU received 588 enquiries. Out of these enquiries, more than half were raised by prospective complainants, while nearly 20% were made by human resources practitioners, or those representing employers to handle internal complaints or establish anti-sexual harassment policies. Meanwhile, 10% were made by bystanders or prospective witnesses, while the rest were made by education practitioners, prospective respondents and the general public.

22. The ASHU carried out strategic public education and training in response to the latest social issues. To further strengthen the promotion of the anti-sexual harassment message in different industries, the ASHU began producing concise leaflets and posters, for example, promotional materials that are suitable for display in staff changing rooms, to help different organisations disseminate the message. In 2024, the ASHU also continued to produce educational comic strips, which explained the concept of sexual harassment and the EOC's complaint-handling procedures in layman's terms. The materials aim to encourage those

affected by sexual harassment to provide their names when lodging complaints, which would enable the EOC take follow-up actions or provide assistance.

Preventing sexual harassment in tertiary institutions

23. The EOC has developed an online training module on the prevention of sexual harassment for the eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC). The training module was launched in early 2023. As of the end of 2024, over 37 000 students have completed the training module. Meanwhile, the EOC launched an online learning module for non-UGC-funded tertiary institutions in early 2024. As of December 2024, five tertiary institutions have started or undertaken to use the module as an elective course or training material for student leaders. Close to 900 students have completed the module. In response to prior allegations of sexual harassment during orientation camps, the EOC wrote a letter to all tertiary institutions in April 2024, urging them to mandate anti-sexual harassment training for students, including those involved in planning, executing and participating in orientation camps. In August 2024, the EOC also organised the ‘Play Smart’ Joint-University Workshop on Addressing Sexual Harassment on Campus, inviting student leaders, residence tutors and staff supporting student activities from the eight UGC-funded universities to attend. Through case discussions and roleplaying activities, the workshop deepened the participants’ understanding of sexual harassment prevention and handling cases of sexual harassment. Over 40 representatives from the eight universities joined the workshop.

24. The EOC continued to organise anti-sexual harassment training for staff members and students from tertiary institutions, secondary schools and primary schools. In 2024, the ASHU and the Training Section organised 18 training workshops and 86 training sessions respectively for various institutions, which registered participation of over 12 300 people. The EOC also collaborated with individual tertiary institutions to develop new mandatory training courses for specific groups, such as all managerial staff and student leaders in charge of organising orientation activities.

Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace

25. In recent years, ‘Environmental, Social and Governance’, or ESG, has become the core strategy for many companies to achieve long-term, sustainable development. In February 2024, the EOC organised a seminar entitled ‘Embracing Equal Opportunities to Enhance ESG’ to help small and medium-sized enterprises create equal, diverse and inclusive workplaces. At the seminar, which was attended by around 70 participants from various enterprises, the ASHU provided suggestions for companies to implement reasonably practicable measures to prevent sexual harassment. It also introduced various support services the EOC provides to help companies implement equal opportunity and anti-sexual harassment policies on various fronts, including the framework for corporate policy on anti-sexual harassment, and training and consultancy services. In addition, the EOC organised a workshop on formulating and implementing workplace anti-sexual harassment policies in November 2024. The workshop was targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises from different sectors. It aimed to enhance the participants’ understanding of the protections against sexual harassment provided by existing legislation, the legal responsibilities of employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and to facilitate discussions on experiences and best practices in handling sexual harassment complaints. The ASHU also provided free consultancy services to organisations that participated in the seminars and workshops, reviewing their anti-sexual harassment policies or mechanisms and assisting them in implementing measures to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

III. Public Education

26. On the public education front, the EOC carried out various online and offline activities in 2024 to encourage members of the public to eliminate prejudice and discrimination, and build a caring and inclusive society. In addition to utilising different platforms and channels to educate the general public on the protection of the anti-discrimination ordinances, the EOC also believes that, as young people are Hong Kong’s future, raising their awareness of equal opportunities will be conducive to fostering diversity and inclusion in the next generation. Accordingly, the EOC launched tailored activities for primary, secondary and tertiary students in 2024 with the aim to instil the values of equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion in different age groups.

Publicity and media publicity

27. The publicity efforts carried out by the EOC in 2024 included:

- Hosting a film screening of the audio description version of the ‘Under the Same Sky’ short movie series for around 100 members of various organisations serving people with visual impairments in March 2024. The short movie series features heart-warming stories that depict the discrimination and challenges different communities encounter in their daily lives, highlighting that people with different abilities can enjoy equal participation in social activities. The EOC has uploaded the audio description version of the series to the EOC website and YouTube channel for public viewing; and
- Partnering with the Radio Television Hong Kong Radio 2 to produce a Cantonese radio show titled ‘Inclusive Society’, delving into discrimination cases handled by the EOC, the protection provided by the anti-discrimination ordinances, and best practices in building a diverse and inclusive environment. A total of 16 episodes of the programme were aired in 2024.

Promoting the message of equal opportunities to young people

28. The EOC has always attached great importance to youth education. In recent years, it has been actively utilising different social media platforms to promote diversity, equality and inclusion to the general public, especially young people. As of the end of 2024, the EOC’s Instagram profile ‘平·常·事 EO Matters’ had over 22 000 followers and nearly 1.83 million interactions on its posts. The following paragraphs set out the programmes launched by the EOC to promote the message of equal opportunities to children and young people at different stages of education. They include:

- In December 2024, the EOC launched the ‘Harmony in the Universe’ online educational modules for primary school students, which features animated short films set in space, a theme children find engaging. The modules aim to foster empathy, care and respect for others through interesting stories and characters. Developed to align with the Education Bureau’s Values Education Curriculum Framework 2021, the modules also provide a set of teaching materials,

including discussion questions, games and activities, for the use by teachers, educators and parents. The first two modules are now available on the EOC's website;

- In December 2024, the EOC launched the Equal Opportunity Cup Inter-School Debate Competition, marking the first time that the EOC has organised a debate competition on the four anti-discrimination ordinances. Through debates on issues related to diversity, equality and inclusion, the initiative provides young people with opportunities to learn about the development of equal opportunities in Hong Kong, deepen their understanding of the anti-discrimination ordinances, and foster the elimination of discriminatory attitudes while promoting diversity and inclusion; and
- In October 2024, the EOC launched the third edition of the Equal Opportunity Youth Ambassador Scheme, recruiting students from local tertiary institutions to become Equal Opportunity Youth Ambassadors. Through an array of experiential learning activities, the Youth Ambassadors will gain first-hand experience and understanding of the needs and circumstances of different communities, encouraging them to promote the message of equal opportunities to their peers. The scheme received a record number of around 190 applications, 50 of which were eventually selected as Youth Ambassadors.

IV. Promoting Equal Opportunities for Disadvantaged and Marginalised Communities

(i) Advancing equal opportunities for ethnic minorities

29. The year 2024 marked the 15th anniversary of the enforcement of the RDO, a milestone in the development of racial equality. The EOC launched various initiatives related to racial diversity and inclusion to further facilitate the integration of ethnic minorities into society and to address the difficulties they face in the areas of education, employment and access to services and facilities.

Racial integration

30. The EOC organised the Racial Diversity & Inclusion Sports Day 2024 in April 2024. The event provided an opportunity for over 300 participants of different ethnicities, backgrounds, ages and occupations to connect through

sports, strengthening mutual understanding and acceptance. The event received enthusiastic responses and support from various sectors, with different schools and businesses forming teams to promote the message of racial harmony through dodgeball and 3-on-3 basketball competitions. The event received extensive media coverage.

31. To foster the integration of ethnic minorities into society, the EOC reached out to, and collaborated with various racial and religious groups. For example, in 2024, it met with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong and the India Association Hong Kong to discuss the barriers ethnic minorities encounter in employment and in accessing services, as well as the relevant follow-up plans. Moreover, the EOC collaborated with the Zubin Foundation, the Federation of Hong Kong Ethnic Communities and the Sikh Temple on various events to advance equal employment opportunities for ethnic minorities. The EOC frequently provided training on the RDO and cultural sensitivity for both the public and private sectors. In 2024, it organised 102 training sessions, which were attended by over 5 200 participants.

Employment

32. Launched in August 2018, the Racial Diversity and Inclusion Charter for Employers provides a set of nine best practices for employers, which aims to foster racial equality in the workplace in the areas of employment policies, staff culture and work environment. As of the end of December 2024, the Charter had 504 signatories from both the public and private sectors, covering over 500 000 local employees. In November 2024, the EOC held a reception titled ‘Marking Milestones’ to mark the 6th anniversary of the Charter, as well as to provide a platform for Charter signatories to connect and share their experiences. The EOC also announced the launch of the Racial Diversity & Inclusion Employers Award Scheme during the event. Through recognising the achievements of organisations for their commitment to implementing policies and practices that promote racial equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, the Scheme raises the awareness of the benefits of racial inclusion policies and encourages employers in different sectors to adopt such policies and practices, thereby mainstreaming racial diversity and inclusion.

33. Apart from organising networking activities for Charter signatories from time to time, the EOC also invited Charter signatories to provide suitable job opportunities for ethnic minorities. In total, the signatories provided over 200 posts with no Chinese language proficiency requirements to ethnic minorities. In collaboration with the Federation of Hong Kong Ethnic Communities, the EOC organised the first-ever Racial Diversity & Inclusion Recruitment Fair for ethnic minorities at the Sikh Temple in Wan Chai in October 2024. The recruitment fair brought together five government departments and 11 corporations, offering 500 job vacancies across different qualifications and sectors, including public transportation, engineering, banking, hospitality and disciplined services. In November 2024, the EOC also participated in the Building a Multicultural Workplace Job Fair co-organised by the Labour Department and the Ethnic Minorities Committee of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong. The EOC set up a dedicated booth at the job fair and showcased 80 job vacancies from different Charter signatories. The two events attracted over 1 000 non-ethnic Chinese job seekers. In addition, the EOC encouraged Charter signatories to provide internship opportunities for non-ethnic Chinese students to broaden their horizons and future career paths.

Education

34. To encourage schools to instil the concept of racial integration in students through activities, the EOC organised a recognition ceremony for the second edition Racially Friendly Campus Recognition Scheme in July 2024. The event commended 158 schools – a significant increase from the 68 schools recognised in the inaugural edition of the Scheme – for their effort in promoting diversity and inclusion on campus. The EOC launched a new edition of the Scheme in September 2024 with new awards introduced to foster the creation of racially equal and inclusive schools. In addition, the EOC organised three training sessions for over 200 teachers from racially friendly schools.

Racially friendly services and facilities

35. Ethnic minorities continue to face unfavourable or even discriminatory treatment when accessing services or facilities. In response, the EOC carried out the following publicity and education activities in 2024:

- In January 2024, the EOC held a panel discussion, titled ‘Racially Friendly Customer Service: Why & How’, at the Halal Pavilion in LOHAS Expo 2024 to encourage local product and service providers to explore ways to provide racially friendly customer services;
- The EOC organised a training session titled ‘Racial Equality in Public Services Provision’ for over 1 500 participants from nine government departments and public bodies to facilitate public service providers to cater to the needs of service users from different ethnic backgrounds; and
- The EOC continued to collaborate with the Estate Agents Authority to provide training for estate agents.

(ii) Protecting the equal rights of people with disabilities

36. In addition to ethnic minorities, the EOC is also concerned about the difficulties people with disabilities face in various areas, including transportation, education, employment, access to services and the biased and discriminatory attitudes of some people towards them. By encouraging different premises and businesses to provide accessible environments and facilities, conducting research studies, advocating for policies and engaging in publicity, the EOC has been proactively working to enhance the wellbeing of people with disabilities.

Building an accessible urban environment

37. Creating an accessible urban environment and removing barriers in facilities and services can enable people with disabilities to enjoy equal rights, to participate fully in society and to live with dignity. As population ageing gathers pace, the need for accessible environments, facilities and services will increase. In response, the EOC launched Hong Kong’s first Universal Design Award Scheme (UDAS) in February 2024 to encourage organisations to adopt universal design through awards and education. The UDAS attracted enthusiastic responses from both public and private organisations with a total of 270 premises submitting applications. They cover premises and facilities frequently visited or used by the public in daily lives, including shopping malls and retail spaces, offices, restaurants, sites with recreational, sports or cultural purposes and revitalised sites. A total of 281 awards were presented, including 11 Special Recognition Awards, 120 Gold Awards, 133 Silver Awards, 13 Bronze Awards and four Merit Awards. To celebrate the success of the UDAS, the EOC held a recognition

ceremony in November 2024 with over 300 guests in attendance, including representatives from the awarded premises and supporting organisations.

38. To foster an inclusive urban environment for all, the EOC organised the ‘Accessible for All@Hong Kong Symposium’ in July 2024, bringing together stakeholders from different sectors to explore the issue in a holistic manner. The event featured speakers who are leaders and experts from various fields, including politics, architecture and housing, information and innovation technology and healthcare. They shared with close to 300 participants their experiences and ideas in building accessible environments, facilities and services, promoting digital accessibility and fostering inclusion through the Smart City Blueprint in the future. The EOC also invited experts from the Mainland to present on the development of barrier-free cities in the Mainland and the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

39. Meanwhile, the EOC continued to promote the mainstreaming of universal design to various sectors and stakeholders through publicity and education. For example, the EOC, together with the Property Management Services Authority (PMSA) and the Chartered Institute of Housing Asian Pacific Branch, held two continuing professional development online seminars in January and March 2024 for around 600 PMSA members. They covered the principles of universal design and relevant application examples.

40. To raise public awareness and foster greater acceptance of service animals by stakeholders in different public domains, the EOC published the ‘Guide Dogs: A Practical Guide’ in May 2024. The Guide introduces the definition and responsibilities of guide dogs and other service dogs. It also highlights the experiences of guide dog users in everyday life. With a view to protecting the rights of guide dog users in different public domains, the Guide provides practical tips for stakeholders in various sectors on ways to provide appropriate assistance, services and measures. To promote the Guide after its publication, the EOC issued letters to stakeholders, including the Transport Department. The Department then reviewed and added some of the content related to guide dogs in the pre-service courses for taxi, public light bus and public bus drivers, and shared practical tips about guide dogs with non-franchised bus drivers through bulletins.

Promoting the employment of people with disabilities and eliminating misconceptions and biases

41. Through advocacy, the EOC continued to encourage more employers to hire people with disabilities in 2024. It also took active steps to support organisations to promote disability inclusion through various initiatives. For example, it provided support for non-governmental organisations to assess corporations' implementation of inclusion policies and measures using an index and to host inclusive recruitment fairs. Separately, the EOC released the 'How to Support Employees with Dementia at Work – A Practical Guide for Employer' in September 2024 to enhance public awareness of dementia and assist employers in supporting employees with dementia and carers of family members with dementia. The Guide explains the common difficulties people with dementia encounter. It also provides a series of practical suggestions on workplace arrangements for employers to support employees with dementia who are able to continue working, as well as employees who need to care for family members with dementia. The Guide received positive feedback from various organisations.

42. Eliminating public misconceptions and prejudices against people with mental health needs and people in recovery is another priority for the EOC in building an inclusive society. In this regard, the media has an important role to play. In order to assist media practitioners in upholding the principles of fairness and objectivity when reporting on mental health issues or incidents, the EOC released the 'Media Guidelines for Reporting on Mental Health Issues' in June 2024. Developed by the EOC together with individual members of the Advisory Committee on Mental Health and a representative from the Hong Kong Press Council, the Guidelines shed light on the relationship between media reporting and public perception of mental health issues. They propose five key principles for media practitioners to follow, namely 'Ensure Accuracy', 'Minimise Harm', 'Protect Privacy', 'Use Proper Language and Images' and 'Help and Support'. By encouraging the proper use of language and images, and minimising stigmatisation and negative labelling of people with mental health needs and those in recovery, the Guidelines aims to foster a supportive environment for their rehabilitation and integration into society.

Fostering the development of disability-related affairs in the GBA

43. In 2024, the EOC continued to deepen exchanges with organisations and stakeholders working to improve the wellbeing of people with disabilities in the Mainland. In November 2024, the EOC hosted a visit from the China Disabled Persons' Federation and held in-depth exchanges with the delegation on the promotion of equal opportunities and rights of people with disabilities in the Mainland and Hong Kong. In addition, the EOC participated in the Third Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Exchange Forum on Synergistic Promotion of Disability Rights and Services (“3rd GBA Forum”) from 9 to 11 November 2024. The Forum was co-hosted by the China Disability Research Society and Shenzhen University, and the EOC again served as one of the supporting organisers. At the Forum, EOC representatives presented on the EOC's complaint-handling procedures, conciliation mechanism and its efforts to promote universal design.

(iii) Promoting Support to Carers with Family Responsibilities

44. The EOC has been advocating support to carers with family responsibilities through different means and promoting the protection afforded by the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance to persons with caring responsibilities for their immediate family members, such as leveraging the EO Club network to deliver seminars on the law for different enterprises and sectors. The EOC held a seminar in January 2024 to promote family-friendly employment practices (FFEPs) to the human resources professionals working in public, private and non-profit organisations. Participating organisations shared the FFEPs they have implemented and also held discussions with participants on ways to effectively support employees with caring responsibilities.

V. Enhancing Organisational Effectiveness and Work Efficiency

45. The EOC hosts regular training and exchange activities to empower staff members to provide quality services, thereby enhancing its organisational effectiveness and the impact of its work. In July 2024, the EOC hosted a delegation comprising representatives from the Singapore Ministry of Manpower, the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management and the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices. It exchanged views and experiences with the delegation on promoting equal opportunities and eliminating

discrimination in the workplace, as well as handling complaints and conducting conciliation. Between 9 and 11 November, the EOC participated in the 3rd GBA Forum co-hosted by the China Disability Research Society and Shenzhen University to exchange views on complaints handling and advocacy for universal design.

46. To enable staff to understand the developments and latest state of the country's society, economy, rule of law and foreign affairs, as well as to gain insights into future development strategies and their implications for Hong Kong, the EOC sent a nine-person delegation to participate in a National Studies Course in Beijing in September 2024. The course was organised by the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In August 2024, a group of EOC representatives visited the National Security Exhibition Gallery to strengthen understanding of the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems', Hong Kong's laws on safeguarding national security and the EOC's responsibility in safeguarding national security. The EOC also organised a sharing session on the spirit of the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in September 2024 to enable its staff to gain a better understanding of the spirit of the Third Plenary Session, as well as to consider ways to implement the spirit of the Third Plenary Session in the EOC's work.

KEY FOCUSES FOR 2025-26

47. Looking ahead to the year 2025-26, the EOC will continue to pursue the strategic goals outlined in the Strategic Plan 2024-2026. Through a multi-pronged approach involving enforcement, research, advocacy and education, the EOC will enable the public to enjoy equal participation in various aspects of society. The EOC will also collaborate with different sectors to promote the values of diversity, equality and inclusion across different strata of society. The following paragraphs outline the key focuses for the EOC in the year 2025-26.

I. Promoting family-friendly work environments and strengthening support for carers

48. The EOC is conducting the 'Study on Family-Friendly Employment Practices from the Perspectives of Human Resource Managers and Family

Members of Employees’ to identify the difficulties different types of organisations encounter in creating family-friendly work environments, understand the actual needs of working family members to participate in domestic affairs from a family perspective, and explore ways to effectively create family-friendly work environments and meet the needs of employees with caring responsibilities. The EOC will also carry out the ‘Study on Effective Policies and Measures to Support Caregivers of Persons with Mental Illness’. The study will identify the challenges carers of persons with mental health needs face, their access to support and information related to their caring responsibilities. Based on the findings, it will propose evidence-based recommendations on relevant policies, services and measures to improve support for carers.

II. Creating an accessible community for all and fostering a barrier-free society

Bringing universal design to the mainstream

49. The EOC will collaborate with a public figure with disabilities to produce a series of short videos. By visiting different premises, the videos will explain how different types of premises can provide accommodations to people with disabilities with a view to encourage more premises to follow suit. The videos will be promoted through social media. Separately, the EOC will compile a list of good practices and areas for improvement from different premises under the first UDAS into a set of points to note, which will be published on its website in the first quarter of 2025. It also plans to hold sharing sessions for stakeholders from different sectors to introduce the set of points to note. Meanwhile, the EOC is in the process of organising a new edition of the UDAS and will continue to bring universal design to the mainstream through recognition.

50. Apart from encouraging different premises to adopt universal design in Hong Kong, the EOC will continue to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with relevant bodies in the GBA, such as the Guangdong Disabled Persons’ Federation and the Shenzhen Disabled Persons’ Federation. This will enable all parties to explore ways to establish more facilities and services with universal design in the GBA together, thereby enhancing the quality of life and social participation of people with disabilities and persons with diverse needs in the region.

Fostering barrier-free services and digital environments

51. To raise the public's awareness about the needs of people with disabilities, the EOC will develop guidelines in 2025 for different sectors to eliminate operational and attitudinal barriers in the provision of goods, services and facilities and in the management of premises. The guidelines will tackle the stigmatisation of people with disabilities and educate the public to see them in a positive light.

52. With the rapid development of technology, digital technology has become an essential part of everyday life. However, new technology can create more barriers for marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, to participate in society. The EOC will conduct the 'Study on Accessibility of Online Purchasing, Services and Information Platforms' to assess whether the websites and mobile applications commonly used in Hong Kong are accessible to people with disabilities, and to collect the views from relevant stakeholders to identify ways to promote digital accessibility.

Supporting employees with mental health needs

53. The EOC will conduct public education to help the management of organisations better understand that there is no need to be apprehensive of persons with mental health needs. This will empower employers to tackle the stigmatisation of mental health issues and persons with mental health needs. The EOC will publish a guideline titled 'How to Support Employees with Mental Health Needs' and related animation in the first half of 2025. The guideline will cover the stigmatisation of mental health issues and discriminatory acts on the grounds of mental illness, personal experiences of employees and employers and examples of reasonable accommodation. The publication will encourage employers and employees to create inclusive workplaces.

III. Building a diverse and equal society to attract talent from around the world

Employment

54. In the 2024 Policy Address, the Chief Executive proposed a series of measures to transform Hong Kong into a city where talents gather. Promoting racial diversity, equality and inclusion policies and practices to employers will encourage more organisations to build diverse workforces and attract talents who value diversity and equality to pursue their careers in Hong Kong. It will also help remove the difficulties and barriers local ethnic minorities face in employment. Building on the Racial Diversity and Inclusion Charter for Employers, the EOC will actively promote the Racial Diversity & Inclusion Employers Award Scheme. By establishing an inclusive employment network and recognising companies and organisations that have excelled in creating racially inclusive workplaces, the initiative aims to highlight the importance of building multicultural workforces to more enterprises and organisations.

55. The 2024 Policy Address has also outlined several measures to attract talent. The EOC will conduct the ‘Study on Integration of Mainland and Overseas Talents in Hong Kong’, which will gather data and information on individuals who come to Hong Kong through various programmes, assess the level of integration of Mainland and overseas talent and professionals after their arrival in Hong Kong and explore the experiences they face and strategies they adopt in the process of integration. Through data analysis, the EOC aims to propose recommendations to strengthen the integration of incoming talent, thereby enhancing Hong Kong’s appeal to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and regions.

56. As the EOC handles many employment-related discrimination complaints and conciliation cases every year, it has accumulated a wealth of experience. The EOC will continue to engage in exchanges with different organisations to share its views and expertise in handling complaints and conducting conciliation. For example, the EOC will host a visit from the Labour Affairs Committee of the Daini Tokyo Bar Association in March 2025 to discuss employment-related anti-discrimination laws, mechanisms for handling complaints and conducting conciliation, as well as work related to the promotion of equal opportunities with legal practitioners from Japan. These exchanges will further strengthen the EOC’s

expertise in settling discrimination disputes and gain overseas recognition of Hong Kong's work in promoting workplace equality.

Education

57. On the education front, the EOC will continue to hold discussions with stakeholders, including the Government, the education sector, racial communities and non-governmental organisations, on measures to improve Chinese language learning for non-Chinese speaking students and exchange views on enhancement solutions. In order to encourage schools and educators to deepen their commitment to diversity and inclusion in education and to strengthen the promotion of racial equality and inclusion in schools, the EOC will expand the latest edition of the Racially Friendly Campus Recognition Scheme by introducing awards to recognise innovative activities that promote racial inclusion in schools, educators who actively engage in training and schools that continuously support the Scheme. The Education Bureau will continue to be a supporting organisation of the Scheme.

Racially equal and friendly services

58. To help non-ethnic Chinese integrate into society, the EOC will work with the public sector, private sector and racial groups to promote racially friendly customer services and racially equal public services. It will foster positive exchanges and interactions between service providers and racial communities, thereby enabling public service providers and professionals in the service sector to understand the needs of racial communities and the requirements of racially friendly customer services. Meanwhile, the EOC will continue to conduct the 'Study on Improving Social Wellbeing of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong through Ameliorating the Digital Divide' to examine whether ethnic minorities living in Hong Kong face more difficulties than the general public when accessing public services through digital channels. The study will also examine digital platforms that are popular among ethnic minority communities to assess whether existing channels for disseminating public information are effective in reaching them.

IV. Enhancing the younger generation's understanding of diversity, equality and inclusion

59. The EOC will continue to provide various platforms and avenues for children and young people in different age groups to learn about issues related to equal opportunity and to explore the practice of inclusive values in everyday life. The activities of the third edition of the Equal Opportunity Youth Ambassador Scheme will be held in the first half of 2025. Fifty youth ambassadors from various tertiary institutions will participate in a series of experiential activities to learn about the difficulties people with disabilities and people from different races face, the importance of eliminating sexual harassment on campus and the benefits of implementing diversity and inclusion policies for enterprises. They will also have opportunities to experience barrier-free environments.

60. The EOC will organise the inaugural Equal Opportunity Cup Inter-school Debate Competition in 2025. The debate competition has received a positive response from various sectors and attracted applications from 117 secondary schools. Thirty-two teams have been selected to participate in the debate competition through a draw. The debate competition will be conducted in Cantonese and on a knockout basis with the grand final scheduled to be held in May 2025. Aside from promoting the message of equal opportunity to schools and secondary school students, the debate competition helps the community learn more about equal opportunity issues that are relevant to their everyday life. Accordingly, the EOC will collaborate with a radio station to promote the competition and broadcast the final match, enabling the public to participate in the discussion of issues related to equal opportunity.

61. The EOC will release new chapters of the 'Harmony in the Universe' online educational modules for primary school students in the 2025/26 school year. Through engaging animation and diverse teaching materials, the modules enable primary school students to learn about different concepts of equal opportunity. The EOC will also improve the content of the modules based on feedback from teachers and educators. It will also encourage more educators and even parents to use the educational modules through different channels, thereby enhancing the next generation's understanding of and support for diversity and inclusion.

V. Combating sexual harassment and conducting research on gender norms

62. The EOC will launch an anti-sexual harassment short video competition, inviting the public to produce short videos with creative narratives to highlight the importance of zero tolerance for sexual harassment. Targeting young people in education and the general public, the competition calls on various sectors of the community to participate in the prevention of sexual harassment, thereby fostering a culture of mutual respect and ensuring safety for everyone in all aspects of daily life.

63. Many sexual harassment cases are related to the employment field. In recent years, a growing number of companies and organisations, especially start-ups and companies with a small number of staff, are using co-working spaces as their offices. The EOC will conduct the ‘Study on Sexual Harassment in Co-Working Spaces in Hong Kong’ to examine the awareness of liability and obligations under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance among users and employers in common workplaces. It will also assess the prevalence of sexual harassment in common workplaces, explore ways to enhance awareness of sexual harassment prevention and put forward practical suggestions for effective prevention.

64. Separately, the EOC will begin two research projects on gender. The first is the ‘Gender Representation in Advertisements Study’. It aims to examine how advertisements depict and present different gender in behaviour, employment patterns and family status, shedding light on implicit perspectives on gender. The study will also explore ways to achieve gender-equal representation in advertisements. The second research project is the ‘Study on Gender Perspectives in Public Transport’, which aims to propose recommendations to meet the needs of men and women in public transport services by analysing the gendered experiences of public transportation and the gendered perceptions of different modes of public transportation.

VI. Showcasing the EOC’s achievements over the past 30 years

65. Established in 1996, the EOC will celebrate the 30th anniversary of its establishment in 2026. Over the years, the EOC has upheld its mission to oversee the implementation of the anti-discrimination ordinances in Hong Kong, engage various stakeholders to promote equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination

and actively disseminate the message of diversity and inclusion to different groups through various activities. To mark the 30th anniversary milestone, the EOC will launch a series of online and offline publicity and promotional activities to showcase its work and achievements, as well as highlight the development of a diverse and inclusive society in Hong Kong. By publishing short films and launching educational initiatives, the EOC aims to enhance the public's awareness of the four anti-discrimination ordinances in Hong Kong and encourage the broader collaboration with the EOC in building a caring and inclusive society for the future.

Conclusion

66. The EOC is committed to fulfilling its statutory functions, and working with the Government and stakeholders from various sectors to promote a caring and respectful culture in society, create a diverse and inclusive environment, and strengthen the foundation for Hong Kong's sustainable development. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and comment on the work plan of the EOC (paragraphs 47 to 65).

Equal Opportunities Commission
February 2025

Annex 1

**Number of Complaints Handled by the EOC
from January to December 2024 (by ordinance)**

Ordinance	Sex Discrimination Ordinance	Disability Discrimination Ordinance	Family Status Discrimination Ordinance	Race Discrimination Ordinance	Total
Complaint investigation					
Employment field	410	508	42	44	1 004
Non- employment field	115	204	7	55	381
<i>Sub-total</i>	525	712	49	99	1 385
Self-initiated investigation	10	14	0	4	28
Total	535	726	49	103	1 413

Breakdown on Complaint Cases Concluded under Complaint Investigation
in 2024

Outcome	Number
Investigation not conducted	52
Investigation discontinued	866
Early resolution with respondent	39
Early conciliation successful	137
Conciliation successful after investigation	7
Conciliation unsuccessful	18
Total	1 119

Annex 3

Number of Applications for Legal Assistance in 2022-2024

Year	No. of applications processed (including those brought forward from the previous year)		Ordinance			
			Sex Discrimination Ordinance	Disability Discrimination Ordinance	Family Status Discrimination Ordinance	Race Discrimination Ordinance
2022	<i>Given</i>	8	5	3	0	0
	<i>Not given</i>	3	0	3	0	0
	<i>Withdrawn</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Under consideration</i>	1	1	0	0	0
	Total	12	6	6	0	0
2023	<i>Given</i>	7	2	4	0	1
	<i>Not given</i>	7	2	5	0	0
	<i>Withdrawn</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Under consideration</i>	2	0	2	0	0
	Total	16	4	11	0	1
2024	<i>Given</i>	9	4	4	1	0
	<i>Not given</i>	5	2	3	0	0
	<i>Withdrawn</i>	0	0	0	0	0
	<i>Under consideration</i>	1	1	0	0	0
	Total	15	7	7	1	0