

Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities
Housing, Healthcare and
Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities

Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission

Purpose of the Paper

This paper is supplementary to the previous submissions from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) made to the Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities (EMs) on 13 March and 10 April 2017 regarding the housing problems of EMs, use of healthcare services by EMs and Support Service Centres for EMs.

Submissions from the EOC on 13 March and 10 April 2017

2. Housing and healthcare are recognised as basic needs in any developed society and community support services are key to the social integration of non-native residents. The EOC has, in its previous three submissions, outlined in detail the language barrier faced by the EM community in access to healthcare and public housing services, with inadequate and often inefficient provision of interpretation services. Besides, discrimination by landlords and estate agents in renting apartments and providing services are not uncommon. Regarding the community support for EMs, insufficient resources from the Government have gravely impacted the service delivery and scope of the Support Service Centres for EMs, including community interpretation services. Even worse, there is an inclination by many Government departments to refer various requests of EMs to the Support

Service Centres, burdening them with additional responsibilities that should be undertaken by the respective Government departments.

3. The recommendations to the Government made in the previous submissions, largely covered the following:

On housing

- Proactively provide interpretation services for EM applicants of public housing and EM tenants living in public housing estates; and
- Commit resources for an extensive public education campaign to change attitudes of potential landlords about EMs.

On healthcare services

- Implement a more efficient system of providing interpretation services including simplification of procedures for booking service, such as setting up dedicated offices within hospitals to book interpretation requests; and
- Provide better staff education and training and introduce in-house interpreters to supplement the pool of outsourced interpreters.

On Support Service Centres for EMs

- Improve funding for the Support Service Centres to provide effective service and for the CHEER Centre to maintain a high quality interpreter crew; and
- Make clear to the Government bureaux/departments about their responsibilities towards everyone including EMs, so that services they should be providing are not passed on to Support Service Centres as a matter of course.

Additional Recommendations

4. Over the past six months, the EOC has conducted training programmes on the Race Discrimination Ordinance and cultural sensitivity for the estate management staff of the Housing Department, frontline medical staff of the Hospital Authority and licensees of the Estate Agent Authority. However, such training exercises only covered a small segment of the staff and practitioner population and are mainly informative in nature. With the belief that cultural sensitivity is a mindset that needs to flow through the organisation and not simply information that is acquired in one-off training sessions, **the EOC recommends that standard training on cultural sensitivity and anti-discriminatory practice be provided for all front desk and managerial staff in the hospitals, clinics, housing estates, service centres receiving applications for public housing units, etc. Similarly, regulatory authority and professional bodies should make it a mandatory requirement for estate agents and estate management officers to undergo such training.**

5. Training alone is not sufficient for staff to cultivate this mindset. Government departments and bureaux should genuinely embrace the fact that EMs are their responsibility and not just of the Support Service Centres. A shift in attitude and service delivery has to be continuously reinforced and incorporated into the workings, policies, procedures and delivery right through the organisation whether back-end or front-end. To ensure this, the Government is advised to put in place in all departments and bureaux, especially those offering critical services such as healthcare and housing, the following measures:

- **Regular department-wide training on service provisions for EMs;**
- **Checklist of policies and procedures to ensure good service to EMs including but not limited to provision of essential information in EM languages;**
- **Data collection on key service indicators such as response time on request for interpretation service, etc.; and**
- **Regular monitoring of these measures to make sure they are enforced and practiced diligently.**

6. To foster true integration, the Government needs to ensure that EMs and local Chinese are provided with more and more opportunities for working side by side. Clearly EMs can serve the Hong Kong population while in addition being able to deal with the language-related barriers faced by the EM population. This is particularly pertinent in essential services such as healthcare, policing and housing to name a few. We have seen encouraging examples of EM nurses and police officers who work alongside their Chinese colleagues to serve all Hong Kong people, but have the additional advantage of being able to address the specific language and cultural needs of EM service users. The recent headline making news of a young Pakistani constable helping a potential suicide victim by speaking to him in Urdu is a case in point. However, such examples are still few and far between. **We urge the Government and Hospital Authority to capitalize on these positive examples to open up vacancies in healthcare and public housing services for EMs by critically reviewing the language proficiency requirements of their job positions. Simultaneously, similar review exercise should extend to all Government departments and bureaux. In addition, on-the-job language training should be actively encouraged and considered.**

7. By taking the lead, the Government would encourage other employers to follow suit thereby making EMs-in-service more visible to the general public and helping Hong Kong's multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society to be united, mutually-respectful and harmonious.

Conclusion

8. In conclusion, the EOC once again reiterates the need to see EM issues and difficulties as part of the Government's responsibility and this should begin at the very start of any new policy or implementation. Further, it has to be incorporated into the working of every part of a Government Department so it is not treated as a post-facto problem that needs a patchwork solution. In addition, cultural sensitivity, racial respect and acceptance have to be instilled top-down and sideways in all service sectors, both public and private. Public education and awareness needs to be strengthened not just through media but also through providing EMs more visibility through opportunities for them to serve Hong Kong.

Equal Opportunities Commission

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