

LCQ11: Ethnic minority women

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (May 23):

Question:

It is learnt that as some ethnic minority (EM) women do not understand Chinese nor English, they are unable to integrate into the Hong Kong community, not to mention securing employment. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) pointed out in its submission to the Panel on Constitutional Affairs of this Council in February 2014 that "ethnic minority women are generally considered as one of the most vulnerable groups in Hong Kong due to their cultural and language background... (the) Government should take appropriate measures proactively to empower ethnic minority women to facilitate their integration into the local community". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government proactively took appropriate measures in the past three years to take forward the aforesaid recommendation of EOC so as to help the EM women integrate into the community; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the Government offered in the past three years Chinese or English language courses specifically designed for newly arrived EM women; if so, of the number of EM women who attended such courses; and

(3) whether the Government has offered domestic helper training courses conducted in EM languages for enrolment by EM women, in order to help them secure employment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the Government) is alive to the difficulties faced by some ethnic minorities (EMs), including EM women, in integrating into the society due to language barrier and cultural differences. Therefore, various bureaux and departments, according to their policy purviews, provide relevant services and support for EMs to meet their needs so as to facilitate their early integration into the society. The Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB) is responsible for the overall policy on the promotion of racial equality and the Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 602). It has issued the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality to provide guidance to relevant bureaux and departments to ensure equal access to public services by EMs. For example, the Education Bureau implements a series of measures to help EM students learn Chinese. Overseen by the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) and the Labour Department provide

EMs with employment training and support. The Home Affairs Department (HAD) provides support services that help EMs integrate into the community.

After consulting the relevant bureaux and departments, the consolidated reply to the question raised is as follows:

(1) Starting from 2014-15, CMAB has been providing a recurrent funding of \$4.69 million to the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) for enhancing the EOC's publicity and education programmes on the Race Discrimination Ordinance. The EOC has since set up an Ethnic Minorities Unit (the Unit) to promote equal opportunities for EMs, including EM women, through advocacy, training and promotional efforts. Besides, the CMAB provided an additional provision of \$3 million to the Unit in 2017-18 for promoting equal opportunities for EMs. The funded programmes include media campaigns, production of educational publications, and conducting integrated research on EM education, academic and employment pathway with a view to drawing up practical guidebooks for EM youth. The Unit has all along been committed to helping EM women integrate into our community. To this end, a number of leadership groups, including one on Pakistani women and another on Sikh women, were formed last year within these communities with the objective of creating a team of ambassadors who can raise awareness and provide information on equal opportunities to community members as well as channel feedback to the EOC on their concerns.

In addition, the Women's Commission (WoC) was established in January 2001 as a high-level central mechanism on women's issues. Its mission is to enable women in Hong Kong, including EM women, to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life. As at May 2018, amongst the 21 non-official members of WoC, one member is an EM woman. The WoC initiated the Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP) in 2004 to encourage women of different backgrounds and educational levels to pursue lifelong learning and self-development. To encourage EM women to empower themselves through self-learning, the CBMP has offered some courses in English since March 2013. Besides, since 2012, LWB has been providing funding for WoC to implement the Funding Scheme for Women's Development for women's groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for organising projects and programmes which are conducive to women's development. WoC also distributes funding through the 18 District Councils to women's groups and NGOs in organising more district level activities which are conducive to women's development with a view to establishing a harmonious community together. Beneficiaries cover wide-range of women, including grassroot women, new arrival women, as well as EM women, etc.

HAD provides support services to EMs, including EM women, to help them integrate into the community. Major services include commissioning NGOs to operate six support service centres for EMs and two sub-centres to provide tailor-made classes, counselling, integration programmes and other support services. Some of these activities, such as mutual support groups for women, interest classes, health talks, etc, are specifically designed for EM women. With regard to the dissemination of information, HAD publishes guidebooks in English and six EM languages and maintains a dedicated website (www.had.gov.hk/r ru) to introduce public services to EMs; sponsors five radio

programmes in EM languages to provide EMs with local news and important government announcements; and commissions an NGO to distribute information kits to newly arrived EMs at the airport and answer their enquiries.

(2) The ERB has been offering dedicated Chinese or English language courses for EMs, including workplace Cantonese, workplace Putonghua, workplace Chinese (reading and writing), English training, etc. Eligible charitable organisations may also apply for subvention under the Adult Education Subvention Scheme (AESS) to conduct language and re-orientation courses designed for EMs. The numbers of the language courses concerned and enrolled EM trainees, including women trainees, in the past three years (i.e. 2015-16 to 2017-18) are shown in Appendix I.

In addition, HAD also organises language courses to help EMs meet the social needs in their daily lives. In the past three project years, a list of relevant courses organised and the number of EM women participating in such courses are shown in Appendix II.

(3) Currently, ERB has not offered domestic helper training courses conducted in EM languages. If an EM would like to take any retraining course conducted in Cantonese, ERB could arrange teaching assistants who can speak English or EM languages to support in class, or offer subsidy to the training body concerned for development of supporting materials and teaching assistance. Through its Focus Group on Training for Ethnic Minorities, ERB will understand the training and employment needs of EMs and hence provide suitable retraining courses.