

A Study on Ethnic Minorities' Awareness and Satisfaction towards Selected Public Services

Executive Summary

Introduction

Objectives of the Study

1. The aim of the Study is to assess ethnic minorities' (EMs') awareness and satisfaction towards major public services and identify the underlying causes for the phenomena identified in the study. More specifically, the study was pursued on the following terms: –
 - (a) in the interests of having a manageable scope without compromising the depth, the study should cover selected public services of greater relevance to the integration of EMs. It was decided that the following four public services would be covered in the study, namely,
 - (i) employment services of the Labour Department (LD), including job search, referral and employment advisory services provided mainly through its job centres;
 - (ii) training/ retraining programmes provided by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) through its training bodies;
 - (iii) family and child welfare services, services for the youth, community development services, and services for the elderly provided through the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) / Integrated Services Centres (ISCs), Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs), District Elderly Community Centres/ Neighbourhood Elderly Centres as operated or subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD); and
 - (iv) integration services provided by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) through its support service centres and sub-centres for EMs (EM centres), including the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER Centre) which provides general interpretation and translation services in addition to its basic services.
 - (b) the target EM groups would be EMs of South Asian ethnicities (viz. Indians, Nepalese and Pakistanis) as the EM Poverty Report has identified this ethnic group as more vulnerable to poverty risk. They may have a greater need for public services in their integration into the local community; and
 - (c) as one of the objectives to identify underlying causes or factors for the assessed awareness and satisfaction levels with a view to formulating improvement measures, a qualitative study would be conducted via focus group discussions or interviews with stakeholders. Efforts should be made to ensure that the EM participants cover a sufficiently wide cross-section of target EM respondents based on parameters such as age, ethnicity, gender,

socio-economic status and length of residence in Hong Kong.

Methodology

Approach

2. In conducting this study, attempt was made to reach EMs with different economic activity status, language ability and educational level in order to effectively gauge problems faced by them in accessing public services. The measures adopted are summarized below:
 - a) EMs residing in different districts were approached through NGOs serving EMs in different districts;
 - b) A balanced mix of EMs in terms of age, educational attainment and economic activity status (whether employed, homeworkers, unemployed and retired) were invited to focus group discussions;
 - c) Efforts were made to reach out to hard-to-be-contacted EMs who did not participate in activities organized by NGOs. Examples of such efforts were approaching them at the entrance of religious places where EMs usually frequented, and referrals by other EMs using a snow-ball sampling approach;
 - d) To overcome language barriers, EMs were employed as translators/facilitators in focus group discussions in which the discussants do not speak Cantonese, Putonghua or English;
 - e) To further reduce reluctance on the part of female EMs to participate in focus group discussions, female researchers from the Project Team were deployed to be facilitators of focus group discussions when there were female EMs present;
 - f) Separate focus group discussions were arranged for Indian and Pakistani discussants.

Stakeholders consulted

3. A total of 30 in-depth interviews and 16 focus group discussions were held involving 179 stakeholders. A breakdown of the interviewees and discussants is set out below: -

Interviewees/discussants		No. of in-depth interviews	No. of focus group discussions	No. of stakeholders participated
Key informants		6	-	6
Government departments/agencies		11	-	23
Service providers	Support service centres	4	-	6
	Other NGOs	7	-	9
	EM organisations	2	-	5
EM participants*		-	16	130
Total		30	16	179

* EM participants covered a diverse background in age, gender, education attainment, occupation and length of residence in Hong Kong.

4. Out of the 130 EM participants, 34 were Indian, 57 were Pakistani and 39 Nepalese. About 65% of them were female. Approximately 72% of the participants were aged 25-64, with 16% aged between 15-24 and the remaining 12% aged 65 or above. Nearly 58% of EM participants have resided in Hong Kong for more than 10 years, whilst another 21% have resided in Hong Kong for less than 7 years.
5. Out of the 130 EM participants, only 7 were users of all selected public services, while 22 were non-users of any of the selected public services. Of all the participants, less than half were users of services of LD, ERB and SWD, at approximately 31%, 14% and 44% respectively. Approximately 62% of the EM individual respondents have used the services provided by HAD through its EM centres.

Limitations

6. Given the scope and nature of the study, there are a number of limitations as follows: -
 - (a) Views expressed by stakeholders in this study represented their individual comments and insights. The research team was not in a position to verify the statements/ comments made by the discussants.
 - (b) Most EMs whom the research team consulted were not users of public services.
 - (c) Given that one respondent may be the user of services of one organisation and not another, it is difficult to make delineation of service users as opposed to non-service users when collecting their views during the course of the focus group discussions.
 - (d) Non-EM stakeholders consulted may have good knowledge of the needs of EMs through their years of research on and contact with EMs. Nevertheless, they are often not first-hand users of EM services.

Services provided by HAD

7. HAD provides support services for EMs to help them integrate into the community. It commissions NGOs to operate six support service centres and two sub-centres for EMs (EM centres) to provide tailor-made classes, integration programmes, etc. All EM centres are running smoothly. Feedback from service recipients has been very positive and they think that the services can meet their special needs.
8. Apart from the EM centres, HAD also implements other programmes, including

community support teams, ambassador schemes, district-based integration programmes, Harmony Scholarships Scheme, etc. to help EMs' early integration into the community.

9. To disseminate useful information to EMs, HAD sponsors radio programmes in five EM languages, operates a dedicated website and publishes guidebooks in six EM languages and English, and commissions an NGO to distribute information kits to newly arrived EMs and handle enquiries at the airport. To promote racial harmony, EM and Chinese staff of the Race Relations Unit (RRU) under HAD conduct school talks and roving exhibitions on cultural diversity and racial harmony.

Stakeholders' views on HAD's services

10. Most EMs consulted were of the view that the language courses were pitched at the very basic level necessary for "survival". The computer class was also a basic one. EMs were only informed of the availability of training courses at short notices. As a result, many EMs had difficulties in rescheduling their commitments to attend the courses. As regards after-school tutorials for children, the demand is great but the number of places available is not adequate.
11. Several EMs consulted felt that many activities organized by EM centres are recreational activities. It does not help much as far as integration is concerned as participants are mainly EMs. It was pointed out that the ultimate objectives should be to facilitate the integration of EMs in the local community and to enhance harmony among residents of different ethnicities. Activities organized by EM centres to gather EMs together were only the first step.
12. Furthermore, a number of EMs consulted opined that activities organized by EM centres do not have specific target groups within EM community, and fail to take into account the different and diverse needs of EMs. EMs who have recently arrived in Hong Kong have very different needs from those who have been in Hong Kong for quite some time. It was suggested to gather information on EMs who have newly arrived in Hong Kong in order to provide follow up services to them.

Difficulties faced by service providers

13. In organizing activities for EMs, EM centres have difficulty finding venues in convenient locations. High rental of premises has restricted the type of activities EM centres can organize. Furthermore, some EM centres that cannot afford to pay high rental increases have to move to remote locations with lower rental. This has affected these centres' ability to retain existing members and attract new ones.

14. Furthermore, EM centres are only awarded two-year grant agreements by HAD. It is difficult for the EM centres to draw up long-term plans. For school activities, which are usually planned one year in advance, the EM centres have less than a year to plan and conduct activities. This leaves staff at the EM centres very little time to build up its relationship with and engage the EM students, seriously affecting the effectiveness of their programs.

Good practice adopted by EM centres

15. To address EMs' difficulties in finding jobs, certain EM centres organize recruitment days and job fairs for EM job-seekers, where employers can conduct job interviews and make job offers on the spot. The centres also arrange EM job-seekers to join job fairs and employment-related exhibitions organized by other NGOs and LD. Through efforts by the EM centres, employers are encouraged to offer job positions with less demanding requirements on spoken Cantonese. The employment support is considered quite effective in helping EMs find jobs.

Services provided by LD

16. LD provides a wide range of free employment services to job seekers, including EMs, through a network of 13 job centres, three recruitment centres for the catering, retail and construction industry, a Job Vacancy Processing Centre and a Telephone Employment Service Centre. Job seekers may also obtain the latest vacancy information through the Interactive Employment Service (iES) website, its mobile application as well as vacancy search terminals located throughout the territory.
17. Since September 2014, LD has implemented the Employment Services Ambassador (ESA) Programme for Ethnic Minorities to employ trainees of the Youth Employment and Training Programme (YETP) who can communicate in EM languages as ESAs in job centres, industry-based recruitment centres and job fairs for six months. Moreover, since May 2017, LD has engaged two Employment Assistants proficient in EM languages at the Kowloon West Job Centre in Sham Shui Po and the Employment in One-stop in Tin Shui Wai on a pilot basis to strengthen employment support for EM job seekers, especially those of South Asian origins.
18. Furthermore, LD has set up an exclusive e-platform, a dedicated webpage for EM job seekers on the iES website (www.jobs.gov.hk/EM). The webpage, featuring job vacancies which are posted by employers welcoming EM job seekers and having no or little Chinese language requirements, also publishes successful employment stories of EMs.

LD's promotion of employment services to EMs

19. To raise EMs' awareness of LD's employment services, promotional leaflets are prepared in English and six EM languages. Moreover, with the support of the ESAs and Employment Assistants who are also members of the EM communities, LD proactively reaches out to EMs at their popular gathering spots such as mosques, district-based organisations, grocery stores, food establishments, activities targeted at EMs, etc. and distributes these promotional leaflets. In addition, on-going dialogue is maintained with NGOs serving EMs through the network of The Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

LD's promotion to employers

20. LD constantly reminds employers to consider the genuine occupational qualifications of the posts when specifying the language requirements and encourages them to provide bilingual job vacancy information. Employers are also required to specify the four aspects of Chinese language requirements (i.e., reading and writing Chinese, speaking Cantonese and Putonghua) individually and encouraged to open up their vacancies to EM job seekers who have little knowledge of written Chinese as far as practicable. Furthermore, experience sharing sessions are organized for employers to acquaint them with EM cultures and the skills to communicate with them.
21. In addition, LD has been making continuous efforts to canvass vacancies suitable for EM job seekers to enhance their employment opportunities. LD organizes large-scale and district-based inclusive job fairs at which EM job seekers can submit job applications and attend interviews with employers on the spot. In recruiting employers to join these job fairs, special efforts were made to encourage employers to relax the Chinese language requirements.

Stakeholders' views on LD's services

22. Many EMs consulted indicated that they usually obtain information on job availability through family members and friends. They are of the view that jobs offered through LD are mainly manual workers at construction sites or service workers. The job vacancies available are not diverse enough to cater for the employment needs of EMs with different educational levels and skills. Furthermore, the Chinese language requirement of many jobs offered to EMs, including English language teaching, book-keeping and IT jobs, is quite high.
23. There are some comments that LD staff manning the telephone employment service hotline is unable to fully communicate with EMs in English, reducing

the effectiveness of the hotline. Several EMs remarked that sometimes the EM users have to wait a long time for the interpretation service. While most EMs consulted found the LD staff in the job centres friendly and courteous, as far as finding jobs is concerned, their services are not helpful. Several EM users expressed that sometimes they have to wait a long time before obtaining any response from LD. This negative experience could probably be one of the reasons why some EMs were reluctant to make use of LD's employment services.

24. Furthermore, the role of ESAs is rather limited. They only help break the language barriers when EM job seekers try to use the facilities and services at the centres or job fairs. They do not have knowledge about local job market. Full-time staff should be employed. The stakeholders, on the other hand, are glad to note that LD has employed two full-time staff proficient in EM languages starting from May 2017.
25. It was noted by several EMs consulted that some employers may not be aware of EM cultures, including their religious rituals such as fasting during Ramadan and religious prayers (e.g. Salah five times a day), and may be reluctant to adjust the work or office arrangement (e.g. a quiet room for prayer).

Suggestions for LD

26. To help employers, it was suggested that LD should, in collaboration with NGOs, organize seminars for employers to enhance their cultural sensitivity by explaining to employers the working habits and religious practices of EMs. This will facilitate the adoption of good practices conducive to better relationship between EMs and their local Chinese counterparts in the workplace. Similarly, talks or seminars on the local labour market conditions, including the usual work habit and expectations of employers, should also be organized for EM job seekers.

Practices of NGOs considered effective

27. One NGO visited provides follow-up services after they have successfully secured employment for EMs. The follow-up services include providing employers with information on EM cultures and assist both employers and EM employees to understand and adapt to each other's work practices and expectations. Several NGOs also shared the view that such follow-up services are very helpful to both employers and EM employees. They find that a list of "do's and don'ts" in the workplace is often very useful to both employers and EM employees.

Services provided by ERB

28. ERB co-ordinates, funds and monitors training courses and services that are market-driven and employment-oriented so as to meet the changing needs of the employment market. Since 2007, ERB provides dedicated training courses delivered in English to suit EMs' aspirations and training needs. Since October 2016, ERB also subsidises training bodies to develop supplementary training materials and provide learning support services to facilitate EMs who can speak and comprehend Cantonese to attend some 500 training courses provided to members of the public.
29. To facilitate EMs who cannot commit their time for the full length of a course, the Modular Certificates Accumulation Scheme has been launched in 2016 so that EMs as well as other learners can accumulate certificates obtained through several shorter courses in order to acquire a fully recognized qualification which is only possible previously through attending a course of longer duration.
30. ERB reviews from time to time the training courses and services for EMs, and seeks the views of stakeholders in the process. On a periodic basis, ERB meets with the Focus Group on Training for Ethnic Minorities to discuss, among other things, the training and employment needs of EMs. The Focus Group comprises representatives of EM groups, social services organisations, training bodies, employers and relevant government bodies.

Promoting ERB's services

31. To promote the programme to the EM community, pamphlets in English and six ethnic minority languages (including Hindi, Urdu, Nepali, Indonesian, Tagalog and Thai) are published. The Course Prospectus is prepared in English, and advertisements are placed in newspapers in English, Urdu and Nepali to promote the courses for the EMs. The promotional leaflets and Course Prospectus are distributed through diverse channels.
32. Furthermore, ERB sponsors training bodies to organise district-based activities, including district guided tours, course and industry exhibitions as well as job fairs to disseminate training and employment information to members of the public, including EMs, to enhance their employment opportunities.

Stakeholders' views on ERB's services

33. Some EMs consulted indicated that they were not aware of the services of ERB. When they were shown ERB promotional leaflets during focus group discussions, they were interested. The low level of awareness among EMs

consulted may explain their low participation in training courses offered by ERB.

34. For language courses, adverse comments on the quality of training were given by a number of EMs consulted. For instance, they pointed out that changes of lecturers affected the coherence and effectiveness of some courses.
35. It was commented by several EMs consulted that there is restriction on the number of ERB courses an applicant can apply. If a course an applicant applied has been cancelled due to insufficient number of applications, the applicant has to cancel his/her application before he/she can apply for another ERB course.
36. Several stakeholders commented that many job positions do not require training certificates from ERB as a requisite. EM trainees found that even after their ERB training, they can still only find the same types of job positions as before training. This may also explain why there is a lack of interest among EMs in attending ERB courses.
37. It was pointed out that the duration of 6 – 8 hours daily for most of the courses for EMs is not geared to the life practices of many EMs. For EMs who have part-time jobs or who have to take care of their children attending schools, they can only spare 2 – 3 hours to attend classes.
38. On the part of course providers, it was opined that the requirement on the minimum class size has created uncertainty for them, as it is often not possible to fill the class with sufficient number of EM learners.

Services provided by SWD

39. In planning and implementing welfare services, SWD has made reference to the statistics and information on EMs to better understand the social needs of ethnic minorities. “Points-to-note in providing welfare services for ethnic minorities” are issued to social workers / social security staff of concerned units so as to provide reference for serving EMs, including cultural practices of various EM groups and ways to arrange suitable interpretation and translation services, etc. There is a designated person in each administrative district to render internal support to district colleagues for providing welfare services to ethnic minorities.
40. To promote racial equality and enhance the equal access to relevant welfare services, key SWD service pamphlets are offered in 6 EM languages. They are available at service centres and also online. Besides, an eye-catching icon “Information for EM” has been incorporated into SWD’s Internet homepage to facilitate EMs’ easy access to information. SWD Hotline has provided callers of EM groups with instant access to telephone interpretation service in 7 common EM languages so as to facilitate their welfare service enquiry. In addition, SWD has

employed EMs as Welfare Support and Liaison Assistants in IFSCs to assist EMs who seek for help there.

Stakeholders' views on SWD's services

41. Many EMs consulted indicated that they know SWD when they apply for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or Old Age Allowance. However, they do not know other services provided by SWD.
42. In addition, for activities run by NGOs, information leaflets and notices are written in Chinese. This has reduced considerably the chance of EMs who can speak Cantonese to participate in activities not organized specifically for EMs, thereby further inhibiting integration of EMs in the local community through activities in which both EMs and their local Chinese counterparts participate.
43. Furthermore, as revealed by EMs, when they approach the service counters of centres operated or subvented by SWD, they are seldom offered interpretation services even though there are noticeable communication gaps between EMs seeking services on the one hand and frontline staff providing services on the other. More specifically, several EMs consulted pointed out that services provided by subvented youth centres such as counselling are mainly conducted in Cantonese. This has discouraged EMs from seeking help from youth centres.
44. Several EMs also shared their experience seeking help from IFSCs. As many EMs have previous experience or have been told by their friends that interpretation service is not readily available, they have to ask their family members, EM friends or EM social workers to accompany them to IFSCs. EM staff of NGOs consulted also shared their experience of being asked to accompany EMs to SWD to serve as "interpreters".

Recommendations

General

Recommendation 1

45. *Whilst it is noted that certain indicators have been put in place by departments concerned to facilitate examination of the outcomes of services provided by them to EMs, and to assess if such outcomes are conducive to equal access to public services, it is recommended that HAD, LD, ERB and SWD should consider reviewing and, if applicable, refining their indicators from time to time taking into account the changing needs of EMs, so as to better assess the outcomes of their services for further service improvement.*

Recommendation 2

46. *It is recommended that a concerted effort be made by HAD, LD, ERB and SWD to publicize in a holistic manner their services, especially new measures introduced in recent years to help EMs, highlighting in particular success stories.*

Recommendation 3

47. *It is recommended that in delivery of public services, consideration should be given to funding NGOs to provide the services and to delivering the services in partnership with NGOs, with NGOs playing the role of engaging EMs and facilitating the development of mutual trust between EMs and the service providers.*

Recommendation 4

48. *It is recommended that in delivery of public services, consideration should be given to organizing on-the-job training for EMs, through the concerted efforts of employers, relevant government departments, and NGOs with funding support from government, with a view to building mutual trust between EMs and employers.*

Specific recommendations

Services provided by HAD

Recommendation 5

49. *It is recommended that consideration should be given by EM centres to review the operation of EM centres to see if they are meeting the different and diverse needs of EMs to facilitate their integration into the community.*

Recommendation 6

50. *It is recommended that HAD should consider devising a mechanism for following up EMs newly arrived in Hong Kong and commission NGOs to proactively contact these EMs and provide them with services including orientation programmes and language classes geared to the needs of newly arrived EMs.*

Recommendation 7

51. *It is recommended that HAD should actively consider funding more NGOs to providing services to EMs, based on a systematic assessment of demand, with*

emphasis primarily placed on integration through activities involving both EMs and local Chinese.

Recommendation 8

52. *It is recommended that HAD should review the adequacy of funding to EM centres and consider extending the contract to EM centres to more than two years.*

Services provided by LD

Recommendation 9

53. *It is recommended that enhanced follow-up services be provided for EM job seekers and employers employing EMs. Such follow-up services may include providing employers with information on EM cultures and assist both employers and EM employees to understand and adapt to each other's work practices and expectations.*

Services provided by ERB

Recommendation 10

54. *It is recommended that ERB should take step to encourage and facilitate different centres each receiving very few applicants to consolidate their applications such that one centre can commence class with sufficient number of applicants. In addition, ERB should consider offering courses in a more flexible mode, in terms of delivery and class time.*

Services provided by SWD

Recommendation 11

55. *It is recommended that SWD should develop performance indicators on the outcome of its services by EMs, taking into account the actual usage of the services.*

Interpretation services

Recommendation 12

56. *In line with the Administrative Guidelines, it is recommended that the relevant Government departments should approach and fund more NGOs, preferably located in different districts, to provide interpretation services to EMs to ensure their equal access to public services.*

Response by service providers

57. Response from HAD, LD, ERB and SWD on the views of stakeholders and recommendations is set out in Appendix 3 to the full report.