

CHAPTER 4: THE EMPLOYMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITIES**OVERVIEW**

The data pertaining to the employment situation of ethnic minorities depict the following urgent trends that warrant urgent attention:

- There is a higher rate of participation in the labour force among ethnic minorities compared to the working population of Hong Kong as a whole;
- Certain ethnic groups face particular difficulties in securing employment;
- Ethnic minority youth struggle to find employment;
- Elderly ethnic minorities remain in the workforce until well after the age of retirement;
- There is a lower participation rate in the labour force among female ethnic minorities when compared to their Hong Kong Chinese counterpart; and
- A significant percentage of members of certain ethnic minority groups are concentrated in elementary occupations such as catering, construction work or manual labour jobs, typically earning a lower monthly income compared to the working population as a whole.

These trends reinforce the multi-faceted nature of the obstacles faced by ethnic minorities in seeking equal access to opportunities in education, employment, housing, health and numerous other spheres of life. Without due attention to the causes of the current patterns of employment, ethnic minority communities remain vulnerable to the risk of entrenchment in intergenerational poverty.

Further data collection and research is required to examine these trends to better understand their underlying causes and to inform law and policy with respect to resource allocation so that these inequalities can be effectively addressed.

Many ethnic minorities have expressed the difficulties they face in the process of applying for jobs, with the Chinese language requirement being cited as the most significant impediment to being considered for a position, even for jobs for which such skills may be only marginally necessary. Despite these difficulties, very few ethnic minorities seek employment assistance from the Government or from non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) for various reasons, including language barriers, the lack of knowledge that such services are available to them and how the services may enhance their job search prospects.

Moreover, for those in employment, practices of differential and unfair treatment towards ethnic minorities are not uncommon. These include, longer working hours, unfair dismissal, greater workload compared to colleagues, lower wages, lack of opportunities for promotion, etc., among other things. These practices are commonplace despite the existence of the Race Discrimination Ordinance (“RDO”), Cap. 602. The RDO provides measures to seek redress for wrongful treatment on grounds of race on the part of employers or potential employers and even protects complainants against victimisation for reason of filing a complaint under the RDO. Nevertheless, given the difficulties experienced by ethnic minorities in securing employment in the first place, inadequate support, the language barrier or lack of requisite levels of proficiency in Chinese, many ethnic minorities choose to tolerate unfair practices and unequal treatment for fear of

losing their jobs or being blacklisted from seeking jobs due to gaining notoriety as a complainant or troublemaker.

To date, only three extensive surveys have collected data on the employment situation of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. These include:

- A survey entitled, “*A Research Report on the Employment of South Asian Ethnic Minority Groups in Hong Kong*,” conducted by Ku et al., in 2006, published by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (the “**2006 Survey**”);
- A Caritas study in 2010, entitled, “*Survey on Working Conditions of South Asians in Hong Kong*,” (the “**2010 Survey**”); and
- The 2011 *Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*, published by the Statistics and Census Department (the “**2011 Thematic Report**”).

The 2006 Survey consisted of 200 questionnaire surveys covering 4 broad areas - employment situation, employment difficulties, employment assistance and ethnic minorities’ sense of belonging to Hong Kong and 20 in-depth interviews with South Asian ethnic minorities to explore the complex dynamic of employment practices.

For the 2010 Survey, questionnaires were distributed in To Kwa Wan, Tsim Sha Tsui, Central, Jordan and Wan Chai over a five-month period. To prevent domination of interviewees of a certain social class, these venues were specifically selected based on certain considerations in order to maintain the credibility of the findings. A total of 141 questionnaires were completed.

A. LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

In 2011, there were a total of 349,700 ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, constituting 9.9% of the working population. The statistics revealed that a significantly higher proportion of ethnic minorities (65.2%) participated in the labour force compared to the participation rate of the population of Hong Kong as a whole (57.9%).

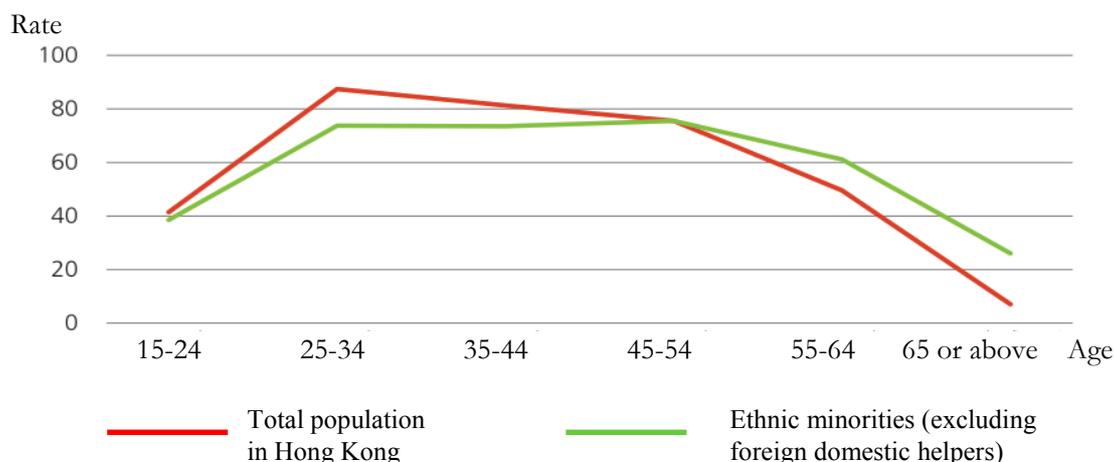
The data in Graph 4.1 below is taken from the 2011 Thematic Report, and provides an overall picture of the labour force participation of ethnic minorities in comparison to that of the general population in Hong Kong:

The breakdown of the statistics by age group reveals that a smaller proportion (73.7%) of ethnic minorities aged 25-34 (excluding foreign domestic helpers) joined the labour force compared to the participation rate (87.4%) of the general population in the same age group.

Table 4.1 Labour Force Participation Rate Among Ethnic Minorities by Age Group in 2011 (excluding foreign domestic helpers)

| Group/Age | 15-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | >65 |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Whole Population | 41.4 | 87.4 | 81.2 | 75.5 | 49.5 | 7.0 |
| Overall, Excluding FDH | 38.5 | 73.7 | 73.5 | 75.5 | 61.1 | 26.0 |

Source: Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2013¹

Graph 4.1 Labour Force Participation Rate Among Ethnic Minorities by Age Group in 2011 (excluding foreign domestic helpers)

Source: Hong Kong Council of Social Service, "Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong" (2013)

One might speculate that the lower labour force participation rate is due to a higher proportion of ethnic minorities being in school. Prima facie, the educational attainment, in terms of the highest level attended, of ethnic minorities is higher than that of the whole population. However, as presented in the Key Demographic Data Chapter and Chapter 3 on Education of Ethnic Minorities (of this Report), this figure is skewed by the higher educational attainments of the Japanese, Koreans, and White groups. Except for Indians, the level of educational attainment among South Asians, namely Indonesians, Pakistanis, Thai and Nepalese, is considerably lower compared to the whole population. This means that schooling is not a possible explanation for the lower participation rate of younger South Asian ethnic minorities.

The statistics therefore signify that younger South Asian ethnic minorities struggle with securing employment.

In contrast, ethnic minorities aged 55 and above tend to stay employed even after they have reached the age of retirement. This could be due to a number of factors, including poverty, larger families, difficulties in securing employment later in life if necessitated, and the tendency of ethnic minority households being single-income families. This could also be due to cultural factors that are unaccounted for or as a result of choice. This is particularly worth considering in light of the fact that there are few, if any, provisions for activities or communities for ageing ethnic minority populations to get involved in. In some cases, the figures could be the result of the level of education, experience, language skills or industry-specific patterns.

Table 4.2 Labour force participation rate of ethnic minorities and general population by gender

| | Labour force participation rate (%) | |
|---------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Ethnic Minorities (Excluding FDH) | Hong Kong General Population |
| Male | 80.1 | 67.0 |
| Female | 49.6 | 53.4 |
| Overall | 65.2 | 59.7 |

Source: Source: 2011 Thematic Report, Table 6.3

If we look at the distribution by sex, 80.1% of male ethnic minorities (excluding foreign domestic helpers) participate in the work force, which is significantly higher than the 67.0% participation of males in the general population but also considerably higher than the 49.6% labour participation rate of female ethnic minorities (excluding foreign domestic helpers), which is lower than the labour participation rate of the females in general population (53.4%). The difference in rates of participation in the labour force between ethnic minority men and women may be the result of cultural, traditional, religious or educational attainment factors or family responsibilities such as household duties and childbearing and rearing. A further breakdown by ethnicity of this group (excluding foreign domestic helpers) reveals a significantly lower labour force participation rate of Pakistani females.

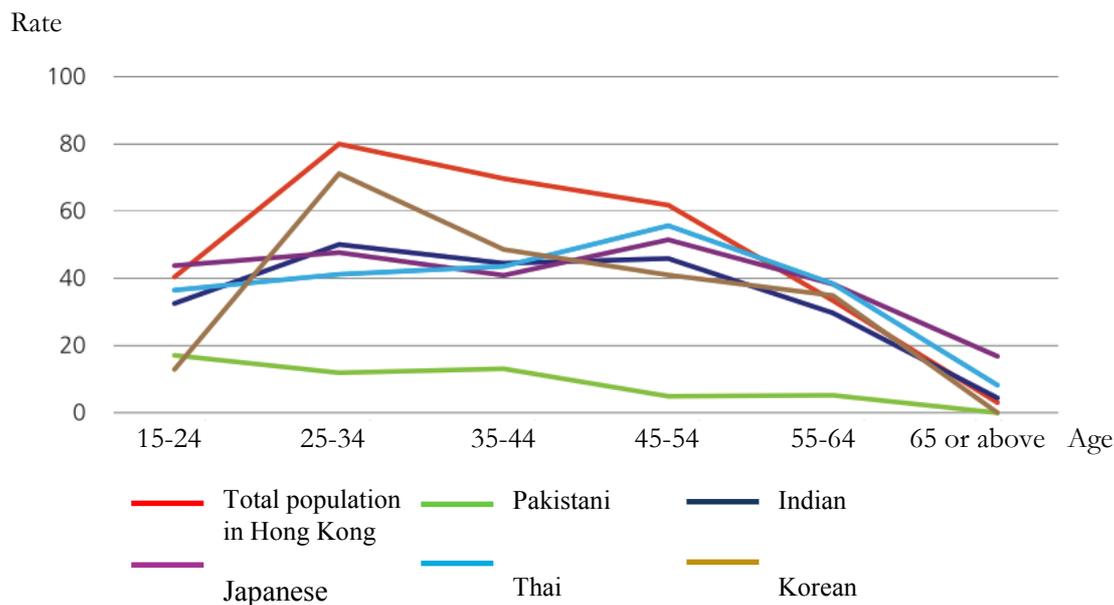
For males, further breakdown by ethnicity (including foreign domestic helpers) reveals that in the age groups of 25-34 and 35-44, the labour force participation rates of Pakistani (80.6% and 85.2% respectively) and Thai (74.7% and 79.6% respectively) men is considerably lower than that of males in the general population as a whole (92.1%, 92.1%). This suggests that it is more difficult for Pakistani and Thai men within the age bracket of 25-44 years to secure employment than for the general population as a whole.

Therefore, although the overall rate of labour force participation reflects that a high proportion of ethnic minorities are in employment, the breakdown by sex and ethnicity reveals that certain ethnic minority groups face more difficulty in securing employment than the general population as a whole or may be opting not to enter the labour force. Those who are in employment continue to face difficulties in other respects. Many of them are confined to certain types of occupations (See Section B1 below) and earn less than the general population (see Section C below). They also face unfair treatment and setbacks in chances of being promoted to senior levels at work.

Table 4.3 Work Force Participation Rate Among Female Ethnic Minorities by Ethnicity and Age (excluding foreign domestic helpers)²

| Ethnicity | 15-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | >65 |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Whole Population | 42.5 | 84.0 | 73.2 | 63.2 | 34.1 | 3.0 |
| Pakistani | 18.9 | 11.9 | 13.1 | 4.9 | 5.2 | - |
| Indian | 44.1 | 63.9 | 53.7 | 52.8 | 30.1 | 4.4 |
| Japanese | 43.8 | 47.7 | 40.9 | 51.5 | 38.3 | 16.8 |
| Thai | 45.1 | 57.1 | 62.3 | 67.6 | 49.4 | 16.8 |
| Korean | 12.9 | 72.2 | 48.6 | 41.0 | 34.9 | - |
| Overall, Excluding FDH | 37.4 | 56.8 | 55.1 | 57.7 | 38.6 | 7.8 |

Graph 4.2 Work Force Participation Rate Among Female Ethnic Minorities by Ethnicity and Age (excluding foreign domestic helpers)³



Source: Hong Kong Council of Social Service, “Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong” (2013)

B. TYPES OF OCCUPATION

B1. Elementary Occupations

Key Finding: A majority (75.8%) of the working ethnic minorities are engaged in “elementary occupations” – i.e. occupations that do not require special skills compared with 19.5% of the general population as a whole engaged in elementary occupations.

The other categories of occupation covered by the Thematic Report were Managers and Administrators, Professionals, Associate Professionals, Clerical Support Staff, Service and Sale Workers, Craft and Related Workers (including construction workers, carpenters, food and beverage processors, jewellery and watch makers, craft workers in garments and textiles), Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers, and Skilled Agricultural and Fisheries workers (including farm and animal husbandry).⁴

Japanese, Koreans, Thais and Indians represented the largest numbers among those who were Managers and Administrators (significantly higher than the 10.1% of the whole population).⁵

Filipinos, Thais, Nepalese and Koreans were among those with the largest share of those engaged as Professionals (considerably higher than the 26.1% of the whole population).⁶

Pakistanis were most highly represented in the clerical workers and service and sales and elementary categories.⁷

A breakdown by ethnicity shows the percentage of select South Asian population groups engaged in such work:

An overwhelming proportion of female working Indonesians (99.6%) and Filipinos (96.9%) were engaged in elementary occupations, most of whom are accounted for as part of the foreign domestic helper population. While a substantial proportion of female working Indians (42.9%), Nepalese (46.6%) and Thais (67.5%) were also engaged in elementary occupations, only 14.9% of female working Pakistanis were engaged in the same. In fact, 42.6% of female working Pakistanis were professionals/ associate professionals. Reading this statistic together with Graph 4.2 which shows that Pakistani women remain the most under represented group in the labour force suggests that the figures may be skewed because they apply to a very small number of this group of women engaged in the labour force.

Table 4.4 Percentage of population engaged in elementary occupations by ethnicity and gender in 2011 (including FDH)

| Population Engaged in Elementary Occupations by Ethnicity and Gender in 2011 | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|----------|
| Ethnicity | Total (%) | Female (%) | Male (%) |
| Indonesian | 99.3 | 99.6 | 42.7 |
| Filipino | 94.4 | 96.9 | 35.9 |
| Thai | 61.5 | 67.5 | 12.7 |
| Nepalese | 42.3 | 46.6 | 39.3 |
| Pakistani | 36.0 | 14.9 | 38.4 |
| Indian | 19.4 | 42.9 | 5.7 |
| White | 2.2 | 4.0 | 1.5 |
| Japanese | 0.9 | 1.8 | 0.5 |
| Korean | 1.1 | 2.5 | n/a |
| Ethnic Minorities as a Whole | 75.8 | 89.9 | 12.9 |
| Ethnic Minorities as a Whole (excluding FDH) | 11.9 | 17.3 | 8.8 |
| General Population as a Whole | 19.5 | 27.1 | 12.3 |

Source: 2011 Thematic Report, Table 6.3

There are two possible explanations: that they do not find work for cultural, traditional, religious reasons or reasons of family responsibilities, including housework and childbearing and child rearing duties that lie on them to a greater extent than their spouses; alternatively, those who are not constrained by these factors do work or have no choice but to work but corresponding with their lower educational attainment levels, they are confined to the elementary populations or they have high educational attainment levels and strive for roles in the Professional or Associate Professional categories when they do enter the labour force.

These figures have not been adjusted to isolate the large number of foreign domestic helpers. The 2011 Thematic Report provided for a figure of 11.9% as reflective of the proportion of ethnic minorities engaged in elementary occupations after excluding

foreign domestic helpers. However, this figure is an average calculated with reference to all the different ethnicities. The 2011 Thematic Report does not provide a breakdown of the figures by ethnicity.⁸

To isolate the effect of including foreign domestic helpers (who are predominantly female) within this set of figures, we can consider the figures in relation to male working ethnic minorities. For working males, 12.3% of the whole population were engaged in elementary occupations, whilst 42.7% of Indonesian, 35.9% of Filipino, 5.7% of Indian, 38.4% of Pakistani, 39.3% of Nepalese and 12.7% of Thai men engaged in the same respectively. As we can see, except working male Thai and Indian, a relatively high proportion of South Asian working males were engaged in elementary occupations when compared to the working population of males as a whole in Hong Kong.⁹

The 2006 Survey shows that around one third of the 200 respondents engaged in elementary occupations; around 30% as service workers and shop sales workers; around 13% as clerks; 19% as managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals and 3% as plant and machine operators and assemblers.

However, a lower educational qualification was not necessarily the reason behind the engagement of ethnic minorities in elementary occupations. Some of them were actually very well educated. For instance, one Nepalese holding an MBBS had to work as a receptionist at a clinic.¹⁰ In another case, an Indian university lecturer was only able to find a job at a foreign currency exchange shop.¹¹ There are many such examples.

B2. Civil Service

Many ethnic minority youths aspire to serve Hong Kong as civil servants but have been unable to fulfil these dreams due to the inherent limitations in the education system that fail to equip them to master Chinese effectively.¹²

At present, most job openings for civil servants require proficiency in the Chinese language, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible for ethnic minority applicants to compete for these jobs. As stated on the official website of the Civil Service Bureau, the Hong Kong Government has an “established policy to maintain a biliterate (Chinese and English) and trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English) Civil Service in order to meet the long-term operational and development needs.”¹³

Whilst it is appreciated that certain civil service posts might genuinely require Chinese reading and writing capabilities, the blanket condition may be unwarranted for other posts, such as drivers and other manual work. However, that these are the only posts possibly exempted from the language requirement is itself problematic because it confines ethnic minorities wanting to join the civil service to merely manual or low ranking civil service positions as opposed to substantive positions despite their other educational qualifications on account of their lack of proficiency in reading and writing Chinese. To insist on the same Chinese requirement for all civil service posts regardless of the actual occupational requirement is unreasonable and undermines the possibilities of attracting talented and diverse individuals to be a part of the civil service.

Taking into account the failure of the education system to equip ethnic minorities with Chinese language skills of a level high enough to enable them to compete meaningfully with their Chinese counterparts, an approach incorporating the principles of substantive equality would require an adjustment to the entrance, promotion and assessment measures to account for the inevitable differences in language proficiency. This is in line with the observation of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which

emphasised the importance of reassessing the Chinese proficiency requirement for each post in the civil service in Hong Kong.¹⁴

Despite being pressed on more than one occasion, the Government still refuses to provide a racial profile of the whole civil service and claims that “it does not have the ethnicity data of the whole civil service because race is not a relevant consideration in the appointment and the promotion of civil servants.”¹⁵ However, to ensure that ethnic minorities are not underrepresented due to discriminatory or unfair policies, whether in operation directly or indirectly, there is a compelling need for the Government to produce such data to allow for an evidence-based assessment of possible reasons that might explain the paucity of numbers in ethnic minority members of the civil service.

The civil service remains a sector in which ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented. In 2011, a voluntary and anonymous survey on the racial profile of the Civil Service was carried out by the Civil Service Bureau, in which a total of 26,671 civil servants were surveyed (representing 17% of the 156,781 civil servants as of 31 March 2011).¹⁶ The results showed that ethnic minorities accounted for a mere 0.8% (225 respondents), with the largest five groups being White, Indian, Mixed, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi (in descending order).

Table 4.5 Number of ethnic minority respondents to the survey by ethnicity

| Ethnicity | Number of Respondents |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| White | 82 |
| Indian | 41 |
| Mixed | 30 |
| Pakistani | 18 |
| Bangladeshi | 15 |

Taking into consideration that “White” does not fall within the term “ethnic minorities” in the context of this report, the actual number for the purpose of this report would be even lower.¹⁷ The 225 respondents were serving in 33 bureaux or departments, including *inter alia*, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Correctional Services Department, the Department of Justice and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.¹⁸

The Police Force and the Correctional Service Departments were amongst the first to review their recruitment policies, relaxing the requirement on Chinese language in appropriate cases.¹⁹ The Hong Kong Police Force has sought to diversify the racial profile of its officers. For instance, since 2010, the Yuen Long Police Station has started employing ethnic minority youths as Liaison Officers to serve as a bridge to their communities. It is also encouraging to see that the Police Force has extended the scheme to hire ethnic minorities as liaison assistants from 5 police districts to 14 police districts.²⁰ In 2012, 16 people from the Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese and African communities were hired as cultural advisors to help spread anti-crime messages and help ethnic minorities integrate into the community.²¹ In the same year, Hong Kong saw the historic appointment of its first South Asian female police constable since the handover, Ms. Heina Rizwan Mohammed, a Hong Kong-born Pakistani woman. Fermi Wong Wai-fun, Founder and

former Executive Director of Hong Kong Unison noted this as a “symbolic first step,”²² particularly in light of the fact that the Pakistani population in Hong Kong has increased by 62.4% between 2007 and 2011.²³

However, we have yet to see the same approach being taken in other public bodies and departments, such as public hospitals, clinics and maternal and child healthcare centres, family services centres of the Social Welfare Department and job centres of the Labour Department. As Hong Kong Unison has urged, “these public bodies and branches of department particularly need staff members who understand the cultures and languages of ethnic minorities. The presence of ethnic minority staff will also enhance visibility of ethnic minorities in the public sphere.”²⁴

This is explored in greater detail in Chapter 2 on Language, Identity, Integration and Belonging of this Report, which looks at issues arising out of language barriers faced by ethnic minorities.

In order to diversify the cultural background of the civil service workforce, the EOC had asked the government to employ more ethnic minorities to set an example for other employers in Hong Kong. The EOC noted that the Government had taken the following steps to promote a multi-cultural civil service workforce²⁵:-

- Reviewing the language proficiency requirements (LPRs);
- Accepting non-local public examination results;
- Adjusting the recruitment process;
- Implementing employment initiatives specific to ethnic minorities.

Increasing the chances of ethnic minorities being hired in civil service is not only a matter of guaranteeing equal opportunities in employment; it is also a necessary measure to reduce the language and cultural gaps that present obstacles to the enjoyment of access to various rights and opportunities in society.

B3. Entrepreneurship

The EOC recently announced results of two funded research projects that it funded, namely “Empowerment through Business: Social Asian Entrepreneurship in Hong Kong”²⁶ and “Breaking through the barriers- Ethnic minority success stories and their implications for policy intervention in Hong Kong”²⁷. The first project interviewed 22 ethnic minority entrepreneurs of Pakistani and Nepalese origin in 2014, while the second project interviewed 9 South/ Southeast Asians on their successful stories of integrating into the local community.

Research results revealed that the performance of ethnic minority entrepreneurs is divergent, as successful, stable, and survival businesses were identified in the research²⁸. Analysis shows that key factors to success include²⁹:-

- Personal attributes such as being perseverant, knowing and focusing on the goal, refreshing oneself with progression continuously, knowing one’s capacity, being strategic in choice-making;
- Social networks assisted in disseminating job-opening information, for instance, through referrals by friends

Ethnic minority entrepreneurs often had limited recourse to formal sources of financing such as bank loans. Since ethnic minorities believed that banks will not even allow them to open bank accounts, such perceived discrimination deterred them from attempting to obtain bank loans.³⁰ Instead of obtaining bank loans, they usually borrow from family or friends due to the bank's requirements for official documents they may be unable to provide (for example, proof of address in country of origin) and perceived racial discrimination.³¹ Also, some Pakistani Muslims consider it inappropriate to borrow from financial institutions.³² In contrast, strong intra-ethnic mutual support in terms of family and friends and informal financial network means easier recourse to funding via the ethnic minority community.³³ Further, the less individual class assets one has (personal cultural capital and bridging social capital), the more dependence one has on ethno-group resources.³⁴

Since ethnic minority businesses are concentrated in a small geographical area, competition is keen. As such, business owners are forced to tolerate late payments by customers in order to retain customers and to avoid bad-mouthing by their co-ethnic fellows.³⁵ Further, interviewees expressed difficulties in hiring Chinese workers because of discrimination and communication barriers. This has undermined their ability to attract more Chinese customers.³⁶ This potentially threatens the viability of such businesses if their product targets the general market rather than the ethnic minority population, for example.

While the ethnic economy empowers ethnic minorities on both the community (by creating networking and bonding space amongst ethnic minorities and enhancing local tourism and social projects) and individual level (by enhancing social status and job opportunity), it is at the same time disempowering in terms of failing to overcome structural barriers, such as the language barrier.³⁷ For instance, 30-year old Khan Khalid, born and raised in Hong Kong, faces enormous difficulties in handling Chinese documentation and hence he could only focus on foreign business.³⁸ He believes that Chinese language education should be made compulsory for ethnic minority students.³⁹

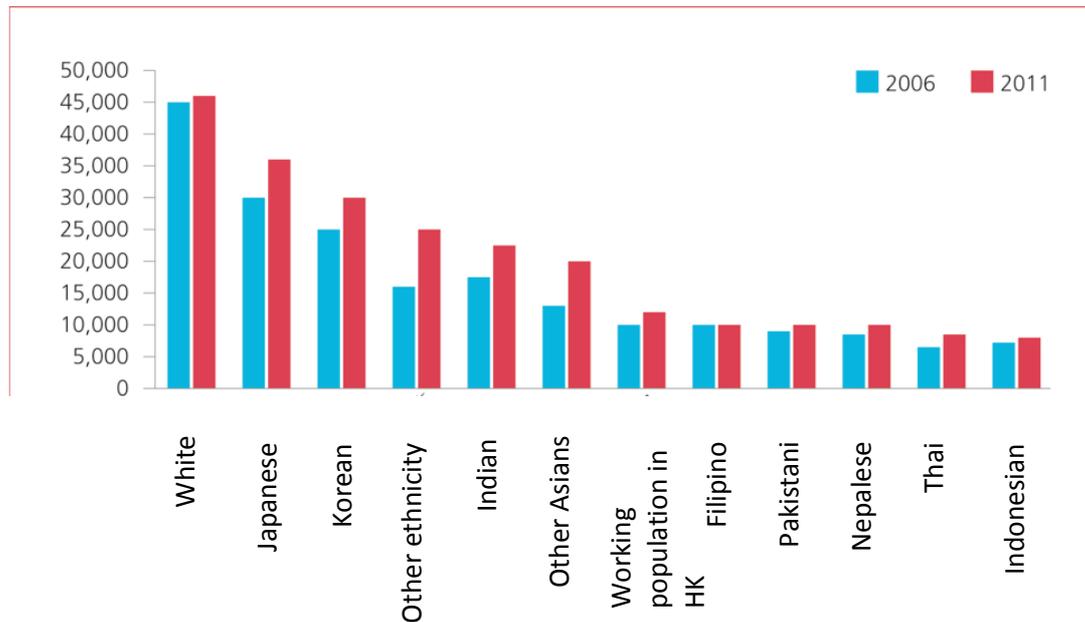
Dr. Ferrick Chu, the Head of Policy, Research and Training Division of the EOC recommended stepping up measures to support petit entrepreneurship of ethnic minorities, particularly in terms of formal sources of financing, and business advice, support and training, and suggested that ethnic minorities could offer valuable resources of local and international tourism in the form of cultural tours.⁴⁰ In particular, the government should act as facilitators to assist ethnic minorities in realizing their entrepreneurial dreams.⁴¹

C. INCOME

In general, from 2006 to 2011, the median monthly income of different ethnic minorities increased. The graph below shows the median monthly income amongst different ethnic minority groups in 2006 and 2011.

In 2011, apart from Indians, the majority of South Asian ethnic minorities (excluding FDH) earned a lower monthly income when compared to the median monthly income of the whole working population.

Graph 4.3 Median Monthly Income Disaggregated by Ethnicity in 2006 and 2011²

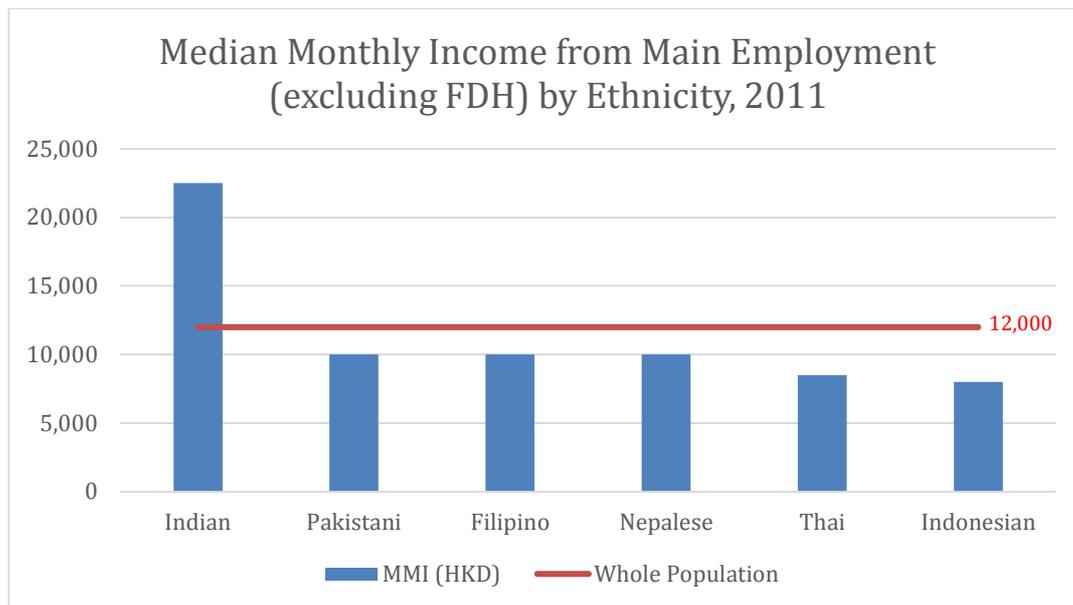


Source: Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 2013

Table 4.6 Median monthly income from main employment (excluding FDH) by ethnicity, 2011

| Ethnicity | Median Monthly Income in HK\$ |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Indian | 22,500 |
| Working Population as a Whole | 12,000 |
| Pakistani | 10,000 |
| Filipino | 10,000 |
| Nepalese | 10,000 |
| Thai | 8,500 |
| Indonesian | 8,000 |

Source: Census and Statistics Department, Thematic Report 2011

Graph 4.4 Median Monthly Income from Main Employment (excluding FDH) by Ethnicity, 2011

Source: 2011 Thematic Report, Table 6.5

The lower income earned by South Asian individuals compared to the Hong Kong Chinese working population is likely attributable to a substantial proportion of them being engaged in elementary occupations (as elaborated in section B1 above). For the same reasons, since Japanese, Koreans, Whites and Indians tend to be in Managerial and Administrative positions, employers or self-employed (7.9%, almost double the rate compared to the whole population), they seem to be earning well.⁴³ However, this does not correspond with the high rates of representation among Professionals of groups such as Thais, Nepalese and Filipinos.

In addition, although the minimum wage law was enacted in Hong Kong in 2010, findings from interviews with 238 South Asian workers revealed that 25% of respondents were underpaid, with approximately 20% of them not earning more than HK\$6,000 a month.⁴⁴

One particular respondent said he worked 24 hours a day as he was not allowed to leave his place of employment during his on-duty days and yet, he was only paid for 12 hours a day.

Staff of the Holy Cross Centre, who conducted the research study, expressed that language barriers made South Asian workers more susceptible to exploitation and the deprivation of their labour rights. They urged the Government to establish a body to examine and address the needs of ethnic minorities.

Table 4.7 Labour Force Participation Rate for Persons Aged 65 and Above by Ethnicity

| Ethnicity | Labour Force Participation Rate for Persons Aged 65 and Above |
|--|---|
| Indonesian (includes foreign domestic helpers) | 9.6% |
| Filipino (includes foreign domestic helpers) | 38.1% |
| Indian | 24.8% |
| Pakistani | 33.0% |
| Nepalese | 45.2% |
| Asians Overall | 29.3% |
| White | 30.8% |
| Thai | 18.7% |
| Mixed | 13.7% |
| Ethnic Minorities Overall (including foreign domestic helpers) | 27.6% |
| Ethnic Minorities Overall (excluding foreign domestic helpers) | 26.0% |
| Whole Population | 7.0% |

Source: 2011 Hong Kong Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities, Table 6.1

Table 4.7 above shows that the majority of the elderly ethnic minority population over the age of 65 continues to work. The highest rates of continued employment in this age group is found among the Nepalese at 45.2% followed by Pakistanis at 33%. 26% of the ethnic minority population over the age of 65 continues to work, compared with 7% of the comparable group in the whole population. That amounts to a difference of nearly four times as much. The question arises, why is this so?

D. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

D1. General Difficulties

The 2006 Survey reveals that 39% of the respondents experienced some form of unemployment in the last two years whilst 59% of them felt that it was difficult or very difficult to seek employment in Hong Kong. 50% felt that they had fewer prospects of being employed compared to their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts. 75% of the respondents attributed their difficulties in seeking employment to not knowing Cantonese / Mandarin, while 37% of them attributed it to not being Chinese, reflecting impressions of perceived racism in the employment market.

Other reported difficulties included:

- Job advertisements written mostly in Chinese;
- Qualifications from home country not being recognized in Hong Kong;
- Low education qualifications impacting competitiveness with other applicants;
- Lack of network or assistance for introduction to available jobs;
- Cultural and/or religious differences;
- Lack of requisite skills;
- Steep fees charged by job referral agencies;

- Lack of English language skills;
- Age discrimination;
- Immigration status and policies affecting them, i.e. conditions of stay, etc.

Among the 190 respondents who reported their means of getting their current or last job, 71.6% of them obtained the job by receiving help from family members, relatives and/or friends, and only 19.5% obtained the job by reading the advertisements on newspapers, magazines or the internet.

In the 2010 Survey, 70% of the respondents reported that it was difficult for South Asians to find a job and 34% of them cited the language barrier as the main reason, noting in particular, that the requirement of both, reading and writing skills in Chinese, worsened the problem. Even among those respondents who had lived in Hong Kong for more than 10 years, 31% still found the language barrier to be the greatest obstacle when seeking employment. Also, 20% regarded racial discrimination as the reason for difficulties encountered in securing a job. The 2011 Thematic Report provides the following overview of the percentage of Cantonese-speaking persons over the age of 5, disaggregated by ethnicity:

Table 4.8 Proportion of ethnic minorities aged 5+ able to speak Cantonese

| Ethnicity | Percentage |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Chinese | 98.8 |
| Thai | 91.1 |
| Indonesian | 85.6 |
| Pakistani | 59.8 |
| Nepalese | 48.0 |
| Indian | 35.3 |
| Filipino | 24.8 |
| Ethnic minorities (total) | 51.8 |

Source: 2011 Thematic Report, Table 4.5

These findings are not inconsistent with the 2006 and 2010 Surveys because there is still a substantial proportion of South Asians who cannot speak Cantonese. Moreover, for those who speak Cantonese, they may not be as fluent as their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts. Further, the 2011 Thematic Report does not provide data on the number of ethnic minorities who can read and write in Chinese, which is a significant skill and overwhelmingly impacts competitiveness in the employment market.

Many speak Chinese well – very fluent but still no job because of no reading and writing. Is Chinese a genuine occupational requirement? If yes, 30% saying they can't read or write it – highlights a problem with an education issue. Second, the large percentage who can't speak, points to a failing and discrimination and lack of integration.

D2. Employment Assistance

The 2006 Survey also looked at the readiness of ethnic minorities to seek employment assistance. 34.5% of the respondents tried to seek help from the Job Centre of the Labour Department. The majority of those who did not seek help (58.8%) thought there was no need to do so, while 26.7% of them did not know about Job Centre. Further, 18.3% of

them considered that the services were not useful and 12.2% of them did not seek help as services were only provided in Chinese.

Table 4.9 Percentage of those who ever sought help from the Job Centre of the Labour Department

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 69 | 34.5 |
| No | 131 | 65.5 |

Table 4.10 Reason for not seeking help from the Job Centre

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| No need | 77 | 58.8 |
| Don't know there is such a centre | 35 | 26.7 |
| No time | 25 | 19.1 |
| The services are not useful | 24 | 18.3 |
| Services are provided in Chinese | 16 | 12.2 |

Among those who did seek help, slightly more than half of them reported that the services were not useful. Reported difficulties they encountered include:

- (i) staff not being able to find a job for them;
- (ii) services being provided in Chinese and
- (iii) staff not being able to understand their needs, not helpful or even having discriminatory attitudes towards them.

It is pertinent to note here that, language barriers, the very factor that often impedes access to the employment market is also a barrier to seeking employment assistance. Moreover, given the higher rate of unemployment among the economically productive category of ethnic minorities (aged 25-44) compared to their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts for this age group engaged in employment, the fact that more than half who turned to such services and did not find them useful, exacerbates the very problem of equal access to employment opportunities for ethnic minorities.

The 2010 Survey showed similar results: only about 20% of the respondents had sought occupational assistance from the Government or other non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”). Reasons for not seeking help included:

- (i) they did not face difficulties or preferred to deal with difficulties on their own;
- (ii) they did not know about the occupational assistance schemes available through the Government or NGOs;
- (iii) they did not know where and who to seek help from;
- (iv) language barriers; and
- (v) they did not think the Government or NGOs could help them solve problems effectively.

Between 2010 and 2012, there were on average 1,000 able-bodied ethnic minorities each year who sought assistance from the Labour Department. Table 4.11 below shows the number of able-bodied job seekers at the Labour Department disaggregated by ethnicity.

Table 4.11 Number of Able-bodied Job Seekers at the Labour Department Disaggregated by Ethnicity

| Ethnicity | No. of Job Seekers | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------|------------|
| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| Pakistani | 284 | 220 | 245 |
| Indian | 285 | 160 | 185 |
| Filipino | 170 | 178 | 158 |
| Nepalese | 146 | 84 | 98 |
| Indonesian | 109 | 78 | 69 |
| Thai | 59 | 66 | 67 |
| Other ethnicity | 181 | 115 | 159 |
| Total | 1234 | 901 | 981 |

Source: Press Release LCQ18: Employment Services for ethnic minorities⁴⁵

The actual success rate of the services provided by the Labour Department is unknown. The Labour Department explained that, able-bodied jobseekers might be placed into employment either through the referral services of the Labour Department or by direct application to employers who advertise their vacancies through the Labour Department. Over 90% of the vacancies advertised through the Labour Department were open for direct application by jobseekers in both English and Chinese. Also, in light of the fact that those who secured employment through direct application were not required to report their placement, the Labour Department was only able to release data relating to placements secured through the referral services.

Table 4.12 below shows the number of successful placements made through the referral services disaggregated by ethnicity.

Table 4.12 Number of Successful Placements Made Through Referral Services Disaggregated by Ethnicity

| Ethnicity | No. of Placements | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| Pakistani | 21 | 11 | 8 |
| Indian | 11 | 10 | 4 |
| Filipino | 23 | 12 | 18 |
| Nepalese | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| Indonesian | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| Thai | 13 | 14 | 8 |
| Other ethnicity | 19 | 8 | 8 |
| Total | 105 | 72 | 61 |

Source: Press Release LCQ18: Employment Services for ethnic minorities⁴⁶

As for ethnic minority job seekers with disabilities, they would be registered with the Selective Placement Division (SPD) of the Labour Department. In 2010, 2011 and 2012,

there were a total of 24, 22 and 16 such jobseekers respectively who sought the assistance of the SPD at the Labour Department. Among them, 4, 11 and 9 successfully sought placements through the employment services of the SPD in the 3 years respectively.

Due to the incomplete data sets, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the actual effectiveness of the services provided by the Labour Department and the extent to which they have successfully assisted ethnic minorities in securing employment. However, respondents stated that these services had not been adequately publicised and made readily accessible to ethnic minorities, which explains the low rates of help-seeking in this regard.

D3. Retraining Services

The 2006 Survey reports that two thirds of the respondents did not join any courses in order to increase their competitiveness in the job market. More than 75% of them reported difficulties in using retraining services in Hong Kong. Reported difficulties included:

- (i) not knowing about the courses;
- (ii) courses being conducted in Chinese;
- (iii) not being able to find suitable courses;
- (iv) schedule of the courses not suitable;
- (v) fees too expensive;
- (vi) not meeting the entrance requirement of the courses;
- (vii) qualification of the courses not useful/ not being recognized.
- (viii) qualification of the courses not useful/ not being recognized.

A survey conducted in 2003 by Hong Kong Unison and City University of Hong Kong reveals specific attendance rates of the eight types retraining courses available in Hong Kong amongst ethnic minorities based on a pool of 402 respondents.⁴⁷ The survey shows that, with the exception of construction-related courses, the participation rate of ethnic minorities in these retraining courses was extremely low. For instance, only about 10% had taken courses run by the Vocational Training Council, 5.5% attended courses run by Youth Pre-employment Training Programme, and less than 5% attended courses run by the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education (IVE), the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme, the Clothing Industry Training Authority, the Project Yi Jin and the Employment Retraining Board. On the other hand, whilst 70% of the respondents attended courses run by the Construction Industry Training Authority, this was probably a result of the legal requirement imposed on persons working on construction sites and cannot be meaningfully compared with the figures for the other seven types of courses. It has, however, been anecdotally noted at the Ethnic Minorities Forum run by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, that such courses are routinely undersubscribed. This calls for a rethink of the structuring of the courses in terms of numbers and to direct resources be allocated to run some of the courses with a lower subscription rate.

E. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN THE WORKPLACE

According to the 2006 Survey, almost 75% of the respondents reported that they faced difficulties of different kinds at work. These include:

- communication problems with supervisors, bosses and/or colleagues;
- not receiving salary on time;
- being bullied by supervisors/ colleagues;
- having conflicts involving cultural or religious practices;
- being unreasonably fired for being an ethnic minority;
- experiencing unequal treatment at work;
- being asked to undertake a heavier workload, etc.

Amongst the problems reported by the respondents, communication problem was the most common and was experienced by over a third of the respondents. Close to a third of them indicated that they could not receive salary on time, although it was not known whether it was a result of any unfair treatment where their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts were paid on time. One out of five respondents felt bullied, which included instances of supervisors or colleagues laughing at, making fun of, humiliating or insulting them. One significant source of conflict was cultural or religious practices, which led about 15% of the respondents into disagreement or argument with their supervisors or colleagues. About 13% of the respondents believed that they were unreasonably fired because of their ethnicity. Last but not least, some respondents stated they were treated unequally at work generally. For example, they cited that they have a heavier workload than their peers.

When asked to compare the treatment they received at work with that of their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts, 42% of the respondents were of the view that they had less chances for promotion opportunities; 25% stated that they had a heavier workload and 24% reported that they had higher chances of being laid off.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

The Chinese language barrier has been cited by many ethnic minorities as an impediment to finding work in Hong Kong. Difficulties might include job adverts in Chinese, qualifications from other countries not being recognized, lack of network for introductions, or cultural and religious differences. Even where they are able to find employment, they are frequently held to different standards and made to work harder or for longer hours than their Hong Kong Chinese peers.

A smaller proportion of ethnic minorities joined the labour force compared to the general population of their peers. Interestingly, however, ethnic minorities aged 55 and above tend to stay employed even after they have reached the age of retirement.

Generally, the statistics suggest that it is more difficult for Pakistani and Thai men within the age bracket of 25-44 years to secure employment than for the general population as a whole. Almost 4 times as many working ethnic minorities are engaged in “elementary occupations” as the figures for the general population and an overwhelming proportion of female working Indonesians (99.6%) and Filipinos (96.9%) were engaged in elementary occupations, most of whom are accounted for as part of the foreign domestic helper population.

Working within the civil service is extremely difficult for ethnic minorities, as proficiency in Chinese is a prerequisite. Whilst it is true that the education system in Hong Kong does not effectively teach ethnic minority students the requisite level of proficiency in Chinese, the imposition of this blanket condition for civil service work may be unwarranted for many posts, such as drivers and other manual work. As a result, the civil service remains a sector in which ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented.

Ethnic minority entrepreneurs often have limited recourse to formal sources of financing such as bank loans and, as many believe that banks will not even allow them to open bank accounts, they are deterred from attempting to obtain bank loans. For those wishing to find employment, around 1 in 4 were not aware of the existence of the Job Centre. Language once again is a key obstacle to access to this kind of assistance.

Around 75% of ethnic minorities surveyed reported difficulties with retraining services, including expenses of fees, not meeting the entry requirements, the language of instruction and inability to find suitable courses. Participation in such courses is therefore very low. Even where retraining courses were advertised as being available in English, there were reportedly conducted with Chinese as the medium of instruction.

Finally, women from specific ethnic groups are clearly underrepresented. The absence of Pakistani women from the workforce is very noticeable. The cause of this needs to be better understood to determine whether this is a gender, cultural or religious issue or one of systemic discrimination.

Overall, if the Hong Kong system is resulting in over 75% who are only able to enter elementary occupations, this is a key issue that needs to be tackled; clearly the education system is failing them in many ways as is the mechanics of entering the labour force on an equal footing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government should encourage more departments to review the LPRs in relation to more ranks of civil service positions to take the lead to set an example of establishing a multicultural workforce⁴⁸;
2. Training and advancement support specifically for ethnic minorities should be strengthened to give them an equal chance in the promotion process⁴⁹;
3. Better education system and multiple pathways to assist with Chinese language learning through courses for basic Chinese offered to ethnic minority communities in different settings.
4. Enhance mentorship, outreach and publicity for job centres and other employment assistance in order to facilitate better job opportunities for the ethnic minority community.
5. In order to increase ethnic minorities' access to public services, the government should take steps to help its civil service workforce develop multilingual abilities⁵⁰ and cultural competence;
6. The government should document in detail and update regularly the data on ethnic minorities in the civil service workforce to keep track of the progress of developing a multicultural workforce and identify areas for improvements⁵¹;
7. Improve ethnic minorities' access to formal sources of finance, by reducing formal requirements for obtaining bank loans, tailoring loan schemes to cater for needs of ethnic minorities, and incorporating ethnic minorities into the existing funding schemes such as the SME Funding Scheme⁵²;
8. Improve ethnic minorities' access to business advice and support services, for example, by setting up a specific support team for ethnic minorities in existing service providers like the Support and Consultation Centre for SMEs⁵³;
9. Provide community-based training for ethnic minorities to enhance their entrepreneurial and language skills;⁵⁴
10. Promote ethnic minority neighbourhoods as potential sources of local and international tourism⁵⁵
11. Ethnic minority women need focused outreach by the government. The standards of teaching, the structural cultural, patriarchal issues that have a gendered impact on their educational and employment experiences need to be better understood so that their poor employment prospects can be tackled.

¹ Hong Kong Council of Social Service, 'Policy Bulletin: Issue Fifteen, Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong' (*Hong Kong Council of Social Service*, 30 October 2013).

² (n 1).

³ (n 1).

⁴ Census and Statistics Department, *Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong SAR Government (2012), p.136-137.

⁵ Census and Statistics Department, *Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong SAR Government (2012), p.75 Table 6.3.

⁶ *ibid* 75, Table 6.3

⁷ *ibid*.

⁸ *ibid*.

⁹ *ibid*.

¹⁰ H B Ku, K W Chan and K K Sandhu, 'A Research Report on the Employment of South Asian Ethnic Minority Groups in Hong Kong' (Hong Kong Polytechnic University 2006) (the "2006 Survey").

¹¹ *ibid*.

¹² Hong Kong Unison, 'Submissions to the Legislative Council Panel on Public Service on the Employment of Ethnic Minorities in the Civil Service, LC Paper No. CB (4)563/12-13(01)' (*Legislative Council*, 15 April 2013) <<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr12-13/english/panels/ps/papers/ps0415cb4-563-1-e.pdf>> accessed 18 September 2015, 5; *The Standard*, 'A ray of hope for ethnic minorities' *The Standard* (Hong Kong, 13 September 2012).

¹³ For specific requirement on language proficiency, see: Civil Service Bureau, 'Appointment Requirements' (*Civil Service Bureau*, 13 March 2015) <<http://www.csb.gov.hk/english/admin/appoint/35.html>> accessed 18 September 2015. The specific requirements on language proficiency vary from one position to another and are advertised from time to time.

¹⁴ Hong Kong Unison, (n 12) 4.

¹⁵ *ibid*.

¹⁶ Civil Service Bureau, 'Legislative Council Panel on Public Service Racial Profile of the Civil Service, LC Paper No. CB (1) 2436/10-11(02)' (*Legislative Council*, June 2011) <<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/panels/ps/papers/ps0620cb1-2436-2-c.pdf>> accessed 18 September 2015.

¹⁷ *ibid*, Annex A. 82 out of the 225 respondents were White. The actual number of ethnic minorities for the purpose of this report would be 143.

¹⁸ *ibid*, §7.

¹⁹ Oriental News, '非華裔佔公務員不足 1%' *Oriental Daily* (Hong Kong, 10 April 2013) <http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/news/20130410/00176_035.html> accessed 18 September 2015.

²⁰ Hong Kong Unison (n 12) 4.

²¹ Choya Choi, 'Ethnic advisers a force to be reckoned with for police' *The Standard* (Hong Kong, 18 June 2012) <http://www.thestandard.com.hk/news_detail.asp?pp_cat=11&art_id=123516&sid=36728782&con_type=1> accessed 18 September 2015.

²² John Carney, 'First South Asian woman police recruit starts work in Yuen Long' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 26 August 2012) <<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1022848/first-south-asian-woman-police-recruit-starts-work-yuen-long>> accessed 18 September 2015.

²³ Census and Statistics Department, 'Hong Kong Population Census Interactive Data Dissemination Service' (*Census 2011*, 2011) <<http://www.census2011.gov.hk/pdf/idds/statistics-classification-idds-en.pdf>> accessed 18 September 2015.

²⁴ *ibid*.

²⁵ Equal Opportunities Commission, 'Submission for the Panel Meeting on Public Service on 20 July 2015 on Employment of Ethnic Minorities in the Civil Service' (*Equal Opportunities Commission*, July 2015) 3.

²⁶ Community College of City University, 'Empowerment through business: South Asian Entrepreneurship in Hong Kong' (*Equal Opportunities Commission*, July 2015) <http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/Upload/UserFiles/File/Funding%20Programme/policy/1314/20150707/CityU-CC_eReport.pdf> accessed 18 September 2015.

²⁷ Flora Lau, 'Breaking through the barriers – Ethnic minority success stories and their implications for policy intervention in Hong Kong' (*Equal Opportunities Commission*, June 2015)

<http://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/Upload/UserFiles/File/Funding%20Programme/policy/1314/20150707/HKSYU_Report.pdf>.

²⁸ Community College of City University (n 26) 12-15.

²⁹ Lau (n 27) 6-9.

³⁰ Alan Yu, 'Pakistani in Hong Kong could run his business 100pc – if only he was made to learn Chinese in school' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 8 July 2015)

<<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/1834408/pakistani-hong-kong-could-run-his-business-100pc>> accessed 18 September 2015.

³¹ Community College of City University (n 26) 18.

³² *ibid* 18-19.

³³ *ibid* 19.

³⁴ *ibid* 33.

³⁵ *ibid* 19-20.

³⁶ *ibid* 20.

³⁷ *ibid* 21-24.

³⁸ 東網, '南亞裔本地營商乏援 難借貸不諳中文成障礙' 東網 (Hong Kong, 7 July 2015)

<http://www.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20150707/bkn-20150707170128211-0707_00822_001.html> accessed 18 September 2015.

³⁹ Yu (n 30).

⁴⁰ EOC announces research findings of two funded research projects on ethnic minorities: see Equal Opportunities Commission, 'The EOC Announces Research Findings of Two Funded Research Projects on Ethnic Minorities' *Equal Opportunities Commission* (Hong Kong, 7 July 2015) <<http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/GraphicsFolder/ShowContent.aspx?ItemID=13157>> accessed 18 September 2015.

⁴¹ 古樂兒 and 黃杏美, '少數族裔營商條件受限制 平機會促政府作推動者' *In Media HK* (Hong Kong, 7 July 2015) <<http://www.inmediahk.net/node/1035752>> accessed 18 September 2015.

⁴² Hong Kong Council of Social Service (n 1).

⁴³ *ibid*, and Thematic Report 2011, Table 6.2.

⁴⁴ Jolie Ho and Jennifer Ngo, 'Quarter of South Asians are underpaid' *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong, 9 July 2012) <<http://www.scmp.com/article/1006296/quarter-south-asians-are-underpaid>> accessed 18 September 2015.

⁴⁵ Hong Kong SAR Government, 'Information extracted from Press Release LCQ18: Employment Services for ethnic minorities' (*Information Services Department*, 13 November 2013) <<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201311/13/P201311130454.htm>> accessed 18 September 2015.

⁴⁶ *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Working Group of the Social Integration Project for Ethnic Minority People in Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong and Unison Hong Kong, *A Research Report on the Employment Situation of South Asian People in Hong Kong* (Centre for Social Policy Studies 2003).

⁴⁸ Equal Opportunities Commission (n 25) 3-4.

⁴⁹ *ibid*.

⁵⁰ *ibid*.

⁵¹ *ibid*.

⁵² Lau (n 27) 30-32.

⁵³ *ibid*.

⁵⁴ *ibid*.

⁵⁵ *ibid*.