
Chapter 3

Poverty Alleviation and Support for the Disadvantaged

Preamble

The Commission on Poverty (CoP) will continue to consider policies and measures in its new term to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion, as well as to promote social mobility. One of the CoP's working priorities in the future is to conduct an extensive public consultation on how retirement protection could be improved to ease poverty among the elderly. Four Task Forces have been established, focusing on supporting the underprivileged who have special needs; promoting education, employment training and other measures to enhance upward mobility of young people from grassroots families; implementing poverty alleviation and prevention measures funded by the Community Care Fund; and taking forward social innovation initiatives funded by the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund respectively.

There is significant improvement in the overall poverty situation in 2013, indicating that our poverty alleviation initiatives are yielding results. With the full implementation of the Old Age Living Allowance by the current-term Government, the poverty alleviation policy in 2013 produced the most notable result of the last five years. The poor population in Hong Kong dropped from 1.04 million in 2009 to 970 000 (below 1 million for the first time) in 2013. The poverty rate also dropped from 16.0% to 14.5%. The 2013 poverty statistics show that

the working poor is still the group that deserves Government's priority attention. The Low-income Working Family Allowance is now in the pipeline, and will provide low-income families, particularly those with children, with financial support.

As regards those disadvantaged members of the community who cannot support themselves, we will continue to meet their basic living needs through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme, which acts as a safety net of last resort. Regarding those who are capable of work, education, training and employment support will be enhanced to enable them to share the benefits of economic growth. To help address intergenerational poverty, we will ensure that children and young people enjoy opportunities to quality education and training irrespective of their background.

We will strengthen the support for persons or families with special needs, including persons with disabilities, mental patients and ex-mentally ill persons, ethnic minorities, and single parents and their families. The aim is to remove the barriers that hold them back from realising their potential. We will continue to develop client-centred, family-focused and community-based services that provide integrated and cross-sectoral support.

New Initiatives

We will:

Poverty Alleviation

(a) Community Care Fund (CCF) Programmes

- Invite the CCF to consider exploring the feasibility of implementing a pilot scheme at suitable elderly centres to provide integrated medical and rehabilitation services for demented elderly persons living in the community based on a model of medical-social collaboration. (FHB/LWB)
- Expand the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme progressively to cover elders who are Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) recipients in the second half of 2015, starting with those aged 80 or above in the first phase. (FHB)
- Incorporate the CCF programme of providing extra travel subsidy for needy special school students into the Government's regular assistance programme starting from the 2015/16 school year. (EDB)

(b) Retirement Protection

- Study the findings of Professor Nelson Chow and his consultancy team as set out in the Research Report on Future Development of Retirement Protection in Hong Kong, and the Commission on Poverty (CoP) will launch a public consultation in the second half of 2015 on the way forward for retirement protection. (CSO)

Supporting the Disadvantaged

(a) Supporting Families

- Strengthen community support services for families by increasing the manpower for Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres. (LWB)
- Earmark \$200 million to continue implementing short-term food assistance services. (LWB)

(b) Enhancing Services for the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities and Persons with Mental Illness

- Extend the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities to green minibuses in phases starting from the first quarter of 2015. (LWB)
- Increase the manpower of long stay care homes and enhance the allied health services of hostels for moderately mentally handicapped persons to provide care and support for ageing service users. (LWB)
- Increase the manpower of Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness to provide more intensive counselling and support for families/carers of ex-mentally ill persons, with a view to alleviating their caregiver stress and consolidating their mutual help network. (LWB)
- Launch a pilot project to strengthen the support for persons with autism and their parents/carers. (LWB)

- Actively explore the inclusion of sign language courses in the scope of the Continuing Education Fund. (LWB)
- (c) Support for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Strengthen the services of the existing six Child Assessment Centres to provide early assessment and professional diagnosis for children with developmental problems. (FHB)
 - Launch a pilot scheme to invite non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating subvented pre-school rehabilitation services to provide on-site rehabilitation services for children with special needs who are studying in ordinary kindergartens, or kindergarten-cum-child care centres. (LWB)
 - Invite the CCF to consider launching the following new programmes to strengthen support for students with SEN –
 - provision of a cash grant for ordinary schools with relatively more students with SEN and financial needs to strengthen the teaching team of the schools so that a designated teacher can be deployed to co-ordinate matters relating to SEN support; and
 - enhancement of the academic expenses grant for post-secondary students with SEN and financial needs. (EDB)
 - Increase the manpower of subvented Parents/Relatives Resource Centres to enhance the support for parents and relatives/carers of persons with disabilities and ex-mentally ill persons, including children or young persons with special needs. (LWB)

Community Involvement

- Allocate resources through the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund to promote cross-sectoral collaboration in building mutual help networks among residents of new PRH estates and developing social capital. (LWB)

On-going Initiatives

We are:

Work of the Commission on Poverty

(a) CoP

- Updating the poverty line annually to monitor Hong Kong's poverty situation on an on-going basis and provide scientific data for policy formulation and effectiveness evaluation. (CSO)
- Reviewing the existing policies and exploring new measures to prevent and ease poverty through the work of its Task Forces. (CSO)
- Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration in promoting poverty alleviation, and maintaining exchange and communication on poverty alleviation work with other government advisory boards and committees. We will continue implementing the "Future Stars Programme" through tripartite collaboration of the community, business sector and the Government to provide young people from grassroots families with opportunities for corporate visits, short-term workplace training and internship. (CSO)

(b) CCF Task Force

- Implementing a number of assistance programmes under the CCF. The programmes rolled out in 2014-15 include –
 - providing hostel subsidy for needy undergraduate students who reside in hostels;

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- increasing the academic expenses grant for needy students pursuing eligible self-financing post-secondary programmes;
 - implementing a pilot incentive scheme to encourage able-bodied Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients to seek employment;
 - providing a one-off subsidy again for CSSA households living in rented private housing and paying a rent which exceeds the maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme; and
 - providing a living subsidy again for low-income households not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA.

Moreover, seven CCF programmes have been incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programme. The CCF will continue to draw up more new pilot programmes in collaboration with the other Task Forces under the CoP to further assist the disadvantaged and low-income families. (CSO)

(c) Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund Task Force

- Engaging intermediaries to implement the capacity building programmes and provide funding support under innovative programmes, continuing to make preparation for the flagship project on food assistance with a view to setting up information infrastructure and network for more effective operation of stakeholders involved in food assistance projects. (CSO)

- Considering as the next stage of work, how best to strengthen social innovation ecosystem and encourage the use of innovative commercial practices to address social needs. (CSO)

(d) Special Needs Groups Task Force

- Reviewing the existing policies and initiatives which support the underprivileged with special needs (including persons with disabilities, students with special learning needs, single-parent families, new arrivals and ethnic minorities). (CSO)
- Exploring new policies and initiatives to help the underprivileged with special needs integrate into the community, achieve self-reliance and move up the social ladder. (CSO)

(e) Youth Education, Employment and Training Task Force

- Reviewing and exploring policies and initiatives related to young people, including education, employment and training, to remove the barriers they face and provide them with equal development opportunities, thereby facilitating their upward mobility and reducing the risk of intergenerational poverty. (CSO)
- Exploring new policies and initiatives and enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration, in the light of the economic development and social situation in Hong Kong, for the promotion of life planning, diversified development, vocational training and continuing education to help young people from grassroots families realise their potential. (CSO)

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- Conducting academic research and data analysis to understand social mobility in Hong Kong from individual and intergenerational perspectives. (CSO)

Poverty Alleviation

(a) Helping Low-income Families

- Making arrangements to introduce the Low-income Working Family Allowance to encourage employment and strengthen the support for the next generation. (LWB)
- Implementing the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme and conducting a comprehensive review. (LWB)
- Implementing the short-term food assistance services. (LWB)

(b) Enhancing Upward Mobility

- Continuing to roll out projects under the Child Development Fund and exploring ways to develop school-based programmes to promote the long-term development of children from a disadvantaged background. (LWB)
- Implementing various student financial assistance schemes to ensure that no student in Hong Kong will be denied access to education due to a lack of means. (EDB)
- Incorporating the following three CCF programmes into the Government's regular assistance programme starting from the 2014/15 school year –

- enhancement of the financial assistance for needy students pursuing eligible programmes below sub-degree level;
 - provision of free lunch at schools for primary students receiving full grant assistance under the Student Financial Assistance Schemes through the schools; and
 - enhancement of the flat-rate grant for primary and secondary students under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme. (EDB)
- Providing a subsidy of up to HK\$15,000 starting from the 2014/15 academic year for needy students pursuing full-time locally-accredited undergraduate or sub-degree programmes and receiving student financial assistance. The subsidy serves as an incentive for them to participate in exchange programmes outside Hong Kong. (EDB)
 - Enhancing the After School Care Programme organised by NGOs for children aged 6 to 12 by extending the service hours of some centres and providing additional fee-waiving and fee-reduction quotas. (LWB)
- (c) Social Security and Retirement Protection
- Providing rent allowance for CSSA recipients who have been Tenants Purchase Scheme flat owners for more than five years. Originally a CCF programme, this initiative has been incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programme since 2014-15. (LWB)

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- Reviewing the OALA to ascertain, among other things, whether the asset limits should be relaxed. (LWB)
 - Exploring the feasibility of extending the OALA to Guangdong, having regard to the operating experience gained from the implementation of the Guangdong Scheme. (LWB)
 - Seeking an early launch of the “core fund” through legislation. The “core fund” will be a default fund of the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) schemes. It is subject to fee control and is based on a long-term investment strategy to balance investment risk and return, with the aim of facilitating the choice of fund by MPF scheme members and achieving more substantial reduction in MPF fees. (FSTB)
 - Striving to secure early enactment of the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes (Amendment) Bill 2014 to enhance the MPF System by providing more flexible arrangements for scheme members to withdraw their accrued benefits and for promoting reduction in MPF fees. (FSTB)

Supporting the Disadvantaged

(a) Supporting Families

- Increasing in phases the number of residential child care places to enhance support and protection for children and families in need. (LWB)

- Following up the Law Reform Commission Report on Child Custody and Access, including preparing legislative and implementation proposals with an aim to further consult stakeholders before embarking on legislation. (LWB)
 - Combating domestic violence through the provision of preventive, supportive and specialised services for victims and families in need, as well as conducting publicity and public education. Counselling and psycho-educational services are also provided for batterers to change their abusive attitude and behaviour. (LWB)
 - Monitoring the implementation of the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance. (LWB)
 - Providing support services for victims of sexual violence. (LWB)
- (b) Enhancing Services for Persons with Disabilities and Persons with Mental Illness
- Promoting the spirit and core values enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, the rehabilitation sector and the public at large. (LWB)
 - Reviewing the eligibility criteria of the Disability Allowance under the Social Security Allowance Scheme. (LWB)
 - Improving rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities by providing additional day, residential and pre-school places. (LWB)

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- Providing subsidy for pre-school children from low-income families to obtain self-financing rehabilitation services run by NGOs while they are wait-listing for subvented services so as to facilitate their learning and development. Originally a CCF programme, this initiative has been incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programme since 2014-15. (LWB)
 - Providing transitional support services for tetraplegic patients discharged from hospitals through the Transitional Care and Support Centre for Tetraplegic Patients. (LWB)
 - Providing home care services for persons with severe disabilities on a territory-wide basis. (LWB)
 - Providing subsidy for needy persons with severe physical disabilities who live in the community and require constant care to cover their expenses for renting medical equipment and purchase of medical consumables. Originally a CCF programme, this initiative has been incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programme since 2014-15. We are also providing one-stop support services (including casework counselling, occupational therapy/physiotherapy, nursing care service and financial support service) co-ordinated and arranged by case managers in accordance with the needs of these persons to enable them to continue living in the community and integrate into society. (LWB)
 - Continuing to implement the case management service with the additional manpower provided for District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities in 2014-15. (LWB)

- Continuing to provide funding to enhance the support for the operation and development of the Financial Support Scheme for Self-help Organisations for Persons with Disabilities/Chronic Illnesses. (LWB)
- Enhancing sign language interpretation services for persons with hearing impairment with the additional manpower provided for Multi-service Centres for Hearing Impaired Persons and relevant Social and Recreational Centres for the Disabled in 2014-15. (LWB)
- Strengthening the support for athletes with disabilities by means of the \$200 million injected into the Hong Kong Paralympians Fund. (LWB/HAB)
- Continuing to provide short-term day and residential care services for persons with disabilities to relieve the stress of their families/carers. (LWB)
- Implementing the statutory licensing scheme for residential care homes for persons with disabilities and complementary measures to regulate their operation and ensure service quality. (LWB)
- Implementing the Bought Place Scheme for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities to –
 - upgrade the service standards of private residential care homes for persons with disabilities;
 - help the market develop more service options for persons with disabilities; and

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- increase the supply of subsidised residential care places. (LWB)
 - Enhancing care and support services for ageing service users in rehabilitation service units. (LWB)
 - Enhancing the manpower in Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness to provide one-stop district-based community support services for ex-mentally ill persons, persons with suspected mental health problems, their families/carers and local residents. (LWB)
 - Promoting the employment of persons with disabilities by –
 - (i) providing allowance for employers under the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme to encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities and provide them with on-the-job training and support; and (ii) increasing job attachment allowance and wage subsidy under the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities and the Sunnyway-On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities;
 - providing subsidy for employers for procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications;
 - providing financial incentive for mentors rendering workplace assistance and guidance to employees with disabilities; and

- promoting the Talent-Wise Employment Charter and Inclusive Organisations Recognition Scheme to mobilise employers in the territory to actively participate in facilitating the employment of persons with disabilities. (LWB)
- Providing support for businesses funded under the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project to create more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. (LWB)
- Implementing measures to ensure that persons with disabilities will have equal access, like other applicants, to job opportunities in the Government. (CSB)
- Continuing to upgrade barrier-free facilities in government venues and Housing Authority properties. (LWB)
- Enhancing transport services for persons with disabilities through improvement to rehasub service. We are also examining ways of further improving the accessibility of transport services for persons with disabilities. (LWB/THB)
- Implementing the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities to enable elderly people aged 65 or above and eligible persons with disabilities aged below 65 to travel on the general Mass Transit Railway lines, franchised buses and ferries anytime at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip, with a view to building a caring and inclusive society by encouraging them to participate more in community activities. (LWB)

(c) Services for Ethnic Minorities (EMs)

- Continuing to implement various measures for the EMs to facilitate their early integration into the community, including –
 - provision of various dedicated programmes such as language classes and adaptation courses for the EMs through six support service centres and two sub-centres, including the new one in Kwai Tsing District, which commenced operation in October 2014;
 - provision of dedicated programmes such as sports and cultural activities to help the personal development of EM youths through the youth units set up in the support service centres and sub-centres for EMs. The youth units in all the support service centres and sub-centres came into full operation in late July 2014;
 - implementation of Ambassadors Scheme for EM youths since late July 2014 to proactively reach out to these young people, understand their aspirations and difficulties, and make referrals where necessary; and
 - enhancement of support services for EMs by deploying non-civil service contract staff who are familiar with the cultures and languages of the EMs. The newly recruited staff members reported for duty in late 2014. (HAB)
- Implementing measures to ensure that the EMs will have equal access, like other applicants, to job opportunities in the Government. (CSB)

- Operating a new youth college under the Vocational Training Council (VTC) starting from the 2012/13 academic year to support non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students and students with SEN, and to provide them with alternative progression pathways. (EDB)
- Reviewing and implementing various support measures for NCS students, including the implementation of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” and related support measures, and providing Applied Learning Chinese Course (for NCS students) as an alternative recognised qualification for further studies or employment to facilitate their mastery of the Chinese language in a structured manner and integration into the community. We are also formulating a research framework to evaluate the effectiveness of various support measures. (EDB)
- Continuing with the work of the Police to engage with the EMs and to promote to them police services and fight crime initiatives. The number of EM Junior Police Call members increased to 2 500 in 2014. The Police will continue to encourage EM youths to join the Junior Police Call. (SB)

(d) Supporting Students with SEN

- Supporting students with SEN in the VTC through an annual provision of \$12 million starting from 2013-14. (EDB)

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- Continuing to provide additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help primary and secondary schools cater for their students with SEN, including expanding the School-based Educational Psychology Service to cover all public sector primary and secondary schools by the 2016/17 school year. We also adjust the rates of the Learning Support Grant on an annual basis according to the established mechanism. (EDB)
 - Continuing to implement improvement measures in special schools, including the provision of an additional grant to enhance the support for boarders with complex medical conditions, strengthening manpower for boarding services, providing additional teacher assistants for some special schools, and progressive reduction of class size in schools for children with visual impairment and schools for social development. (EDB)

(e) Promoting Digital Inclusion

- Implementing various digital inclusion programmes to help underprivileged groups (including the elderly, persons with special needs and students from low-income families) use ICT to enhance their opportunities and integrate with society. (CEDB)

(f) Strengthening Cross-sectoral Collaboration

- Encouraging further cross-sectoral collaboration through the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged to launch projects that can cater for the various needs of the disadvantaged and benefit more people. Dedicated fund is set aside to provide more after-school learning and support programmes for primary and secondary school students from grassroots families. (LWB)

Social Welfare Planning and Administration

- Identifying suitable sites and facilitating provision of necessary manpower resources to meet the current and future needs of social welfare services. (LWB)
- Continuing to implement the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, under which targeted assistance is provided for participating social welfare organisations during the planning or development process. The scheme is aimed at providing diversified services and self-financing facilities, in particular elderly and rehabilitation service facilities. (LWB)
- Enhancing the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System by providing an additional recurrent funding of about \$470 million in 2014-15 to strengthen central administrative and supervisory support for NGOs, enhance “Other Charges” that cover other operating expenses such as food costs, assist NGOs in recruiting and retaining paramedical staff more effectively or in hiring paramedical services, and allow NGOs more flexibility in using the Provident Fund reserve. The Government will continue to monitor the implementation of these measures. (LWB)
- Continuing with the consultancy study on the feasibility of setting up a centralised platform to provide one-stop and user-friendly administrative service to receive, process and approve applications for public benefits. (CSO)