

# International Youth Day: HK's ethnic minority youth need better Chinese education to combat poverty | Hong Kong Free Press

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## International Youth Day: HK's ethnic minority youth need better Chinese education to combat poverty

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[Hong Kong Unison](#)

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In this seemingly well-to-do city, International Youth Day 2016 perhaps does not mean much to the Chinese youth in Hong Kong. However, to a group of local ethnic minority youth aged between 15 and 24, roughly about 20,000 in number (according to Census 2011), the theme this year may be of some significance – the leading role of young people in eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development.



File photo: GovHK.

According to the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2014, the poverty rate of South Asians was at 22.6%, higher than the overall Hong Kong population of 15.2%. Education is crucial to the alleviation of inter-generational poverty, yet South Asians aged 19 to 24 have a rather low school attendance rate (26.4%) compared to the whole population (44.4%).

How can these youth contribute meaningfully to eradicating poverty when language proficiency was observed to be a major barrier to integration with the local community? Many ethnic minority youth who

Hong Kong Unison worked with had a difficult education experience because of the lack of a suitable Chinese as a second language curriculum and support.

**一齊同學，  
未能同樂。**

我學不好不是我懶惰

現時的教育沒有「中文作為第二語言」的課程，語言不通，阻礙了這群少數族裔新一代的競爭力，使他們難以脫貧。香港融樂會倡議政府發展一個切合少數族裔需要的中文課程，在2004-06年間，少數族裔學生在全港十六學校評定的中文科成績排名為最低的25%。

**Chinese Learning for my needs**

I never avoid learning. Currently, there is no Policy of "Chinese as a Second Language" in the Hong Kong education system. The language barrier makes ethnic minority students less competitive and they have difficulty getting out of the poverty trap. HONG KONG UNISON calls on the Government to establish an alternative Chinese Curriculum and Assessment Mechanism that will meet the needs and rights of its ethnic minority residents. From 2004 to 2006, ethnic minority students scored among the lowest 25% on the Chinese Attainment Test.

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A campaign poster for better access to Chinese-language learning in Hong Kong. Photo: Oxfam.org.uk.

Waqas, an ethnic minority youth of Pakistani descent who is born and raised in Hong Kong and has recently graduated from City University, laments that many schools that admit ethnic minorities only offer a low level of Chinese. Hence, no matter how diligent ethnic minorities are and how well they do in other subjects, the level of Chinese for many of them is at Primary 2/3 when they graduate from Form 6.

Proficiency in the Chinese language is one of the keys to integrating into the community and getting out of the poverty cycle. Catching up on Chinese now, he hopes ethnic minority youths can overcome the language barrier to prove people who doubt their talents, abilities and hard work wrong.



The Chief Secretary for Administration Carrie Lam visits Hong Kong Unison. Photo: GovHK.

The government should take education issues that ethnic minorities face seriously and provide effective support measures for non-Chinese speaking students so that ethnic minority youth can have equal opportunity to participate in the Hong Kong society.

As Waqas reflects on this International Youth Day, he is sure in the near future we will see more home-grown successful ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, contributing to the society to combat poverty, marginalisation and despair, and achieving equitable socioeconomic development.