

Measures to boost banking access for ethnic minorities

Concerns are growing that a "banking underclass" is emerging in Hong Kong due to the combined effects of racial discrimination and a system of redress so cumbersome that people have given up complaining.

In a move to address the problem - which has become increasingly difficult to quantify due to a falling number of formal complaints - the Hong Kong Monetary Authority has introduced a series of measures aimed at improving ethnic minority access to basic financial services which the rest of the population take for granted.

Both the authority and an advocacy group have urged people from the ethnic minority community, which numbers more than 350,000, not to lose faith in the complaints system.

Last year, advocacy group [*Hong Kong Unison*](#) received just seven complaints about possible discrimination against ethnic minority people who tried to open a bank account or access financial services. The Equal Opportunities Commission said it had only one such complaint under the Race Discrimination Ordinance. The HKMA said it received none.

The latest figures are in apparent contradiction to a study by the equal opportunities watchdog in September last year, which found 33 per cent of non-white people of different ethnic backgrounds faced discrimination from financial services providers.

Unison campaign officer Kayla Tam said the group received many unofficial complaints, but most do not go through the proper process because it can "take up to one year" to resolve. Most would rather drop the issue, try to resolve it on their own, or try their luck at another bank. Tam said people need to come forward in order to tackle discrimination.

The head of banking conduct at the monetary authority, Sarah Kwok, said people had to file a complaint to tackle the issue and determine whether it warranted further action. "From these complaints, we obtain useful insight and put out improvement measures based on concrete difficulties they are facing," she said.

The authority said it has taken multiple steps to tackle banking issues faced by ethnic minorities.

A common problem is providing address proof. The authority took steps to ensure banks accept more samples of address proof, raising the number to at least 14. Kwok said the complaints form was simplified in May last year, requiring less personal information.

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ECONOMY

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