



Equal Opportunities Commission

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is an independent statutory body set up in 1996 to implement the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (SDO), the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO), the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance (FSDO) and the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO). The EOC works towards the elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status, pregnancy, disability, family status and race.

The EOC also aims to eliminate sexual harassment; harassment and vilification on the grounds of disability and race; and promote equality of opportunities between men and women, between persons with and without a disability, persons of different races and irrespective of family status. The work of the EOC includes investigation and conciliation, education and promotion, review of legislation and issuing codes of practice and guidelines.

The Ordinances: The SDO and the DDO came into full operation in December 1996. Under the SDO, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of sex, marital status or pregnancy in the specified areas of activities, or sexually harass a person. The law applies to both males and females. Under the DDO, it is unlawful to vilify a person with a disability in public, or discriminate against or harass a person on the ground of disability in the specified areas of activities.

The FSDO came into force in November 1997. Under the FSDO, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the ground of family status. Family status means the status of having a responsibility for the care of an immediate family member. Immediate family member in relation to a person means someone who is related to the person by blood, marriage, adoption or affinity.

The RDO came into full operation in July 2009. Race in relation to a person means the race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin of the person. It is unlawful under the RDO to vilify a person on the ground of race in public, or discriminate against or harass a person on the ground of race, in specified areas of activities.

The areas of activities covered by the four above-mentioned ordinances are broadly the same, including employment; education; provision of goods, facilities or services; disposal or management of premises; eligibility to vote for and to stand for election of public bodies; and participation in clubs.

Investigation and Conciliation: The EOC investigates into complaints lodged under the four ordinances and encourages conciliation between the parties in dispute. Where conciliation fails, a complainant may apply to the EOC for other forms of assistance including legal assistance. The EOC also conducts formal investigation into discriminatory practices where appropriate.

Education and Promotion: The EOC is committed to promoting the concept of equal opportunities through education and promotion. The EOC builds partnership with government and non-government organisations in working towards the elimination of discrimination. Public education and publicity programmes to raise awareness and promote better understanding of equal opportunities concepts include organising talks, seminars and workshops for different target groups; publishing quarterly newsletters; organising roadshows and exhibitions; developing programmes for students and producing TV and radio announcements and programmes. In order to encourage community participation, the Community Participation Funding Programme on Equal Opportunities is in place to assist community groups to organise their own activities to promote equal opportunities. The EOC also seeks to achieve its vision through partnership projects with all sectors in the community. Calendar and tailor-made training programmes are conducted to raise awareness of discrimination and harassment within organisations and government departments to equip them with the skills to deal with the situation should such problems arise.

Research: The EOC commissions various research studies and baseline surveys to examine why discrimination takes place, the overall attitudes and perceptions of equal opportunities within the community. The research studies will help the EOC to develop its strategy, monitor the attitude change and provide benchmarks for future studies.

Review of Relevant Legislation and Issuing Codes of Practice and Guidelines: The EOC keeps under review the anti-discrimination ordinances and submit proposals for amendments to the Government as it thinks fit. It also issues codes of practice under the ordinances and other guidelines. The Codes of Practice on Employment are issued to assist employers and employees in understanding their responsibilities under the ordinances and to provide practical guidelines to management on procedures and practices that can help prevent discrimination and other unlawful acts in the workplace.

Copies of the codes of practice under the four ordinances as well as a series of other information materials explaining the provisions of the ordinances are available at the EOC office and its website. The EOC website also provides up-to-date information on equal opportunities issues in Hong Kong and around the world.

Statistics: From January to July 2011, the EOC received 9 442 enquiries and 518 complaints, with 166 falling under the SDO, 280 under the DDO, 29 under the FSDO and 43 under the RDO. Together with the complaints brought forward from the previous year, the EOC handled a total of 836 complaints, of which 552 complaints were concluded.