

Supplementary information on food assistance-in-kind provided for non-refoulement claimants during their stay in Hong Kong

On humanitarian grounds, the International Social Service Hong Kong Branch (ISS-HK) has since 2006 been commissioned to provide assistance-in-kind services including food in the form of assistance-in-kind to non-refoulement claimants (claimants) when they are deprived of basic needs during their presence in Hong Kong on a case-by-case basis. Its aim is to provide support which is considered sufficient to prevent them from becoming destitute, while at the same time not creating a magnet effect which could have serious implications for the sustainability of our current support systems and for our immigration control.

As regards food assistance, in the service contract made between the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the ISS-HK, food will be provided in the form of assistance-in-kind. Food suppliers for the humanitarian assistance programme are selected through tendering procedures and the process is governed by prescribed rules, e.g. assessment of the tenderers' operational ability, financial stability, management competence, efficiency and capacity in ensuring smooth services for a certain number of users. The tender is conducted periodically and there are seven food suppliers currently working for the ISS-HK for the humanitarian assistance programme.

The ISS-HK is providing a variety of nearly 200 food items on the food selection list, including but not limited to 21 meat/meat products, 35 vegetables/beans, 12 grains/cereals, 12 beverages, 9 fruits, 20 condiments/spices, 7 milk/dairy products and 40 baby food items (if applicable) to cater for the individual needs of service users who have different health, cultural, religious and other needs.

The services provided by the food suppliers under the humanitarian assistance programme are different from other food retailers in the market. In addition, the retail food prices in the market fluctuate over time. Hence, direct comparison is not appropriate. According to the contractual requirement, each food supplier is required to provide all food items on the food selection list (including food items which are usually of higher costs and may not be available in ordinary supermarkets e.g. Halal food and Basmati, etc.) Throughout the contract period, the food suppliers are not allowed to change the price of food items. Food suppliers have to provide and store foods according to the different religious standards (e.g. set up individual storage or refrigerators for different types of food for different ethnic or religious groups). They are also required to provide other services such as packaging and if

necessary delivery service (mainly for claimants with mobility problems). The price list is a part of the procurement contracts between the ISS-HK and the food suppliers, and must be kept confidential.

During the monthly meeting, service users may choose from the list for the food quantity and types they want for that month. After claimants' confirmation, the ISS-HK will send the food order to the food suppliers. The food suppliers will then pack the selected food for service users' collection on the scheduled date. Service users may check the food items at the time of collection to confirm if the food collected is the same as those ordered by them. If there is a difference, they may ask the food supplier for replacement on the spot.

To address the concerns about the food quality and quantity, the Administration has obtained the expert advice of pediatrician and dietitian from the Department of Health (DH) regarding the choice, quantity and nutritional value of the food items. The DH advises that the quantities and nutrition values of the food items are sufficient in general and also recommend some enhancements (e.g. substituting ordinary fruit juice by 100% fruit juice; increasing the fruit quantity). To implement the DH's recommendations, the Administration has increased the average monthly budget for food for each claimant from \$1,060 to \$1,200 from February 2014.

The ISS-HK will only pay all food suppliers according to the amount of food ordered and dispensed on an actual disbursement basis. Payments to the ISS-HK by The SWD are made according to a payment schedule specified in the service contract. Unused money of the service project will be returned to the Administration at the project completion.