

## **Save the Children Hong Kong Response to the Budget 2021-2022**

The Financial Secretary delivered the 2021-22 Budget on February. Save the Children Hong Kong recognises the Government for including a series of relief measures in a bid to alleviate the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak, despite the challenging social and economic environment and a record fiscal deficit, and offers the following suggestions on this year's Budget:

### **Relieve Measures for Children**

Although children are not at a high risk of direct harm from the virus, they are disproportionately affected by its hidden impacts. School closures, home isolation, and social distancing, together with the economic downturn, have impacted children's health and wellbeing, education and protection, with the potential for long-lasting impacts.

Save the Children acknowledges the measures the government has identified to alleviate the impact of the economic downturn on the public. Among these measures, only the waive of examination fees for those who will be taking the 2022 HKDSE specifically responds to the needs of children or youth. The government should more directly identify and take actions to mitigate the adverse impacts on children.

### **Child Poverty**

In 2019, 253,000 (17.8%) children (under the age of 18) in Hong Kong lived in poverty, representing the highest level since 2015. The most marginalised and deprived children have been hit the hardest by COVID, and existing inequalities have been exacerbated.

Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere is one of the targets in the Sustainable Development Goal, and this should also be a key priority for the Hong Kong Government. The Government should implement additional measures to support children from underprivileged backgrounds and to better address intergenerational poverty. Save the Children offers recommendations to address the needs in the following submission: <https://savethechildren.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-Budget-Recommendation-English.pdf>

### **The Mental Well-being of Children and Family**

According to the global research by Save the Children, the vast majority of girls and boys (83%) and parents/caregivers (89%) in different parts of the world reported an increase in negative feelings during the COVID-19 pandemic and just under half (46%) of parents/caregivers reported observing signs of psychological distress in children.

We welcome the measures from the government in the Budget to enhance child and adolescent psychiatric services of the Hospital Authority. To better address the mental health issues, it is also important for the government to increase resources to improve the quality of mental health-related services and reduce the waiting time for those receiving these services.