

Save the Children Hong Kong Recommendations on the 2021 Policy Address

Save the Children's vision is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), an international agreement setting out the rights of every child, is at the heart of what we do. In Hong Kong, we regularly review policies related to children and their rights and provide recommendations to support the development of comprehensive, child-centred government policies and practices, which are in line with the UNCRC.

In 2021 we published our Young Voices research, a unique study listening to the needs of young people in Hong Kong to understand their perspectives on various issues they face in their life. In advance of this year's Policy Address, we would like to draw the Government's attention to the following recommendations.

Listen to children in matters that affect them

Young Voices research indicates almost 90% of students interviewed believe they have few or even no opportunities to express their opinion to leaders and decision-makers in society. Around half of students would like to have more influence and opportunities to address issues concerning them in their schools, municipalities and homes.

We recommend the government to **encourage children's participation in civic affairs**, ensuring the consultative mechanism in the government is responsive in taking their views and suggestions into consideration during the process of policy formulation.

Protect children from harm

According to our Young Voices research, nearly 1 out of 4 children often or always worried about being bullied or experiencing violence from other children and young people. One child out of 5 often or always worried about experiencing violence from an adult. 46% of children worry about being punished by their parents. To better protect children from abuse and neglect, we recommend the government to adopt the following measures.

Develop and implement a comprehensive law to **prohibit all corporal punishment** and other cruel or degrading punishment of children in all settings.

Support large-scale **parent education programmes** to provide appropriate guidance to parents and caregivers to increase their knowledge in good parenting practice. These parenting programmes should be mandatory for families and caregivers with a high risk of or history of abuse or neglect.

Establish a **mandatory reporting system** for all professionals that regularly interact with children, to report any kind of suspected child abuse and enable immediate intervention.

Protect children's mental health

As Young Voices research indicates, 42% of youth often or always felt sad and depressed for a long period of time in the past year. More than 60% of youth surveyed said they had worried within the last year that

someone they know would harm themselves. We recommend the government to allocate additional resource in the following areas to improve the mental welling of children and youth in Hong Kong.

Increase resources for public child psychiatric specialist outpatient services to reduce the waiting time for those who suffer from ADHD, autism, depression, anxiety disorder or other psychological illnesses.

Ensure the supply of psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses, and case managers are able to meet long-term human resources needs according to the guidelines of the World Health Organization, and increase the supply of educational psychologists to provide better support to students who suffer from poor psychological and emotional health.

Provide additional training opportunities to teachers and school social workers to **enhance professional knowledge in mental health** to identify and support students with mental health needs promptly.

Education which develops children to their fullest potential

As indicated in our Young Voices research, more than 60% of the youth frequently felt stressed over schoolwork or academic results in the 12 months prior to our survey. To reduce study pressure and foster balanced development in Hong Kong's students, we recommend the government to adopt the following measures.

Review the education curriculum and public examination system to **reduce study pressure and foster balanced development** and allow more time for non-academic pursuits for students.

Raise **public awareness on the importance of leisure and play for every child**, to benefit the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children.

Increase the amount of student financial assistance and expand the coverage of financial schemes to support underprivileged children to participate in extra-curricular activities and after-school tutoring.

