

Save the Children Hong Kong Response to the Policy Address 2021

The Chief Executive's policy address, delivered on 6 October 2021, included new measures to better protect and improve the wellbeing of children. Save the Children welcomes the increased focus on children and youth in this year's address, and here we outline our response and some additional suggestions to further ensure the laws, policies and practices of the Hong Kong government are fully compatible with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Mandatory Reporting Mechanism

We welcome the government's decision to formulate a legislative proposal to set up a mandatory reporting mechanism on child abuse cases and to enhance the training for practitioners in relevant professions to identify child abuse cases. This move is a crucial step to help report and identify suspected abuse and enable immediate intervention. In addition to the legislation, the government should offer additional resources to professionals to ensure they can handle the potentially growing number of child abuse cases.

Parent Education

We are pleased to see the government acknowledge the fundamental role of the family and continue promoting parent education in this year's Policy Address. Since 2018, our Heart to Heart Parent-Child Programme has helped enhance parent-child relationships and ensure children grow up in a safe and non-violent environment. We provide positive parenting knowledge to parents and caregivers through interactive activities, empower children to express their views and emotions and seek help if they feel unsafe. The government should consider scaling-up parent education programmes in Hong Kong, to build a healthier life for children and parents in society.

Mandatory reporting and parent education are important steps to protect children in Hong Kong from abuse and neglect. To meet the government's legal obligation to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence (article 19 of the UNCRC), we recommend developing and implementing a comprehensive law to **prohibit all corporal punishment** and other cruel or degrading punishment of children in all settings.

Listen to the Voices of Children and Youth

In this year's policy address, the government proposes measures to improve the effectiveness of promoting youth development and child protection by re-organising the policy bureau and creating the post of Commissioner for Children. In addition, the Chief Executive also expressed her willingness to listen to young people's views. We welcome these measures and recommend the government to ensure meaningful participation of children and youth in civic affairs, by strengthening and expanding consultative mechanisms to take young people's views and suggestions into consideration during policy formulation processes.

In 2021 Save the Children Hong Kong published our Young Voices research, a unique study listening to the young people in Hong Kong to understand their perspectives on various issues they face in their life. We hope that Young Voices will inspire actors at all levels of Hong Kong society to prioritise the needs of our young people, to listen to them, and create an environment that enables them to take an active part in addressing issues that affect their lives and their future.