

## **Save the Children Hong Kong Response to the Budget 2022-2023**

The Financial Secretary delivered the 2022-23 Budget on 23<sup>rd</sup> February. Save the Children Hong Kong welcomes the Government's introduction of a series of relief measures to alleviate the negative impacts of the fifth wave COVID-19 outbreak. Our response is outlined here, with some additional suggestions to further ensure the Government's financial investment can better address the challenges and difficulties faced by Hong Kong's children.

### **Relief Measures for Children**

Children are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. 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, negatively affecting their ability to realise their full potential.

Save the Children acknowledges the measures the Government has identified to alleviate the impact of the economic downturn on the public. The only measures specifically responding to the needs of children and youth are the waiver of examination fees for the HKDSE candidates and the subsidies to schools to support e-learning. The Government should also prioritise psychosocial and material support for children and families to encourage healthy coping mechanisms and ensure parents are adequately resourced to support their children. This is especially important for vulnerable children and families, where the impacts of the pandemic have hit the hardest. We urge the government to ensure resources reach those children most impacted by inequality and discrimination.

### **Protect Children from Harm**

We welcome the measures from the Government to better protect children from harm. Regularizing social work services for pre-primary institutions is a positive step to facilitate early identification and timely support for those pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs.

We are also pleased to see that the legislative work on a mandatory reporting mechanism and the introduction of the offence of "*Failure to protect*" are both on the agenda of the Labour and Welfare Bureau. We again emphasise the importance of ensuring sufficient resources are allocated to successfully deliver the proposed legislative changes in mandatory reporting mechanisms for child abuse cases, including: existing manpower, training, investigation mechanism, and social services support.

Apart from law reform, we urge the Government to allocate resources to public education campaigns and parent education programmes to build a culture of zero tolerance for violence against children across society.