Save the Children Hong Kong

Recommendation on the HKSAR Government's First Five-Year Plan (2026 - 2030)

Foreword

Hong Kong has long relied primarily on the annual Policy Address and Budget to drive policy initiatives. This year, we are pleased to see the HKSAR Government formulate its own five-year plan. This aligns its governance approach with the national "Five-Year Plan" framework and will help establish a continuous, quantifiable, mid- to long-term development blueprint.

With the *Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance* coming into full effect in January 2026, Hong Kong has taken a critical step forward in the legal protection of children, subsequently raising overall societal awareness of child protection. However, a comprehensive child protection strategy cannot stop at legislative reforms. Drawing reference from developments in Mainland China, the 2020 revision of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors* officially established the principle of the "best interests of the minor," emphasising comprehensive and systematic protection. We believe that Hong Kong should adopt a similarly systematic approach to ensure that child-centred support mechanisms, sustainable financial resources, and inter-departmental coordination mechanisms are put in place simultaneously.

Save the Children Hong Kong (SCHK) firmly believes that every child has the right to grow up in a safe, healthy, and respected environment, free from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We emphasise that "child protection is a whole-of-society responsibility," requiring close collaboration across all sectors—including families, schools, child-serving organisations, the public, and digital platforms.

For the Government's first five-year plan, we have drawn upon Save the Children International's globally advocated, evidence-based "Child Protection System Strengthening" (CPSS) framework. By integrating the Mainland's successful experience of establishing a national strategy, we propose a strategic roadmap tailored to Hong Kong's local needs. This framework consolidates various child protection initiatives and fundamentally embeds Article 3 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*—"the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration"—as the core principle for strategic planning.

Furthermore, child protection and child mental health are mutually influential. Abuse and neglect can elevate risks to a child's mental health, while mental health issues can weaken a child's capacity to cope with harm and seek help. Therefore, we recommend advancing these initiatives under an integrated "Child Well-being" perspective.

Strategic Planning and Policy Recommendations: Building a "Comprehensive Child Protection System"

Currently, various child protection policies in Hong Kong are dispersed across different government departments, functioning independently with insufficient overall coordination. We recommend adopting the "Comprehensive Child Protection System" as the overarching strategic framework for the five-year plan to break down departmental barriers and address service fragmentation.

This system is highly consistent with the "Six Protections" network—encompassing family, school, society, network, government, and judicial systems—established under the Mainland's *Law on the Protection of Minors*. It aims to adopt an ecosystem model to comprehensively address potential risks during a child's development. In summary, the "Comprehensive Child Protection System" provides an evidence-based blueprint for the ideal operation of child protection mechanisms, while the legal framework provides the necessary statutory backing.

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The “Comprehensive Child Protection System” comprises eight key components. When the Government implements various policies and legislation, these eight components must be developed in parallel to complement and reinforce one another:



1. Long-term Strategic Blueprint

- Incorporate child protection and child mental health strategies into the five-year development plan, establishing clear objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), and review mechanisms.
- Establish a cross-departmental governance structure with overarching coordination capabilities to ensure policy alignment and consistent execution.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Comprehensive Child Protection and Child Mental Health):**
  - **Formulate the “Long-term Development Blueprint for Child Protection and Child Mental Health in Hong Kong”:** Draft a five- or ten-year blueprint centred on child well-being that integrates policies and services across both domains. The service focus should shift from post-crisis intervention to a prevention-based approach. Through early identification, early support, and cross-sectoral collaboration, the Government should aim to prevent child abuse and mental health issues, reduce student suicide risk, enhance family resilience, and establish a comprehensive support system based on the best interests of children.

2. Legal, Policy and Regulatory Framework

- Comprehensively integrate child rights and child-friendly principles into legislation, policies, law enforcement, and judicial procedures.
- Enhance child participation to ensure children's voices are included in the legislative or policymaking process.

- **Specific Policy Initiatives (Comprehensive Child Protection):**
  - **Expand the List of Specified Professionals for Mandatory Reporting:** Explore the gradual expansion of mandatory reporting obligations to other personnel working closely with children and youth (such as sports coaches, art instructors, and private tutors) to strengthen child protection.
  - **Conduct Legal Feasibility Study and Consultation on the Offence of "Failure to Protect":** Conduct a legal feasibility study and broad stakeholder consultation regarding the introduction of a "Failure to Protect" offence to assess the necessity, feasibility, and implementation arrangements for further improving the legal framework for child protection.

3. Cross-departmental and Cross-sectoral Coordination

- Strengthen cooperation mechanisms among government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools, the healthcare system, and other relevant stakeholders.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Comprehensive Child Protection):**
  - **Establish Statutory Status for the "Commission on Children":** We recommend the Government establish a cross-departmental coordination, communication, and oversight mechanism to break down departmental barriers. This includes granting statutory status to the "Commission on Children" and establishing an independent standing post of "Commissioner for Children" to ensure that the formulation, execution, and monitoring of cross-departmental child protection policies proceed in unison.

4. Frontline Capacity Building

- Provide systematic, cross-disciplinary, and continuous professional training for frontline child and youth-facing personnel across the education, social welfare, and healthcare sectors.
- Elevate their understanding and prioritisation of "Child Safeguarding" (CSG), including risk identification, early intervention, and response strategies.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Child Mental Health):**
  - **Enhance Capacity to Identify and Intervene in Psychological Abuse:** Addressing the hidden nature of psychological and emotional abuse, the Government should introduce specialised training modules featuring real-life case studies to build frontline personnel's sensitivity, confidence, and capability in identifying such hidden harm.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Digital Safety):**
  - **Provide Regular "Digital Management and Application" Training:** Offer practical, skills-oriented training for child and youth-facing professionals. Key areas should include identifying emerging AI-driven risks (e.g., deepfakes), safeguarding data privacy, and ethically applying AI tools in service design to enhance digital literacy and response capabilities.

5. Resource Mobilisation

- Provide sustainable, long-term, and stable financial support to drive all child protection policies, services, and measures.
- Establish dedicated funding to support preventive community mental health services and to subsidise NGOs in fully implementing Child Safeguarding Policies.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Comprehensive Child Protection):**

- **Strengthen Ordinance Implementation and Regular Training Funding:** Continuously enhance the implementation support and training for the *Mandatory Reporting Ordinance*, developing clear operational workflows, reporting mechanisms, and case guidelines. The Government should provide dedicated funding to continuously support training for frontline professionals across the healthcare, education, and social welfare sectors.

6. Data Collection and Research Support

- **Establish a Cross-departmental "Central Databank on Children":** Comprehensively integrate data resources from the healthcare, education, and social welfare sectors. By leveraging big data analytics to establish an early warning mechanism, the Government can achieve early and accurate identification of high-risk groups, such as ethnic minority children, students with mental health needs, and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- Provide regular funding for local empirical research to formulate precise, data-driven policies.

7. Community Support and Service Network

- Establish school- and community-based prevention and support systems.
- Strengthen family support and positive parenting to build a universal, inclusive, and de-stigmatised first line of defence in the community.

- **Specific Policy Initiatives (Child Mental Health):**
  - **Promote Peer Psychological First Aid Support Programmes:** Scale evidence-based peer support programmes on campuses (such as the Youth Psychological First Aid Peer Support Programme co-developed by Save the Children and the World Health Organisation). This equips students with psychological first aid skills, allowing them to act as a bridge between peers in distress and professional support.
  - **Launch District Health Centres (DHCs) Healthy Mind Pilot Project:** Adopt a "pilot first, popularise later" strategy. First, lower the psychological assessment threshold at DHCs to age 12, and pilot a youth-specific "Healthy Mind Pilot Project" at key DHCs to provide de-stigmatised preliminary support. In the long term, realise the goal of equipping all DHCs across Hong Kong with dedicated child and youth mental health services, building a psychological defence line at the grassroots community level.
  - **Optimise After-School Care and Transform "Community Living Rooms":** Optimise the "School-based After-School Care Service Scheme" by integrating sports, play, and arts activities to alleviate stress for grassroots students. Simultaneously, position "Community Living Rooms" as family support and buffer spaces, introducing parent peer support groups, positive parenting resources, and outreach social workers to deliver accessible support for parents.

8. Building a Child Protection Culture

- Through broad public education and community advocacy, foster a society-wide culture of "zero tolerance" toward child abuse and harm while actively engaging families across generations to popularise and deepen the concept and practice of positive parenting.
- Require all child-contact organisations (e.g., NGOs, corporations, national sports associations) to formulate comprehensive "Child Safeguarding" policies and codes of conduct to proactively prevent, identify, and appropriately manage risks that may cause harm to children.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Child Mental Health):**

- **Institutionalise “Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)”:** Systematically incorporate SEL into the mainstream curriculum framework. A preventive and structured curriculum will enhance students' emotional management skills and resilience.

- **Specific Policy Initiative (Digital Safety):**
  - **Advance Digital Literacy Education for Children and Parents:** Comprehensively review current school-based digital literacy curricula to include practical topics such as internet addiction, algorithm addiction, online grooming, cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, data privacy protection, and responsible AI usage. Concurrently, expand digital literacy education targeted at parents to increase their awareness of AI and digital risks, empowering them to establish healthy digital parenting habits at home.

Conclusion

To construct a comprehensive safety net for children in Hong Kong, we must integrate strategic policy blueprints with legislative reforms, supported by child-centred services, stable and sustainable resource allocation, and close cross-departmental collaboration. We strongly recommend that the Government adopt Save the Children Hong Kong's “Comprehensive Child Protection System” as the core framework for its five-year plan. When implementing policies and legislation, ensuring the eight key components cooperate seamlessly is vital to achieving comprehensive and effective child protection.

Save the Children Hong Kong will continue to closely monitor and review the formulation and implementation of child-centred policies. Playing an active role as a cross-sectoral bridge, we look forward to joining hands with the Government and all sectors of society to create an environment that respects children's rights, protects their safety, and promotes their well-being, ensuring that every child can grow up healthily, safely, and with dignity.