

**Response to the
Public Consultation of the
2025–2026 Budget**

**Submission by
Plan International Hong Kong**

Introduction

Plan International Hong Kong (“Plan International”) is submitting this briefing in response to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (“the Government”)’s invitation for public views on the 2025-2026 budget.

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children’s rights and equality for girls. Plan International initially operated a field office in Hong Kong from 1953 to 1973, helping nearly 12,000 local children and their families by providing support in education, food, healthcare, housing and career counselling. Plan International re-opened its Hong Kong office in July 2009, giving the Hong Kong community the chance to give back by supporting child development programmes in Asia, Africa, the Americas, Oceania and the Middle East.

Plan International Hong Kong advocates a holistic approach to protecting and promoting children’s rights through preventive and responsive measures so that all children can grow, thrive, lead and live in safety, free from harm, abuse and neglect. Committed to ending violence against children and promoting meaningful child participation, Plan International Hong Kong has rolled out local programmes and influencing work through evidence-based research, partnerships, policy influencing and public education since 2017.

We acknowledge the tough financial situation the Hong Kong government is facing; hence, we propose utilising existing funding to better protect children’s rights. Strategic investments in child protection, and child participation will yield significant long-term benefits for our society.

This briefing covers the key issues of Plan International’s concerns and aims to provide recommendations for the Hong Kong Government’s preparation of the 2025-2026 budget.

These main recommendations include:

- **Budget for Building a Comprehensive Safety Net for Child Protection**
- **Budget for Incorporating Child Rights and Participation for Humanities Subject in primary schools**

Plan International welcomes the Hong Kong Government’s practice of conducting public consultations when drafting the Budget and would appreciate any opportunity to present additional information, in writing or in person, to the Hong Kong Government.

Executive Summary

This section serves to highlight Plan International's recommendations for the Hong Kong Government's preparation of the 2025-2026 budget.

A. *Establishing a Comprehensive Safety Net for Child Protection in Child-Related Organisations*

Hong Kong has experienced a troubling increase in reported child maltreatment cases, rising from 1,006 in 2019 to 1,457 in 2023—an increase of over 40%. Institutional abuse cases, particularly in schools and sports organisations, have also doubled. Despite the establishment of Child Safeguarding Policies (CSPs) with the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China, enforcement remains obscure due to a lack of regulatory authority, hindering consistent implementation. Moreover, the lack of training resources provided for school-contracted extracurricular tutors and sports coaches has increased the chances of institutional child abuse. Plan International recommends that the government allocate resources to:

- a) Prioritise funding opportunities and grant to sports associations that have adopted and implemented CSPs;
- b) Reallocate the Education Bureau's financial resources to develop comprehensive training programs for all individuals working with children in extracurricular settings;
- c) Funding for the Hong Kong Police Force and Social Welfare Department to develop an online Mandatory Reporting tool.

B. *Budget for child participation in community development in primary education*

Children's rights to express their views are enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Recent educational reforms in Hong Kong have separated the General Studies curriculum. This newly introduced Humanities subject in the primary school curriculum that brings positive influences on child participation in community development. Plan International encourages the government to further enhance this initiative by:

- a) Establish a "Grant on Introduction of Primary Humanities" to support resources and training for integrating concepts of child's rights, in particular the concept of child participation into the primary humanities curriculum.

Section I: Establishing a Comprehensive Safety Net for Child Protection in Child-Related Organisations

Rising Cases of Child Maltreatment in Hong Kong

1. Over the past five years, the Social Welfare Department has recorded a troubling increase in newly registered child maltreatment cases, escalating by over 40% from 1,006 in 2019 to 1,457 in 2023¹. While this rise may reflect increased public awareness, estimates from the University of Hong Kong suggest that reported cases represent just the tip of the iceberg in child abuse. This alarming trend underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms to safeguard children and uphold the right to protection.
2. Institutional child abuse refers to maltreatment cases from a system of power, within an institutional or specific care setting, including but not limited to schools, child care services, sports institutions, tutoring centres, and religious centres. Throughout 2019-2023, reported institutional abuse cases, involving perpetrators such as school teachers, sports coaches, and religious personnel, have more than doubled in number, from 42 to 98 cases. Notable incidents from the past financial year involved a secondary school basketball coach who sexually assaulted 11 students² and leakage of nude images of a basketball coach and student³, shocking the community and igniting widespread discussions.

Limited Implementation of Child Safeguarding Policies (CSPs)

3. Establishing Child Safeguarding Policies (CSPs) is a proven global strategy to minimise risks of harm and abuse to children within institutional settings. Child Safeguarding Policy is a set of clear standards and guidelines that minimises harm to children with whom the organisation comes into contact, by governing the behavior of staff and associates of the organisation, and embedding procedures to ensure concerns over a child's welfare are swiftly responded to.

¹ Social Welfare Department. (2024). *Statistics on newly registered child protection, newly reported spouse / cohabitant battering and sexual violence cases*. Retrieved from: https://www.swd.gov.hk/vs/index_e.html#s3

² The Witness. (26 August 2024). 要求男學生傳裸照及自慰片以「評估體能」、藉按摩替對方手淫 籃球教練認 20 罪候判. Retrieved from: <https://thewitnesshk.com/%E8%A6%81%E6%B1%82%E7%94%B7%E5%AD%B8%E7%94%9F%E5%82%B3%E8%A3%B8%E7%85%A7%E5%8F%8A%E8%87%AA%E6%85%B0%E7%89%87%E4%BB%A5%E8%A9%95%E4%BC%B0%E9%AB%94%E8%83%BD-%E8%97%89%E6%8C%89%E6%91%A9%E6%9B%BF%E5%B0%8D/>

³ 香港 01. (23 February 2024). 籃球男教練中學女學生不雅照流出 警列未經同意發布私密影像調查. Retrieved from: https://www.hk01.com/article/993557?utm_source=01articlecopy&utm_medium=referral

4. In 2022, the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) collaborated with Plan International Hong Kong to establish a Child Safeguarding Policy⁴ for all persons working for the Federation or on the Federation's behalf in any capacity, including Officers, Committee Members, staff members, National Sports Associations (NSA) members involved in the business of the Federation, Members of the Hong Kong, China Delegation (e.g. Chef de Mission, headquarters officials, medical officials, sports team officials and athletes), members of staff of contractors, interns and volunteers.
5. The policy provides a clear definition of child abuse, outlines guidelines for preventing harm, and establishes principles for responding to and managing incidents of abuse. It also introduces proactive measures to enhance child safeguarding, such as training programmes, reporting mechanisms, and accountability frameworks. By adopting this policy, SF&OC has demonstrated its commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for children involved in sports and related activities.
6. Despite the comprehensive nature of the Child Safeguarding Policy, its effectiveness is hindered by a lack of regulatory authority to enforce compliance across all affiliated organisations. According to a review report from SF&OC in 2024, "only 9.09% to 28.57% Member Associations have composed Polices/Code of Practices on handling public complaints, Child Safeguarding and Equal Opportunities. The percentages attained in this section are far from satisfactory."⁵ Member Organisations commented that additional resources and funding from the Government to hire additional staff responsible for corporate governance aspects is needed.
7. Plan welcomed the SF&OC included Child Safeguarding Policy in the Code of Governance⁶, all affiliated associations need to implement the code and follow up other advice in the review by the end of 2026. Member Organisations failing to obtain may face repercussions such as a halt in government funding by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department until necessary governance standards are met. To further incentivise compliance and promote best practices, it is recommended that sports organisations that have successfully implemented Child Safeguarding Policies be prioritised for funding and grant opportunities. This approach not only encourages adherence to the Code of Governance but also recognises and rewards organisations that demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding and ethical governance.
8. Recommendation: **Prioritise funding and grant opportunities to sports associations that have adopted and implemented CSPs to encourage and ensure compliance.**

⁴ Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong. (1 April 2022). *Child Safeguarding Policy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hkolympic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Child-Safeguarding-Policy-2022-Eng.pdf>

⁵ Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China. (20 November 2024). *Corporate Governance Review Report*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hkolympic.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2024-11-20-Corporate-Governance-Review-Report.pdf>

⁶ Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China. (20 November 2024). *Code of Governance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hkolympic.org/download/others-2/code-of-governance/>

Gaps in Awareness and Training

9. The 2024 Policy Address announced that the Government will allocate \$2 billion to set up the Teacher Professional Development Fund (the Fund)⁷ to provide a steady funding source for the long-term development of the teacher profession, thereby supporting the Education Bureau (EDB) to strengthen the teacher professional development more comprehensively and systematically.
10. The Government provides \$50 million in funds annually for the implementation of relevant projects under T-excel@hk, as well as various measures to enhance the professional development of teachers and principals and their related work. Key project T-standard+ promotes the “Guidelines on Teachers’ Professional Conduct” and supports activities promoting teachers’ professional ethics. The T-standard+ Online Course for newly joined teachers served 6,900 beneficiaries over the past 5 years.⁸
11. Starting from the 2020/21 school year, newly joined teachers are required to complete 30 hours of core training offered by the EDB. This training covers child safeguarding elements including teacher’s professional identity, roles, values, code of conduct, child protection, and reporting. However, similar training is not mandated for school-contracted extracurricular tutors and sports coaches, leaving a critical gap in child protection knowledge. The aforementioned institutional child abuse cases indicate there is an urgent need to extend similar training to school-contracted extracurricular tutors and sports coaches.
12. Research by Plan International Hong Kong in 2020⁹ revealed concerning gaps in awareness among sports organisations regarding child safeguarding. Only 33% of respondents understood that many pedophiles seek employment in child-related organisations to gain access to children. Furthermore, only 37% recognised that child abuse can occur without leaving visible physical injuries. This lack of knowledge underscores the urgent need for comprehensive training for individuals in these sectors to enhance their understanding of child protection.

⁷ HKSAR. *The Chief Executive’s 2024 Policy Address*. P. 114. Retrieved from: <https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2024/en/p113.html>

⁸ Legislative Council Panel on Education. (7 November 2024). *Proposal of Setting up the Teacher Professional Development Fund*. Retrieved from: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2024/english/panels/ed/papers/ed20241107cb3-811-1-e.pdf>

⁹ Plan International Hong Kong. (2020). *Situation Analysis Study on Child Safeguarding Policy (Study with sports organisations in HKSAR)*. Retrieved from: https://csnet.plan.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Situation-Analysis-Study-on-Child-Safeguarding-Policy-sports-organisations_Research-Summary.pdf?_gl=1*14m0krI*_gcl_aw*R0NMLjE3MzU1NDU1MzQuQ2p3S0NBaUFnOFM3QmhBVEVpd0FPMi1SNnNxby1DS2tmYXd3N0xZb0tSV3ZoY1JNTDZta1M4VWZTaU45cF9DbHBmdEtRMGRydDBqZmV4b0NIWDBRQXZEX0J3RQ..*_ga*OTY1MjQ2OTUyLjE2OTYzODY1ODc.*_ga_BCG1RJ83G*MTczOTE2Nz11OS4zLjE1uMTczOTE2Nz11OS4zLjE1

13. Recommendation: **Reallocate the Education Bureau's financial resources to develop and provide training for all school-contracted extracurricular tutors and sports coaches, mandating a minimum number of training hours annually.** The training should encompass safeguarding topics related to roles and responsibilities, risk assessment, as well as child protection knowledge, ensuring that all individuals working with children possess the necessary skills to support and safeguard their rights effectively.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse

14. The Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse (MRCA) is set to take effect in January 2026, with the accompanying funding of \$24.2 million in the 2024-25 fiscal year allocated to smooth the implementation process¹⁰, we recommend the development of an online Mandatory Reporting Tool to streamline reporting processes for child protection concerns. The current practice requires mandated reporters to contact the Hong Kong Police Force or the Social Welfare Department and complete a form to report suspected child abuse. This traditional reporting format can increase administrative burdens and deter professionals from reporting.
15. Internationally, countries like Australia and Canada have successfully implemented electronic reporting systems that significantly reduce the time required for reports to be filed and acted upon, resulting in a more efficient child protection process. The e-CARL¹¹ online reporting system in Australia lets mandated notifiers report non-urgent child abuse or neglect notifications. A similar easy-to-use online mandatory reporting platform should be introduced in Hong Kong. This platform could adopt a step-by-step approach with multiple-choice and short-answer questions, akin to the e-Report Centre¹² used by the Hong Kong Police Force to alleviate administrative fatigue. Simplifying the reporting process will encourage more individuals to report suspected abuse or neglect, providing a clearer picture of child abuse statistics in Hong Kong.
16. Recommendation: **Provision of funding for the Social Welfare Department and Hong Kong Police Force to develop an online Mandatory Reporting tool.** By streamlining reporting methods, we can facilitate quicker identification and response to child protection concerns, potentially saving lives and preventing further harm. This new system will enhance communication between professionals and child protection services, ultimately improving the safety and welfare of children.

¹⁰ HKSAR. (February 2023). *2023-24 Budget*. Retrieved from: https://www.budget.gov.hk/2023/eng/pdf/2023-24_Media_Sheet.pdf

¹¹ Government of South Australia. *Department of Child Protection*. Retrieved from: <https://ecarl.sa.gov.au/>

¹² Hong Kong Police Force. *e-Report Centre*. Retrieved from: https://www.police.gov.hk/ppp_en/

Section II: Further Promote Children's Participation in Community Development in Primary Education

Integrate Child Rights into the Humanities Curriculum

17. A child's right to participation is one of the basic rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)¹³. Article 12 of the UNCRC establishes the right of every child to freely express her or his views in all matters affecting her or him, and the subsequent right for those views to be given due weight, according to the child's age and maturity.
18. Children's right to be heard is interrelated to their enjoyment of rights to protection and development. Children and young people have first-hand experience of the hardships and challenges they face in their communities. Understanding children's views and experiences is essential to devising an effective strategy for their protection and development.
19. The 2023 Policy Address announced the splitting of the General Studies subject in primary schools into two sections: Humanities and Science¹⁴. As one of the support measures, EDB will provide the "Grant on Introduction of Primary Science"¹⁵, a one-off grant of \$350,000, for each public-sector primary school to support the implementation of Primary Science.
20. Starting from the 2025/26 school year, all primary schools in Hong Kong are required to implement Primary Humanities, beginning with Primary 1 and 4, and extending to all year levels by the 2027/28 school year. The humanities curriculum will cover six topics, including "Community and Citizenship"¹⁶, emphasising the importance of understanding community characteristics, social affairs, and citizens' rights and obligations. While community and rights are essential components of the curriculum, there is a need for further strengthening, particularly regarding the learning experiences and materials, to address gaps in current policies that lack opportunities for children to participate and express their opinions.

¹³ United Nations. (20 November 1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

¹⁴ HKSAR. *The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address*. P. 31. Retrieved from: <https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2023/en/p30.html>

¹⁵ Legislative Council Panel on Education. (4 October 2024). *The Introduction and Development of Primary Science and Primary Humanities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr2024/english/panels/ed/papers/ed20241004cb3-688-3-e.pdf>

¹⁶ Hong Kong Education Bureau. (2024). *Primary Humanities Curriculum Framework (Final Draft)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/cross-kla-studies/ph-primary/Primary%20Humanities%20Curriculum%20Framework.pdf>

21. Hong Kong has been a signatory to the UNCRC since 1994. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. Not only is it crucial for children to learn about this framework, but it also well-fits into the Essential Learning Content of “Community and Citizenship”.
22. To empower children to participate in community development, Plan International Hong Kong launched the “Voice of the Children” (VOC) Project in 2018. Over the past 6 years, we have partnered with various local community organisations in Hong Kong, including the Alliance for Children Development Rights, HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre, and Hong Kong Christian Service North Point Happy Teens Club, to implement child participatory community development (CPCD) programmes across different districts.
23. Schools play a crucial role in nurturing children’s understanding of and connection with the community, helping them learn to become confident, rational and responsible citizens.¹⁷ Plan Hong Kong launched a pilot CPCD project at Shek Lei Catholic Primary School from November 2024 to July 2025, guiding primary students in learning about their Shek Lei neighbourhood and expressing their opinions on the redevelopment of the Shek Lei Public Housing Estate Blocks 10 and 11, which are located adjacent to the school. With an 8-month program length and over 20 activities/ workshops, the aim is to build children’s awareness, analytical skills, and resourcefulness in identifying, analysing, and addressing issues relevant to their community. This initiative boosts a sense of responsibility and linkage among the community, as well as citizenship identity from a young age.
24. The VOC Project is a successful demonstration of a child-centred model of community development – from raising awareness of children’s rights to identifying problems and building consensus with peers and other stakeholders, advocating for the government and those involved to take responsibility for bringing about positive change in the community. To further facilitate teachers in adopting this new curriculum framework, it would be essential to provide opportunities for schools to learn relevant knowledge and methodologies for the implementation of the new Primary Humanities subject.
25. Recommendation: **Establish a “Grant on Introduction of Primary Humanities” to provide primary school resources for the development of educational materials and training for teachers, integrating Child Rights, in particular, the Right to participation into the Humanities curriculum for primary students.**

¹⁷ Melaville, A., Berg, A. C., & Blank, M. J. (2006). *Community-based learning: Engaging students for success and citizenship*. *Partnerships/Community*. 40. Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcepartnerships/40>

Appendix 1: Plan International Suggested Framework of Child Safeguarding Policy

Policy

1. To commit to child safeguarding and state measures to be taken to guarantee children's safety.
2. To provide a clear code of conduct describing acceptable and unacceptable behaviours.
3. The policy is applied to all staff with acknowledgment by signing.
4. The policy is applied to all relevant persons (volunteers, associates, and partners) with acknowledgment by signing.

Procedures

5. To provide clear guidelines to employees, parents and children, so as to support them in reporting any suspicions of child abuse.
6. All incidents, allegations and complaints should be clearly recorded and stored.
7. To ensure children are well-protected during the investigation of a child abuse allegation.
8. To establish a clear time limit on case handling for child abuse allegations.
9. To establish a whistleblowing policy where employees should be able to report abuse or suspicions of abuse without fear of retribution and discrimination in the workplace.
10. To identify, manage and minimise potential risks to children in daily operations.
11. To respect and protect the privacy of children and seek the consent of the child before distributing the child's personal information or pictures.

People & Culture

12. To check job candidates' sexual conviction records.
13. To understand the candidates' attitude and ability towards child protection during recruitment (e.g. interview, background check).
14. To provide employees with regular training and support on how to maintain child safety.
15. To provide training to volunteers, partners and other persons who have contact with children to maintain child safety.
16. To assign child safeguarding responsibilities to designated staff in order to promote CSP's implementation within the organisation.
17. To cultivate a culture where workers feel that they can openly discuss issues related to harm to children.

Accountability

18. Keep the Child Safeguarding Policy public and accessible to all, especially children and parents.
19. To consult children and families on reviewing the effectiveness of child safeguarding policy & procedures.
20. To conduct regular reviews on existing child safeguarding policies and procedures every 1-2 years.