

**Response to the Public
Consultation of Policy Address
2024**

**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’s Government (“the Government”)’s invitation for public view of the Policy Address 2024.

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 1959 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 2015.

This briefing covers the key issues concerning the well-being of children in Hong Kong and aims to provide related recommendations for the Hong Kong Government’s preparation of the Policy Address 2024.

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

Executive Summary

This section serves to highlight Plan International’s recommendations for the Hong Kong Government’s Administration on

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse

- Establish a regular review process and expand the list of mandated reporters.
- Update the Social Welfare Department “Assessment Matrix of the Service Quality Standard 16” and Education Bureau “Performance Indicators (Kindergartens)” to align with the Bill and other key Child Safeguarding elements.

Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC)

- Implement actionable timetable for Phase 3 SCRC extension and service providers of Social Welfare Department e.g., “Community Nannies” and “Foster Parents”.
- Establish a voluntary self-registration system for tutors and coaches, including the SCRC, Code of Conduct, and child protection training and workshops.

Housing Well • Being HK

- Establish a systematic and abiding Child Participation Plan for the project to embed children’s voices in well-being design guidelines for public housing.

Targeted Poverty Alleviation

- Adopt the child participation model and provide relevant programmes that foster community involvement and personal development to Community Living Room children beneficiaries.

Youth Empowerment

- Include United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which address global challenges—within the educational plans for subjects such as “Citizenship, Economics and Society” and “Citizenship and Social Development”.

Commission on Children

- Develop a clear blueprint to ensure a systematic and comprehensive approach to encouraging child participation in decision-making processes.

Foreword

- In the policy year 2023, significant strides were made for child protection in Hong Kong with the enactment of the “Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill” and the Security Bureau's announcement to expand the Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC). These pivotal measures are instrumental in fortifying the safety net for children and reflect the Government's steadfast commitment to children's welfare.
- Plan International Hong Kong commends the Government's acceptance of our recommendations for the 2024-25 Budget¹, notably, the initiative suggesting the Education Bureau develop a self-protection curriculum for kindergartens. The introduction of the “Pre-primary Curriculum and Learning Materials”², specifically "Sex Education: Understanding the Body and Protecting Myself", equips kindergarten stage children with essential skills to recognise and respond to potential risks, thereby fostering a foundation for lifelong safety and awareness.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill

- We commend the Government for gazetting the “Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill”, a crucial step towards enhancing the protection of children in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, to ensure the mandatory reporting scheme achieves its intended effectiveness and responsiveness, **we recommend the establishment of a regular review process**. This process should involve comprehensive assessments of the scheme's effectiveness, identification of areas for improvement, and periodic updates to the list of mandatory reporters. A proactive approach ensures the scheme remains responsive to evolving challenges in child protection.
- To further strengthen the protection of children, we **recommend expanding the list of mandated reporters** to encompass professionals who frequently interact with children. We strongly advocate the government considers extending the scope of mandated reporters to include practitioners and heads of sports institutions, tutorial centres, religious institutions and child-related social service organisations. The urgency of addressing existing gaps is underscored by recent incidents of abuse in these sectors³, highlighting the need for comprehensive accountability and vigilance.

¹ Plan International Hong Kong. (2024). *Response to the Public Consultation of the 2024-2025 Budget*. Retrieved from: https://www.plan.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Plan-International-Hong-Kong_Response-to-the-2024-2025-budget.pdf

² Education Bureau. (2024). *Pre-primary Curriculum and Learning Materials*. Retrieved from: <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/preprimary/resources/moral-and-values-education.html#6>

³ Sing Tao Daily. (2024). 藉口監察肌肉發展及評估運動表現 籃球教練要 11 男生拍陽具照及「打飛機」片段 認 20 罪押後判. Retrieved from:

This will ensure that all individuals and organisations working with children are held accountable for reporting suspected child abuse, so as to build a stronger safety net for children.

- While timely reporting is an important step to protect children, it only serves as a secondary measure to prevent further harm to children who are already abused or are at significant risk of maltreatment. **Preventative strategies must be prioritised** to address the root causes of institutional child abuse. We propose the Government consider developing a guideline framework for child-related organisations to implement comprehensive “Child Safeguarding Policy” (CSP) elements. CSP (Appendix 1) is a set of clear standards and guidelines that minimise harm to children whom the organisation contacts, by governing the behaviour of staff and associates of the organisation, and embedding procedures to ensure concerns over children’s welfare are swiftly responded to.
- We pledge the Social Welfare Department to **update the “Assessment Matrix of the Service Quality Standard 16”⁴ to align not only with the new responsibilities arising from the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill but also with other key Child Safeguarding elements** e.g. the implementation of a concrete reporting mechanism and provision of training for all child-related personnel, to enhance their knowledge and awareness in reporting potential child abuse cases. Similarly, the Education Bureau shall also **consider including the reporting mechanism and other Child Safeguarding elements in the “Performance Indicators (Kindergartens)”⁵** to ensure all kindergartens take the initiative to adopt and review all necessary measures in a regular manner. With the efforts of the two departments, the community would weave a safer environment in nurturing the growth of children.

Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC)

- We welcome the Government's commitment to extending the scope of the Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC) to cover the self-employed, volunteers and all existing employees. Yet, a clear and actionable timetable for Phase 3 SCRC extension, particularly concerning existing employees and self-employed individuals. Current loopholes in services funded by the Social Welfare Department, such as those

<https://www.singtaousa.com/2024-08-25/%E8%97%89%E5%8F%A3%E7%9B%A3%E5%AF%9F%E8%82%8C%E8%82%89%E7%99%BC%E5%B1%95%E5%8F%8A%E8%A9%95%E4%BC%B0%E9%81%8B%E5%8B%95%E8%A1%A8%E7%8F%BE-%E7%B1%83%E7%90%83%E6%95%99%E7%B7%B4%E9%80%BC11%E7%94%B7/497147>

⁴ Social Welfare Department. (2024). *Assessment Matrix Reference Guide on Standards, Criteria, Assessment Indicators and Assessment Steps for Service Quality Standards (SQSs)*. Retrieved from:

[https://www.swd.gov.hk/storage/asset/section/604/en/Assessment Matrix Reference Guide for the 16 SQSs.pdf](https://www.swd.gov.hk/storage/asset/section/604/en/Assessment%20Matrix%20Reference%20Guide%20for%20the%2016%20SQSs.pdf)

⁵ Education Bureau. (2017). *Performance Indicators (Kindergartens)*. Retrieved from:

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/quality-assurance-framework/performance-indicators-pre-primary-institutions/PI_KG_EN.pdf

involving "**Community Nannies**" and "**Foster Parents**", **require immediate attention**. These roles entail close, daily interactions with children, often exceeding the typical contact associated with standard child-related occupations. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive background checks, including the SCRC. Relying solely on self-declarations of having no prior criminal record is an insufficient alternative to the thorough vetting provided by the SCRC.

- The alarming rise in child abuse cases within tutoring and sports institutions further emphasises the necessity for enhanced regulatory measures. According to the Statistical Report published by the Social Welfare Department, individuals identified as "**tutors/coaches**" accounted for 4.1% of all child abuse cases in 2023.⁶ This statistic marks a significant increase and highlights a concerning lack of adequate child protection training among these professionals.
- To address these issues, we **recommend that the Education Bureau establish a voluntary self-registration system for tutors and coaches**. This system should mandate adherence to the SCRC, a comprehensive Code of Conduct, and participation in child protection training and workshops. Such an initiative would empower parents to identify trustworthy individuals for their children's extracurricular activities. Given that the "Education Ordinance"⁷ was last amended in 2003, a thorough review and subsequent amendments are imperative to enhance oversight and enforcement mechanisms within these fields.

Housing Well • Being HK

- The "**Housing Well • Being HK**" project aims to develop comprehensive well-being design guidelines for both new public housing projects and existing public rental housing (PRH) estates. This project incorporates thematic enhancements that aim to improve the overall living environment. The government's effort to gather input from residents and stakeholders is appreciated. We **recommend the Hong Kong Housing Authority establish a systematic and abiding Child Participation Plan for the project**.
- 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). Article 12 of the UNCRC establishes the right of every child, under the age of 18, 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, in accordance with the child's age and maturity.⁸ Children are also important

⁶ Social Welfare Department. (2024). *Child Protection Registry Statistical Report 2023*. Retrieved from: https://www.swd.gov.hk/storage/asset/section/654/Annual%20CPR%20Report%202023_Biligual_Final.pdf

⁷ Hong Kong e-Legislation. (2013). *Education Ordinance*. Retrieved from: <https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap279>

⁸ United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

stakeholders of the community who deserve consultation in a continual and child-friendly manner.

- Plan International has been actively working internationally and locally on including children's voices in community development. The "Voice of the Children" is a community-based child participatory project Plan International Hong Kong launched in 2018. Project Phase 3, partnered with the HKSKH Lady Macle hose Centre and Hong Kong Christian Service respectively in Kwai Chung and North Point, aims to motivate children to participate in social development by exploring community issues around them through a series of workshops and site visits. Children participants provided valuable insights into the issues observed by children within their community regarding the challenges they encounter and the solutions they seek.
- This child-centred model of community development raises awareness of children's rights and allows children to proactively identify community issues that concern them and build consensus with peers and other stakeholders, thus advocating for the government and those involved to create positive change in the community. By providing children with opportunities for engagement and fostering their sense of agency, they can actively contribute to shaping their communities, thus fostering a future that is both inclusive and sustainable.
- Other research⁹ also indicated that meaningful participation can improve children's safety, increase the success of care arrangements and increase feelings of well-being for children involved, which is also the ultimate goal of the "Housing Well • Being HK" project. Therefore, incorporating children's voices in the planning and design of housing developments is essential for creating child-friendly environments. Rather than relying on one-off consultations, a long-term, systematic approach to child participation in community development is essential to both the nourishment of children and the community.

Targeted Poverty Alleviation

- We see the Government's great effort in alleviating poverty with targeted measures such as Community Living Rooms in lower-income districts. **We also recommend the Government adopt the child participation model and provide relevant programmes that foster community involvement and personal development to Community Living Room children beneficiaries.** Research findings from Plan International's "Monitoring and Evaluation Study of the Child Participatory Community Development Programme"¹⁰ indicated that such programs significantly enhance children's awareness of their rights while building foundational capabilities that

⁹ Svein Arild Vis. (2010). *Participation and health – a research review of child participation in planning and decision-making*. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00743.x>

¹⁰ Good Impact Assessment Institute. (2024). *Monitoring and Evaluation Study of Child Participatory Community Development Programme*.

empower them as drivers of change. Key skills cultivated through these programmes include problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. This evidence underscores the importance of integrating children's perspectives into community programs.

- This approach not only amplifies the voices of children residing in subdivided units but also equips them with the skills necessary for personal growth and active citizenship. By positioning children as primary beneficiaries, the government can gain valuable insights into their needs and perspectives, thereby fostering more effective and responsive policies. Ultimately, this inclusive framework promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility among them, paving the way for a more equitable and participatory community development process.

Youth Empowerment

- A study¹¹ found that 87.7% of young people in Hong Kong considered themselves as a global citizen. In President Xi's speech delivered in Hong Kong, he emphasised the need to guide young people to be keenly aware of the trends in both China and the world and help them cultivate a sense of national pride and enhance their awareness of their status as masters of the country.¹² It is vital to integrate a global perspective into educational curricula to prepare youth for the challenges of an interconnected world, enabling them to pursue their aspirations and explore new avenues for personal growth.
- **We advocate for the inclusion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a framework established by the United Nations to address global challenges—within the educational plans for subjects such as “Citizenship, Economics and Society” and “Citizenship and Social Development.”** This integration will deepen local Hong Kong youths' understanding of global interconnectedness and empower them to think critically and creatively about pressing global issues.

Commission on Children

- We believe that diverse voices are the cornerstone of creating a harmonious society. It is vital to mainstream and include children's voices in the community. Hence, the

¹¹ The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups. (2023) *Youth Development — Why a Global Perspective Matters to Young People*. Retrieved from:

<https://yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/en/2023/05/28/yi071-2/>

¹² Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office Of The State Council. (2022). *The speech delivered by President Xi Jinping at the meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland and the inaugural ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*. Retrieved from:

http://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202207/02/content_WS62bf8de6c6d02e533532d147.html

Commission on Children is obligated to “promote and promulgate children's rights as articulated in the UNCRC, and engage with children on matters that affect them” in its Terms of Reference.¹³ **Plan International recommends tasking the Commission on Children to take this key role in developing and disseminating a clear blueprint to ensure a systematic and comprehensive approach to encouraging child participation in decision-making processes.** This blueprint should provide concrete guidance to government departments, agencies, and community organisers on how to effectively encourage and facilitate child participation.

¹³ Commission on Children. (2024). *Membership and Terms of Reference*. Retrieved from: <https://www.coc.gov.hk/en/member.html>

Appendix 1: Plan International's 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. Policy is applied to all staff with acknowledgement by signing.
4. Policy is applied to all relevant persons (volunteers, associates, and partners) with acknowledgement 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 allegation.
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 operation.
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 record.
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 policy and procedures every 1-2 years.