



## **COP31 Hong Kong Youth Statement on Climate Actions**

### **CarbonCare InnoLab COP31 Youth Delegates**

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## Executive Summary

Extreme weather events at both the local and global scales have resulted in significant loss of life, mass displacement, and a severe degradation of living standards. On 9 August, the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) recorded the highest temperature since 1884; research shows that extreme heat is estimated to cause hundreds of excess deaths annually.

Although the Paris Agreement urges countries to limit global warming to 1.5°C, a recent United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report concludes that exceeding this threshold is now inevitable, resulting in exacerbated extreme weather events, glacial melt, sea-level rise, and ecological damage.

As the COP31 youth delegation, we are aware of the escalating climate emergency and call for decisive and transformative climate action. We urge the HKSAR government to accelerate both its mitigation and adaptation initiatives, protect vulnerable groups, catalyse green investments, and structurally integrate youth perspectives into climate policy formulation.

We recommend that the government:

1. **Accelerate the Energy Transition** through renewable energy, electrified public transport, and e-waste management for solar panels and EV batteries.
2. **Integrating Statutory Climate Adaptation and Enforceable Occupational Health Standards to Protect Outdoor Workers from Extreme Heat** through mandatory WBGT monitoring, enforceable work–rest schedules, and greater employer accountability.
3. **Building a Climate-Resilient, Low-Carbon Healthcare System**, including heat–health action plans with night-time triggers, emissions reporting, low-carbon procurement, and workforce training.
4. **Strengthening Climate-related Governance and Information Integrity** through a central risk framework, mandatory assessments, independent disclosure assurance, and anti-greenwashing enforcement.
5. **Adopting a Multi-Dimensional Capacity-Building Model for Youth Empowerment and Talent Cultivation to Develop Resilience against Increased Climate Risk** through institutionalised youth engagement and climate education across policy, schools, and professional training.

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## Introduction

This year, extreme weather events at both the local and global scales have resulted in significant loss of life, mass displacement, and a severe degradation of living standards. A catastrophic Himalayan slope collapse in Nepal this August triggered devastating floods, which resulted in over 1,300 fatalities. In Hong Kong, extreme heat is estimated to cause hundreds of excess deaths annually (Liu et al., 2026).

Although the 2015 Paris Agreement implores countries to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report released this September concluded that exceeding this threshold is now inevitable. This overshoot will exacerbate extreme weather events, accelerate glacial melt, induce further sea-level rise, and inflict profound long-term ecological damage. Compounding these systemic risks is the current El Niño phenomenon, which possesses the potential to become the most severe on record since 1950. Expected to peak near the end of 2026 and persist at least until the spring of next year, this strong El Niño can lead to abnormally high temperatures. On 9 August, the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) recorded the city's highest temperature since 1884. The HKO has warned that record-breaking high temperatures may occur this year and next year due to climate change and forecasts of a “super-strong” El Niño event.

We, as the COP31 youth delegation, are acutely aware of the escalating climate emergency, which demands decisive and transformative action. The aforementioned UNEP report underscores that while the overshoot of the 1.5°C target is unavoidable, aggressive and immediate emission reductions could still help stabilise global temperatures. Concurrently, proactive adaptation strategies are imperative to safeguard populations and critical infrastructure, particularly those most vulnerable to climate impacts, while preserving the institutional and financial capacities requisite for sustaining long-term mitigation ambitions.

Against this backdrop, it is incumbent upon the HKSAR government to accelerate both its mitigation and adaptation initiatives, protect vulnerable groups, catalyse green investments, and structurally integrate youth perspectives into climate policy formulation. Such comprehensive efforts will not only safeguard public safety, health and ecological integrity, but also enhance the city's macroeconomic resilience and stimulate the green economy. We therefore submit the following policy recommendations for the government's immediate consideration:

- (1) **Expedite the Energy Transition:** Accelerate the decarbonisation of the electricity and transportation sectors by aggressively promoting local renewable energy deployment and the

electrification of public transit. This transition must concurrently integrate robust e-waste management frameworks, specifically addressing the lifecycle management of retired solar PV panels and electric vehicle (EV) batteries.

- (2) **Strengthen Occupational Heat Protection:** Enact legislative reforms to strengthen Hong Kong's occupational heat protection framework. This should include mandating site-specific Wet-Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) monitoring, establishing legally enforceable work-rest schedules, and enhancing employer accountability regarding the health and safety of outdoor and high-risk workers.
- (3) **Mainstream Climate Resilience in Healthcare:** Embed climate resilience and decarbonisation strategies into Hong Kong's public health system. This includes establishing clear accountability metrics within the Hospital Authority's Strategic and Five-Year Plans, developing a territory-wide heat-health action plan featuring night-time heat triggers, mandating annual greenhouse gas reporting, and implementing low-carbon procurement and clinical practices supported by comprehensive, climate-ready workforce training.
- (4) **Enhance Climate Risk Governance and Disclosure:** Establish a central climate-risk framework and integrated data platform, mandate risk assessments for key public bodies and major public infrastructure investments, phase in independent assurance of corporate climate disclosures, and implement enforceable anti-greenwashing provisions under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance.
- (5) **Expand Youth Capacity-Building and Policy Engagement:** Formalise mechanisms for youth participation in policy formulation and implementation processes, implement a city-wide mandate on critical climate change education and staff training, and expand provision of climate-relevant professional development programmes.

## **1. Accelerate Energy Transition in Electricity and Transport Sectors, and Integrate E-waste Management into the Transition**

Aggressive mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions is imperative to limiting global temperature increases to the 1.5°C threshold and preventing severe climate-related vulnerabilities. As a highly developed economy boasting one of the world's highest per capita GDPs, Hong Kong possesses both the requisite financial capacity and the global responsibility to achieve net-zero emissions quickly. Energy transition is central to this objective, given that fossil fuel combustion currently accounts for over 80% of the city's total emissions. Furthermore, in an era where geopolitical instability exacerbates volatility in global energy markets (as the Iran War shows), accelerating the energy transition is a critical measure to enhance energy security and economic resilience of Hong Kong.

### **1.1 Accelerate Local Renewable Energy Development**

Electricity generation accounts for over 60% of Hong Kong's total carbon emissions, positioning it as the most critical sector for decarbonisation. Currently, the city's electricity mix remains heavily reliant on fossil fuels (72%), with renewable energy contributing a mere 1%.

#### **1.1.1 Prioritise locally generated solar energy and increase solar energy to 10% by 2050**

We strongly urge the government to establish more ambitious renewable energy targets and implement robust support mechanisms. For solar energy, Hong Kong's current target of achieving 1-2% solar energy in the electricity mix by 2035 is conservative when compared to regional counterparts. For instance, Singapore aims to meet 10% of its energy needs through solar power by 2050 (EMA, 2026). Given the comparable land constraints, population densities, and solar irradiation levels between Hong Kong and Singapore (Inmedia, 2025), we recommend that Hong Kong set a corresponding long-term target for solar energy to 10 % of the energy mix.

The government must also lead by example by accelerating the deployment of solar PV systems across public assets. A 2025 study indicated that among seven categories of government buildings, only approximately 30% are currently equipped with rooftop solar installations (Liber Research Community, 2025). We urge relevant departments to proactively expand solar integration across diverse infrastructure, including the adoption of Building-Integrated Photovoltaics (BIPV), floating solar arrays on reservoirs, and installations on vacant government land.

Offshore wind should complement the expansion of solar energy. The government has targeted wind energy to comprise 3.5% to 4% of the fuel mix for electricity generation by 2035, while academic research (Gao et al., 2019) indicates that the city's offshore wind potential can satisfy over 30% of local electricity demand. Despite this vast untapped capacity, Hong Kong currently lacks any

commercial-scale wind turbines. We urge the government to comprehensively reassess the potential of offshore wind projects and accelerate their deployment.

Over-reliance on imported renewable electricity would expose Hong Kong's transition to supply and climate-related risks beyond its control. Due to the Chinese mainland's own 2060 carbon neutrality commitments and the vulnerability of the China Southern Power Grid's hydropower output to climate-induced fluctuations such as droughts (China Water Risk, 2023), the availability of surplus renewable electricity for export to Hong Kong cannot be guaranteed long-term. Therefore, cross-border energy integration must be pursued as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, aggressive domestic renewable energy expansion.

#### 1.1.2 Extend the FiT Scheme to 2048

The Feed-in Tariff (FiT) Scheme has historically been instrumental in driving the adoption of distributed renewable energy, particularly rooftop solar PV systems. However, the reduction in FiT rates in 2022 and the anticipated expiration of the scheme in 2033 have led to a decline in new installations and private investment. While solar panel costs have decreased with technological maturation, installers note that these savings are offset by rising component and labour costs, necessitating sustained policy intervention (The Xylom, 2025). Consequently, we recommend extending the FiT Scheme for an additional 15 years (until 2048) in the forthcoming Scheme of Control Agreements with power companies.

#### 1.1.3 Strengthen grid capacity and transparency for renewable integration

Furthermore, stakeholders—including residents and solar installation companies—have reported significant challenges regarding the approval of large-scale solar PV systems. For example, a company seeking to install 200 kW systems was granted approval for a substantially reduced capacity of merely 20 kW, a limitation that CLP attributed to grid capacity constraints in districts (Bastille Post, 2018; Oriental Daily News, 2018).

To address these bottlenecks, we urge the government to mandate greater transparency from power utilities, specifically requiring the disclosure of data concerning unapproved capacities and the reasons for such limitations. We also advocate for the government to introduce incentives for power utilities to prioritise grid upgrades and accelerate renewable energy grid connections. Aligning with the COP31 Action Agenda, it is imperative to facilitate investments in grid infrastructure, energy storage, and flexibility mechanisms to ensure the reliable integration of renewable power.

## 1.2 Accelerate the Electrification of Public Transport Fleets

The transport sector accounts for approximately 20% of Hong Kong's total carbon emissions, making widespread electrification an indispensable strategy for sectoral decarbonisation. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA, 2024), the lifecycle emissions of electric vehicles (EVs) are demonstrably lower than those of internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs), even in jurisdictions where the electricity grid is predominantly reliant on coal.

### 1.2.1 Deliver zero-emission taxis and franchised buses by 2034

At present, Hong Kong's electrification of public transport significantly lags behind that of private vehicles. According to the Transport Department's data for June 2026, the EV percentage for private cars stands at 27%, whereas that for taxis and franchised buses remains disproportionately low at merely 8.1% and 1.5%, respectively. The current reliance on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for taxis and diesel for franchised buses continues to impede meaningful emissions reductions.

Recent geopolitical instability—notably the conflict in Iran—and the subsequent volatility in global oil prices throughout 2026 have underscored the urgency of transitioning away from fossil fuels. Hong Kong's average import price for diesel more than doubled between February and April, with July prices remaining 60% above February levels (Consumer Council, 2026). Similarly, the statutory ceiling price for Auto-LPG surged by over 30% from February to July (EMSD, 2026).

Regional and international precedents demonstrate the feasibility of rapid fleet transition. Shenzhen successfully achieved 100% electrification of its taxi and public bus fleets prior to 2020, facilitated by state subsidies, rent-to-own arrangements and government support to resolve land availability issues for fast charging stations (World Bank et al, 2021). Furthermore, London—a city that relies heavily on double-decker buses like Hong Kong—has committed to a fully zero-emission bus fleet by 2034 (London Assembly, 2022). We advocate that the Hong Kong government set the same target and achieve net-zero emissions for taxis and franchised buses by 2034.

### 1.2.2 Build public-transport-first fast-charging infrastructure

To support this transition, the government must proactively facilitate the deployment of robust charging infrastructure. While the current policy target aims to provide 10,000 fast chargers by 2035, a detailed implementation roadmap remains pending. We advocate for a significantly higher proportion of public fast chargers, strategically located to prioritise the operational needs of public transport. Unlike private car owners, public transport fleet operators frequently lack access to private overnight charging facilities and operate under strict time constraints. Extended charging times directly translate to service disruptions and substantial income loss for drivers (Inmedia, 2026). Therefore, a targeted, public-first approach to fast charger planning is essential to ensure the viability of public transport electrification.

### 1.3 Integrate Comprehensive E-Waste Management into the Energy Transition

The accelerated deployment of renewable energy and EVs necessitates a concurrent expansion of end-of-life electrical waste management and recycling frameworks. Without proactive regulatory support, the environmental benefits of the energy transition risk being undermined by hazardous waste accumulation.

#### 1.3.1 Include solar PV waste under the Producer Responsibility Scheme

As of 2025, over 27,000 distributed renewable energy systems—predominantly solar PV installations—have been approved (CLP, 2026). Although solar panels possess a standard operational lifespan of 25 to 30 years, extreme weather events can lead to premature decommissioning. For example, Typhoon Danas in Taiwan reportedly damaged around 135,000 solar panels (PV Magazine, 2025). Given Hong Kong's vulnerability to severe typhoons, proactive legislative planning for solar waste management is imperative.

The improper disposal of solar PV waste poses severe environmental and public health risks (Carboncare Innolab et al, 2026). Depending on their specific composition, PV modules contain hazardous heavy metals and toxic compounds, including lead, cadmium, and chromium. When panels are damaged, weathered, or disposed of in unlined landfills, these substances can leach into the surrounding ecosystem. Communities adjacent to disposal sites face elevated exposure risks through contaminated groundwater, soil, and dust. The public health implications are particularly severe for children, as lead exposure induces irreversible neurological and developmental damage, with no established safe threshold.

Currently, Hong Kong's Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WPRS) does not cover solar PV waste. We advocate amending the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance (Cap. 603) to include solar PV as a designated product under the WPRS, so as to guarantee safe handling, systematic recovery, and environmentally sound recycling.

#### 1.3.2 Establish a mandatory EV-battery recovery and traceability system

Parallel to the solar waste challenge, the Environmental Protection Department projects that the volume of retired EV batteries will surge fivefold, from approximately 1,300 tonnes in 2026 to 6,700 tonnes by 2030. The improper storage and handling of degraded batteries present acute fire hazards. Over the past four years, nine fire incidents linked to retired batteries have been recorded in Hong Kong—a risk that will escalate exponentially alongside the growing volume of retired batteries.

While we welcome the government's stated intention to incorporate retired EV batteries into the Producer Responsibility Scheme, the current proposal lacks critical operational details (GovHK, 2026). Essential components—such as implementation timelines, statutory recovery rate targets, and

standardised handling guidelines for stakeholders across the value chain (including vehicle owners and auto repair workshops)—remain undefined.

We urge the government to establish concrete recovery targets, mandate a comprehensive battery registration system to ensure end-to-end traceability, and provide operation handbooks for repair workshops and EV owners. Accelerating the development of a robust EV battery recycling system will not only reduce fire risks and alleviate the burden on waste management infrastructure but also catalyse the transition towards a circular economy and stimulate green employment opportunities.

## **2. Integrating Statutory Climate Adaptation and Enforceable Occupational Health Standards to Protect Outdoor Workers from Extreme Heat**

The transition from a voluntary advisory system to a mandatory site-level regulatory system is crucial in addressing the structural shortcomings of the existing Heat Stress at Work Warning (“HSWW”) system (Employees’ Compensation Ordinance, 1953; Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, 1997; SCMP Editorial, 2026). Centralised weather data from the Hong Kong Observatory are not suitable for occupational risk assessment, as territorial averages obscure the harsh microclimates and high heat loads directly faced by outdoor workforces (Hong Kong Free Press, 2026; Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026). Moreover, voluntary employer compliance alone presents significant enforcement challenges, as nonmandatory guidance offers no legal protection against operational problems and supervisory disputes. Field measurements confirm that generalised indices systematically miss the critical thermal exposure shapes of urban streets, where limited shade, radiant heat-absorbing road surfaces and poor ventilation compound physiological strain (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026).

### **2.1 Mandate Site-Specific Wet Bulb Globe Temperature Monitoring**

The current territory-wide macro-meteorological mechanism of the Hong Kong Observatory is structurally insufficient to protect outdoor workforces and requires a legislative transition to localised, site-specific Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (“WBGT”) monitoring that meets the statutory requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509) (Hong Kong Observatory, 2024). Ambient air temperature is an inadequate measure of physiological heat strain because it systematically masks real-time thermal differences between individual working environments.

To address this gap, the Labour Department should be legislatively mandated to require the use of portable on-site WBGT monitoring devices and automated district sensors in all high-risk municipal and contract zones. The legislative change will guarantee that the basis for mandatory work-rest adjustments is the specific microclimates in which physical labour is carried out. This means that statutory compliance standards will consider local physiological stressors such as humidity, air

circulation, workload intensity, heavy protective gear and radiant heat from concrete and metal surfaces, rather than generic urban metrics (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026).

This policy demand was structurally unavoidable and was never more visibly undeniable than on 9 August 2026, when the Tsim Sha Tsui headquarters recorded a historic 36.9°C, the highest since 1884, while regional automatic meteorological stations in Sheung Shui recorded a critical 39.8°C (Labour Department, 2026). These big regional differences failed to move the automated alert beyond the baseline Amber level. Former Observatory Director Lam Chiu-ying said the Hong Kong Heat Index ("HKHI") underpinning formula is flawed for occupational safety because it is based on generalised public hospitalisation data rather than direct solar radiation and localised worker endurance (Xiao, 2026). The combination of global warming and Hong Kong's crowded urban setting will mean more heat-related work. Asphalt streets, concrete sidewalks, unventilated metal structures and work sites absorb and re-radiate heat, raising ground and surface temperatures well above official air temperature readings. That means construction workers, delivery riders, road maintenance workers and sanitation workers in Hong Kong are experiencing much higher levels of heat stress than the aggregated weather data suggests.

Furthermore, Oxfam Hong Kong's empirical field research found that portable tracking equipment on real job sites recorded conditions that should have triggered Amber alerts 3.5 times more often than the government's centralised database, with 95.23 hours of extreme heat never recorded (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026). At urban Refuse Collection Points ("RCPs"), for instance, thermal traps are formed due to stagnant air and heavy workloads, elevating the internal baseline temperature to 32°C and pushing sanitation workers to extreme conditions, leading to 62% of construction and sanitation workers experiencing acute heatstroke symptoms like dizziness and rapid heartbeats weekly (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026). Transitioning to mandatory, site-level climate parameters is the only viable policy action to eliminate these enforcement gaps and structurally protect frontline worker health.

## **2.2 Integrate the Heat Stress at Work Warning under Cap. 509**

The government should amend the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509) to transform the Heat Stress at Work Warning ("HSWW") framework from voluntary Guidance Notes into a legally binding statutory requirement. This is the primary mechanism to close systemic enforcement gaps and workplace pressure on outdoor workers. The current HSWW framework is based on inherent voluntariness, which causes huge compliance problems. An advisory safety device which is not legally enforceable cannot serve as an effective deterrent to institutional neglect.

In the absence of legally binding rules, cost-cutting management cultures and voluntary employer uptake leave worker health entirely to their whims. Quantitative data collected by the Hong Kong

Workers' Health Centre revealed that more than three-quarters of frontline workers were not provided with any systematic, on-site safety planning, as less than a quarter of employers interviewed actively conducted required heat-stress risk assessments at designated work sites (Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre, 2021). Industry union representatives have also voiced concerns about the system's advisory nature and how safety officers and supervisors on site often treat active alerts as a cosmetic box-ticking exercise by sending automated WhatsApp notifications to employees (The Standard, 2026).

These widespread compliance gaps and institutional negligence need to be filled by the Labour Department imposing statutory fines and criminal liabilities on non-compliant companies. This robust statutory codification under Cap. 509 should require employers to have comprehensive heat-safety plans, provide certified cooling devices and establish shaded, air-conditioned rest areas at all high-exposure construction and city worksites.

Without legally binding regulations, tight infrastructure delivery timelines and rigid commercial schedules can lead management to prioritise project speeds over worker rest (Labour Department, 2026; The Standard, 2026). Frontline workers who try to take essential breaks are left at the mercy of a poisonous workplace climate of intimidation and "cold violence" (The Standard, 2026). Street cleaners and estate sanitation staff who experience extreme heat exhaustion and attempt to recuperate in public shaded spaces or stairwells are routinely subject to hyper-critical public judgement and explicit verbal reprimands from observers who misconstrue vital emergency recovery for an incapacity or unwillingness to perform operational duties (The Standard, 2026).

This is a difficult environment for marginalised workers to use active heat alerts without feeling ashamed or scared, so they often return to physically demanding jobs before they are fully recovered. Codifying the HSWW system into an enforceable ordinance is therefore the only viable policy mechanism to strip employers of arbitrary discretion, provide statutory grounds for labour inspection, and secure a safe environment where vulnerable individuals can access occupational health protections without fearing immediate career reprisal or job loss.

### **2.3 Recognise Heatstroke as a Statutory Occupational Disease**

We urge the government to amend the Second Schedule of the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282) to formally classify heatstroke and heat-induced organ failure as compensable occupational diseases, which serves as the primary mechanism to protect outdoor workers from legal and economic vulnerabilities (Employees' Compensation Ordinance, 1953).

The implementation of automatic statutory coverage will systematically remove the unfair barriers faced by casual, piece-rate and subcontracted workforces in medical crises, directly securing their

access to compensation without the need for private legal intervention or immediate access to employer-held temperature logs. This statutory update re-classifies extreme heat strain from an individual health incident to an officially recognised, predictable workplace hazard, with clear parameters, to protect the right to safe working conditions for all frontline sectors (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026).

Hong Kong can draw on neighbouring jurisdictions to develop structured medical and environmental standards under Cap. 282. For example, the Law on Prevention and Control of Occupational Disease in the Chinese mainland provides an objective legal blueprint. In this system, diagnostic centres determine whether a case is work-related by accessing data from local meteorological records, in-house industrial hygiene reports and individual clinical histories (National Health Commission of the PRC, 2024). This kind of multi-tiered data verification process eliminates arbitrary denials by employers.

Likewise, Singapore's Ministry of Manpower ("MUM") imposes mandatory reporting obligations on employers, on top of its core Workplace Safety and Health Act frameworks. When an outdoor worker has severe heat-related symptoms, the company is legally required to report the incident through the government portal and to provide all on-site environmental tracking logs directly to the medical professionals (Ministry of Manpower, 2023). The incorporation of these stringent medical checks and reporting requirements into the Hong Kong laws will eliminate the legal ambiguity for injured outdoor personnel, expedite the immediate payout distributions and force outsourcing companies to implement active on-site climate adaptation controls (Oxfam Hong Kong, 2026).

### **3. Building a Climate-Resilient, Low-Carbon Healthcare System**

Climate change is already a critical health issue in Hong Kong, and heat is its most direct risk. Guo and colleagues studied over five million non-cancer, non-injury hospitalisations during the hot seasons of 2000–2019. They found that extreme excess night-time heat was linked to a 3.1% rise in admissions over the following four days. The rise was 5.3% among older people and 5.3% among people of low socioeconomic status (Guo et al., 2024). Climate adaptation measures concerning the healthcare system are urgently needed. However, Hong Kong's First Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) does not mention climate-related health risks in its healthcare chapter.

The healthcare system is also a significant carbon emitter. Healthcare produces around 4.4% of global net greenhouse-gas emissions. If it were a country, it would be the world's fifth-largest emitter. Approximately 71% of these emissions come from supply chains. Anaesthetic gas and metered-dose inhalers add approximately another 1% (Karliner et al., n.d.). The Hospital Authority (HA) runs 43 hospitals and institutions and uses about 3% of Hong Kong's electricity. It has a carbon-neutrality goal

and an electricity roadmap that targets a 15–20% reduction against 2015 levels by 2035. By March 2025, it had achieved 8% (Hospital Authority, 2025). That leaves 7–12 percentage points to find in about ten years. Meanwhile, the First Hospital Development Plan (HDP) will add more than 6,550 beds and 105 operating theatres (Hospital Authority, 2026). These commitments currently sit mainly in HA's environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting. They are not yet built into the systems that allocate money, manage risks and shape clinical practice.

Responsibility extends beyond HA. Key policy levers are held by the Health Bureau, the Environment and Ecology Bureau (EEB), the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO), the Department of Health (DH), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Labour Department. This section makes four policy demands based on the World Health Organisation's Operational Framework for Building Climate Resilient and Low Carbon Health Systems, the global standard (World Health Organisation, 2023). The government would set direction and accountability, and HA would be the main implementing agency.

Climate resilience and decarbonisation should be treated as a core part of patient safety and quality in Hong Kong's health system, not as a facilities task or an ESG reporting item. Our four demands are grouped by the level at which action is needed.

### **3.1 Embed Health-System Decarbonisation and Heat-Health Resilience in Planning, Risk Management and Funding**

The HA already has environmental structures, including a Steering Committee on Environmental Management and a Board Task Group on Sustainability (Hospital Authority, 2025, 2026). However, climate does not appear in the systems that set strategy:

1. The 2025 organisation-wide risk report does not mention climate or extreme weather.
2. The emergency framework does not name heat (Hospital Authority, 2025).
3. None of the Annual Plan 2026–27's four strategic goals is environmental (Hospital Authority, 2026).

At government level, the Five-Year Plan's healthcare chapter does not mention climate (Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), 2026). Governance is also changing, which creates an opening. The next Strategic Plan, the Governance and Structure Reform Committee (set up in December 2024) and the 1 April 2026 cluster merger all create an opening (Hospital Authority, 2025, 2026).

This is also a fiscal-resilience issue. HA's 2026–27 subvention follows a \$1.8 billion cut under the Productivity Enhancement Programme (PEP), with further 2% cuts planned (Hospital Authority, 2026).

HA spent \$1.90 billion on utilities in 2024–25 (Hospital Authority, 2025). A 15–20% cut would save up to \$285–380 million a year, about a sixth to a fifth of the PEP cut. The real figure would be lower, because not all utility costs are electricity.

## Recommendations

### 1. Health Bureau and Environment and Ecology Bureau

- a. Name health-system decarbonisation and heat-health resilience as Five-Year Plan deliverables, and report on them through the Policy Address and the mid-term assessment.

### 2. Hospital Authority

- a. Make climate a strategic direction in the next Strategic Plan
- b. Add extreme weather and heat to the organisation-wide risk register, add an environmental pillar to the key performance indicators (KPIs), and name an executive director who is accountable at Board level.

### 3. Financing

- a. Verified energy and clinical savings should count towards efficiency targets under zero-based budgeting, and part of these savings should be reinvested.
- b. Include climate-resilience costs in the Health Bureau's 2027–30 funding model.

## 3.2 Establish a Heat-Health Action Plan and Hospital Heat-Surge Response

HKO has improved its warnings over time. It added the Hot Weather Special Advisory in 2014 and an alert for prolonged heat across consecutive hot nights in 2022 (Ho et al., 2025). However, current definitions still miss the most dangerous nights. Risk depends on how intense and long overnight heat is, not on crossing the 28°C hot-night cut-off (Guo et al., 2024).

Heat also affects emergency demands rapidly, including through increased emergency calls within a day (Law et al., 2026). Public-health and hospital responses must therefore begin on the same day that dangerous conditions emerge, rather than after admissions have already increased.

The HA has winter surge plans but no heat-surge plan. Exposure is growing. The number of older people in New Territories West is projected to grow by 40% by 2031, while general bed occupancy is already around 90% (Hospital Authority, 2026). As care shifts to homes and residential care homes, more patients will be in places where heat is harder to control.

Healthcare workers are exposed as well. Working-age men show the largest heat-stress effect on emergency visits (Chau et al., 2022), which is relevant to outdoor and supporting staff within the HA system.

## Recommendations

1. Health Bureau, Hong Kong Observatory and Department of Health
  - a. Develop and implement a territory-wide heat-health action plan. Use triggers based on night-time heat intensity and minimum temperature, not only the daytime maximum or the 28°C cut-off (Guo et al., 2024; Ho et al., 2025; Law et al., 2026)
  - b. Integrate Heat-health indicators into the Five-Year Plan's early-warning system.
2. Hospital Authority
  - a. Establish a heat surge plan alongside its winter surge plan. It should include same-day triggers, proactive contact with high-risk patients through HA Go and community teams, and surge capacity for emergency departments and medical wards.
3. Social Welfare Department
  - a. Issue heat guidance for residential care homes, and use the welfare e-platform to flag heat-vulnerable older people who live alone.
4. Labour Department and Hospital Authority
  - a. Include heat stress in occupational safety assessments for outdoor and supporting staff.
5. Hospital estate planning
  - a. Require the HA's Facility Design Guidelines consultancy (due 1Q27) and the Second HDP to set standards for ward overheating, flooding, and power resilience before finalising project briefs.

### 3.3 Require Annual Greenhouse-Gas Reporting and Low-Carbon Procurement

HA currently reports environmental savings per project but does not publish total energy-use data or a greenhouse-gas inventory, making its reported 8% reduction difficult to assess independently (Hospital Authority, 2025).

In 2024–25, HA spent \$12.75 billion on drugs and \$5.90 billion on medical supplies and equipment (Hospital Authority, 2025). Since supply chains account for around 71% of global healthcare carbon footprint, procurement is likely to represent a significant share of HA's carbon emissions (Karliner et al., n.d.). An electricity-only roadmap is therefore insufficient. Electricity-related emissions will decrease as the grid decarbonises, but HA's Reference Guide on Green Procurement and ESG weighting in tenders offers a direct opportunity to reduce emissions and improve supply-chain resilience to extreme weather.

## Recommendations

### 1. Hospital Authority

- a. Publish total energy use and a greenhouse-gas inventory each year. Report Scopes 1 and 2 (direct emissions and purchased electricity) first, then estimate Scope 3 (supply-chain emissions) from procurement data.
- b. Add carbon and life-cycle criteria to central tenders for high-volume consumables and major equipment, building on the existing ESG weighting. Ask major suppliers to disclose their emissions.
- c. Include extreme-weather disruption in supply-chain risk assessments for critical drugs and consumables.

### 2. Hospital Authority and Environment and Ecology Bureau

- a. Incorporate energy-use limits into the hospital Design Guidelines, in line with the Five-Year Plan building targets, and fund large retrofits through green and transition finance.

## 3.4 Reduce Clinical Emissions Through Sustainable Anaesthesia and Climate-Health Training

Anaesthesia's carbon emissions are where the clinical evidence is strongest. Ending desflurane can be done immediately (Kalmar et al., 2026). Trusts in England's National Health Service committed to stopping its use by early 2024. Even before the deadline, its share of volatile anaesthetic gases fell from 20% to 3% (Cutting Emissions from Anaesthetic Gases in England, n.d.). Low-flow anaesthesia can cut volatile agent use by 50–75%. Total intravenous anaesthesia (TIVA) produces about 0.4 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e per hour, compared with 3.1–3.8 kg for volatile techniques (Yamakage, 2026). A Calgary hospital cut desflurane use by 17% (about 12 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e a year) through education, reminders on anaesthetic machines and moving vaporisers to a supply room. Resistance centred on professional autonomy, and short-term costs rose slightly, so savings should be checked rather than assumed (Ip et al., 2024).

Beyond the operating theatre, the biggest gains come from avoiding unnecessary procedures. This means carefully selecting patients for surgery, optimising them before surgery and preventing complications (MacNeill et al., 2024).

The workforce is not yet prepared. HA spent \$570.4 million on training in 2024–25, but no training covers climate, heat illness or sustainable practice (Hospital Authority, 2025). Internationally, only 15% of medical schools teach climate change and health (Omrani et al., 2020). The World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists recommends building environmental sustainability into hospital audit and quality-improvement programmes (White et al., 2022).

## Recommendations

### 1. Clinical departments

- a. End routine desflurane use, adopt low-flow anaesthesia, and offer TIVA where clinically appropriate.
- b. Audit piped nitrous oxide for leaks, streamline procedure packs, prefer lower-carbon inhalers where clinically suitable, and report medication-waste reductions as both cost and carbon savings (Hospital Authority, 2025).

### 2. Hospital Authority

- a. Establish a network of departmental "Green Champions", starting with anaesthesia, surgery, pharmacy and community services. (White et al., 2022)
- b. Include sustainability in quality improvement, for example through the SusQI approach (Ip et al., 2024).
- c. Use the new Anaesthesia Clinical Information System to measure volatile agent use per case.

### 3. Hospital Authority Academy and universities

- a. Develop a short climate-and-health module covering heat illness, vulnerable patients and low-carbon practice
- b. Build planetary health into medical, nursing and pharmacy curricula.

## 4. Strengthening Climate Governance and Information Integrity in Hong Kong

As an international financial hub, Hong Kong is home to over 2,600 listed companies with a total market capitalization exceeding HK\$30 trillion. Concurrently, the Hong Kong Government and its financial regulators have been actively driving climate risk assessment and management. Hong Kong is exceptionally well-positioned to advance climate governance and play a pivotal role in global decarbonization. Indeed, climate change presents material but uneven risks to Hong Kong's assets, and assessing the risk is the foundation of effective climate governance. Academic and civil-society research has already demonstrated that climate change could cause material losses and risks to Hong Kong's public assets. However, the researchers acknowledged that limited case studies could not provide a comprehensive assessment of Hong Kong's exposure (HKU Jockey Club Enterprise Sustainability Global Research Institute, 2025). Since most of these research remain independent and selective, their findings do not provide a consistent, government-wide evidence base. While there has not been a mandate for public sectors to adopt climate risk assessment, listed companies are mandated to public climate-related disclosure, with lack of government support.

At the same time, inconsistent standards and limited enforcement allow environmental claims to be made without sufficiently clear or verifiable evidence. These gaps reduce the reliability and

comparability of climate information, increase greenwashing risks and hinder the effective allocation of public and private capital towards genuine mitigation and adaptation.

#### **4.1 Develop a Public Central Climate Risk Assessment Framework and Knowledge Sharing Platform**

We urge the government to establish a Public Climate Risk assessment framework and platform. The framework should follow the IPCC AR6 risk framework by examining the interaction between hazards, exposure and vulnerability, including acute, chronic, compound and cascading risks and cover short, medium and long-term time horizons. The framework would provide the common evidence base needed for the mandatory departmental and project-level assessments proposed in Point 4.2. It would reduce duplicated studies, reveal interconnected risks and support more consistent budgeting, insurance and adaptation-financing decisions across the public sector.

Hong Kong already had a strong foundation in data sharing systems. The Government's Common Spatial Data Infrastructure (CSDI) Portal provides public, map-based spatial data, while the HKO has also published climate projections aligned with IPCC AR6 risk framework. Hong Kong's 2026–2030 Five-Year Plan (HKSAR, 2026) also proposed data and information network sharing with the Chinese Mainland for assessing inclement-weather hazards. Hong Kong should further strengthen cooperation with Guangdong on interoperable climate data and regional scenarios, as the risks are often regional. By consolidating existing information and ensuring it is verified by the government, both public and private sectors could leverage the information to conduct their specific climate risk assessment.

#### **4.2 Mandate Climate Risk Assessment across institutions and major public investments**

We urge the government to mandate climate-risk assessments for important public investment decisions across two complementary dimensions:

1. **Institutional-level assessment:** Departments and public bodies responsible for significant public assets or essential services such as housing, drainage, water supply and coastal infrastructure should assess the climate risk under the framework.
2. **Asset-and project-level assessment:** New public works and existing public assets providing essential services should perform climate risk assessment. Specifically, this assessment should be part of the approval requirements for upgrading projects to Category A under the Public Works Programme, meaning that public works above the HK\$50 million threshold should be covered (Legco, n.d.). It should also cover existing public assets identified as highly exposed or essential to public services.

Currently, only very few departments have conducted climate risk assessments on a voluntary basis, including the Architectural Services Department and Drainage Services Department, for their own operations (ArchSD, 2025; DSD, 2025). The Civil Engineering and Development Department and Water Supplies Department also conduct sector-specific studies on coastal hazards, flooding and water security (CEDD, 2022; WSD, 2019).

However, their assessment methodologies and presentation formats also vary, lacking a common methodology, shared climate scenarios and consistent reporting standards. Consequently, decisionmakers lack comparable information for systematically incorporating climate considerations into budgeting, capital investment, procurement, insurance and financing decisions. When the platform mentioned in Section 4.1 is established, different departments could leverage the unified database and proceed with their assessment.

### **4.3 Use Climate Assurance to Strengthen Corporate Governance and Risk Management**

We urge the government to phase in independent assurance for climate-related disclosures for the private sector. From a private-sector perspective, Hong Kong has substantially strengthened climate-related disclosure requirements, but gaps remain in their comparability, credibility and reliability. From the 2025 reporting year, the majority of the listed companies are required to issue climate-related disclosures (HKEX, 2026). These requirements improve the availability of climate information but do not verify its accuracy or demonstrate that issuers have undertaken sufficiently robust climate-risk assessments.

Independent assurance is not yet mandatory under the current HKEX rules. Only 9% of the listed companies obtained independent assurance over their ESG disclosures (HKEX, 2025). Climate information therefore continues to vary in reliability, particularly among companies outside the listed-issuer and large publicly accountable entity framework.

Assurance should cover both reported emissions, and the processes companies use to identify and manage climate risks. Limited assurance could begin with Scope 1 and 2 emissions before gradually extending to climate-risk assessments and material financial impacts, which is a proven concept by the government. The Government's Vision Statement on Developing the Sustainability Disclosure Ecosystem in Hong Kong states that "the government and financial regulators will promote sustainability assurance to enable credible implementation" (FTSB, 2024).

Research covering STOXX Europe 600 companies found that external assurance was positively associated with corporate emissions-reduction initiatives, particularly where sustainability and governance committees were in place (Issa, 2025). In Hong Kong, requiring significant deficiencies

and corrective actions to be reported to the board would make assurance a practical governance tool and help companies translate climate reporting into concrete action.

#### **4.4 Strengthen Anti-Greenwashing Standards and Enforcement**

We urge the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau to introduce a statutory Environmental Claims covering goods and services marketed in Hong Kong into the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). Building on Customs' existing responsibility for enforcing the Trade Descriptions Ordinance, the Code should require businesses to possess credible evidence before using claims such as "green", "carbon neutral", "recyclable", "biodegradable" or "compostable".

It should also require businesses to specify whether a claim applies to the entire product or only one component and permit sustainability labels only when supported by an approved certification scheme. Customs should be empowered to demand supporting evidence, order the correction or withdrawal of unsupported claims, and impose proportionate penalties for serious or repeated violations.

Greenwashing occurs when businesses use false, exaggerated or insufficiently substantiated environmental claims to make products or services appear more sustainable than they are. An analysis published by Friends of the Earth (HK) identifies misleading advertisements, labels and broad expressions such as "green", "eco-friendly" and "carbon neutral" as common forms of greenwashing (Friends of the Earth (HK), 2024). BEC similarly reports that inconsistent ecolabels and environmental claims create confusion for businesses and consumers in Hong Kong (BEC, 2024). By standardising the measurement and definition to "recyclable", "biodegradable", and "recycled", with reference to ISO 14021:2026, the Code could provide clear and enforceable criteria for businesses.

### **5. Empower Youth and Cultivate Green Talent for Climate Resilience**

The adverse impacts by the climate crisis disproportionately affect children and youth, owing to increased exposure to extreme weather and heat stress. These impacts are felt more acutely by youth disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status. However, children and youth around the world, including in Hong Kong, often encounter structural barriers that hinder their participation in decision-making efforts on climate resilience.

The Glasgow Programme of Action (2021) emphasises the need for more inclusive and equitable participation, which includes integrating youth empowerment into government decision-making, education, and overall capacity-building. To fully harness the potential of youth in addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change, Hong Kong must fast-track youth engagement in

climate policy to address the unique challenges they face and equip them with essential skills in climate adaptation, and thus achieve long-term resilience and intergenerational justice.

### **5.1 Formalising youth participation: from advisory roles to co-design in climate policy**

In Hong Kong, formal avenues for youth to directly influence the drafting and implementation processes of climate policies remain limited. Advisory-based youth participation in relevant committees allows for interaction with the government regarding climate-related issues, such as through the Member Self-Recommendation Scheme for Youth (MSSY) and the Council for Carbon Neutrality and Sustainable Development (CNSD). Yet, an understanding of specific policy outcomes driven by youth remains unclear due to a lack of transparency.

Under the MSSY, youth involvement is constrained to agenda items under the Green Technology and Finance Development Committee and the Community Involvement Committee on Greening, neglecting other critical topics such as renewable energy, waste management, and just transition. Hence, the government falls short of enabling meaningful and effective youth participation in climate decision-making, and consequently, its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the commitments under the and its commitments under the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE).

To safeguard intergenerational equity under the UNFCCC, the government should avoid tokenistic youth inclusion. Youth participation must be reasonably considered and integrated at all levels of the climate policy-making process, shifting from symbolic consultation to strategic co-design. The government should model international practices as suggested by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to empower youth participation in climate governance and the legislative process. Youth Climate Councils at the national level, first pioneered in Denmark, act as independent youth bodies to advise on climate policy-making strategies to their respective state-level environmental ministries. Such forms of formalised youth engagement facilitate intergenerational collaboration and the aggregation of diverse youth inputs to achieve national climate commitments.

Outcomes resulting from youth participation should be effectively communicated to the public. For example, the Environment and Climate Change Youth Council in Canada publishes multi-year summary reports, detailing specific policy areas alongside feedback from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on how youth inputs were weighted in decision-making.

The government is strongly urged to restructure MSSY by diversifying the number of climate-related committees, allowing members to review Hong Kong's climate commitments, and publish results from youth-led consultation work to improve transparency. It should also consider expanding the

number of youth representatives in both the MSSY and the Council for Carbon Neutrality and Sustainable Development (CNSD), to ensure inclusive and effective youth participation.

Beyond being active agents in bridging existing gaps of relevant climate policy decisions, youth offer nuanced insights on the climate-related risks they face, and embody the rights and interests of future generations. Their lived experiences, particularly those with vulnerable backgrounds, can offer more responsive, inclusive and grounded solutions. Hence, their participation in policymaking and at the implementation level is not simply fair, but is also essential to long-term climate governance.

## 5.2 Establish critical climate education across all education levels

Article 12 of the Paris Agreement affirms the centrality of education and training in enhancing global response and the overall functioning of the Agreement. The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) for 2030 programme was proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), “to empower learners to make informed decisions and responsible action for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.” (UNESCO, 2023) However, Hong Kong does not have an official comprehensive ESD policy, and the current education system does not contain sufficient and suitable learning tools for enhancing students’ understanding and willingness to actively engage in sustainable development.

Recent data from Civic Exchange indicates that sustainability concepts have not been included in 73% of secondary school development plans. Hence, the government must prioritise introducing mandates on critical climate education and relevant professional training at all education levels, as part of a unified, system-wide approach. Without policy support, climate education is actively being deprioritised among educators and has witnessed fragmented implementation efforts. To support Hong Kong’s carbon neutrality policy goals and align itself with international commitments under the Paris Agreement, the government must also reevaluate and redesign Hong Kong’s education philosophy outlined in the Values Education Curriculum Framework (2026), and expedite collaboration between relevant stakeholders, including the Education Bureau (EDB), school staff, youth, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The government must revise its approach to sustainability development education, where its stated aim is to cultivate students’ “benevolence, empathy, respect and appreciation” for the natural environment. This approach may be well-intended, but is not aligned with nor responsive to current realities, and thus, does not adequately develop students’ intellectual and relational capacities to confront increasingly complex and uncertain climate realities. Therefore, the government should incorporate the critical climate education approach, a holistic, transformative model that focuses on

the intersections of climate change with social injustice. It should avoid relying on its one-dimensional, values-based approach to climate education, and should seek to develop students' critical literacy around current solutions to promote innovation and long-term resilience.

#### 5.2.1 Mandate a comprehensive ESD policy framework for primary and secondary schools

The government should look into best practices demonstrated by the Republic of Korea (ROK), where a comprehensive ESD policy has been embedded into the national framework. The ROK's Framework Act on Education (2021) established a legal mandate for local and national-level implementation of ecological transition education, allowing for the implementation of ESD by central governmental organisations, major institutions, government commissions, local governments, civil organisations and more. The Act on Promotion of and Support for Environmental Education (2022) further mandates regular national and local environmental education plans and training educators. Thus, the ESD policy framework has effectively facilitated the nationwide rollout of climate education across educational institutions, communities, and other learning spaces.

Accordingly, the government is strongly urged to introduce an ESD policy mandate, outlining a comprehensive short-term and long-term roadmap on curriculum integration, professional training and support, and coordination with schools of all education levels. This provides a centralised mechanism for facilitating the widespread enforcement of ESD and ensuring uniformity in climate education priorities. It critically enforces a whole-institution approach that embeds climate change and its associated skills across all levels of the education system.

#### 5.2.2 Promote multidisciplinary, critical climate education and strengthen educator capacity

There is existing precedent for strengthening critical climate education in a more structured and coherent manner, across all disciplines. For instance, STEM was incorporated into the eight key learning areas of primary and secondary education in 2016. Similarly, the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education has also incorporated ecological security, biodiversity and conservation into the curriculum. The government should continue this momentum and embrace critical climate education, including by weaving climate topics across non-STEM HKDSE subjects, and promoting inquiry-based and active learning strategies. If implementing climate education is focused on knowledge dissemination, it leaves little room for insightful and meaningful discourse and engagement. Embedding climate action into all subjects helps to prepare young people as future leaders by teaching them to adapt different industries in a just and sustainable manner, ultimately to foster generations of considerate, critical, and committed global citizens.

The government should reference recommendations from the UNESCO-led Climate Smart Education Systems Initiative on how to strengthen teacher training and effectively integrate climate education into classrooms:

1. **Pre-service and in-service teacher training**, equipping both new and experienced teaching staff with climate-specific knowledge and relevant teaching strategies.
2. **Embedding climate change topics into national curricula**, ensuring that climate education is an integral part of student learning.
3. **Professional development programmes** to support teachers in delivering effective climate education.

Additionally, the government should continue to expand and curate teaching resources. The EDB website currently offers limited and outdated teaching resources on climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable development. Hence, it should be more proactive in expanding access to high-quality and regularly updated teaching materials that are aligned with curriculum themes for seamless classroom integration. The government is also encouraged to incorporate climate education into the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) and General (GE) courses, incorporate climate education into core training hours for teachers, and allocate increased funds to implement such training measures. Finally, practical, activity-based teaching approaches should be emphasised. This includes experiential learning, which can be facilitated by NGOs, and application of climate-related topics to real-world issues, such as social services and resource management, across all subjects and disciplines.

### 5.2.3 Establish formal Schools-NGOs Partnership for climate education

To promote coordination between schools and NGOs, the government should encourage the creation of formal communication channels to enable school partnerships to co-develop sustainability projects, facilitate exchange on shared experiences and teaching techniques, and provide mutual support. In particular, it should promote exchange between local and international schools, as Hong Kong's international schools have actively embedded environmental sustainability into their school curricula. This presents opportunities for knowledge exchange with local schools, which may oftentimes lack sufficient resources and clear directions on how to enforce sustainability within their school curricula. The Alliance for Sustainable Schools (TASS), which connects sustainability practitioners in schools around the world through conducting and scaling up pilot projects with member schools and strategic partners. The government should reference this operational framework and spearhead implementation at the local level.

Many NGOs, such as the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, WWF Hong Kong, and SDSN Youth Hong Kong, offer sustainability training programmes for youth. The government should actively

promote such NGO-led community initiatives through its own channels to encourage student-led leadership and NGO collaboration with schools to conduct regular analyses of students' needs and preferences in experiential learning on climate change.

### 5.3 Integrate climate-relevant professional development programmes to increase access to green jobs

To meet the needs of an emerging green market in Hong Kong and worldwide, Hong Kong has positioned itself as a regional green finance hub by expanding its talent pool and strengthening relevant capabilities. In recent years, the government has launched the Pilot Green and Sustainable Finance Capacity Building Support Scheme to support talent development in green and sustainable finance (GSF) by subsidising (prospective) market practitioners in taking up relevant training and acquiring professional qualifications. At this current juncture, government-led support measures are still in their infancy. There is low awareness and willingness among the public to contribute to green industries, and inadequate support to equip young professionals with the unique skills to support the development of the green economy. Opportunities for younger generations to better adapt to environmental conditions and the job market represent an important route to making climate mitigation and adaptation policies just.



Figure 1: What Are the Most Pressing Issues Currently Facing Hong Kong's Financial Industry in Terms of Sustainable and Green Finance? (Hong Kong Financial Services Department Council, 2021)

In Hong Kong, clear skill gaps have been identified in the green jobs sector. According to the Financial Services Department Council (FSDC), talent retention and acquisition is the second most pressing concern facing Hong Kong's GSF industry after disclosure regulations. Demand for hard skills associated with ESG regulations and applied analysis will continue to increase in the future, where

employee training remains a significant challenge due to an insufficient understanding of ESG. In the Asia-Pacific region, investors are actively developing increasingly sophisticated sustainability strategies which incorporate active ownership, measuring impact and setting net-zero targets. Sufficient human capital is needed to navigate increasingly complex ESG policies and requirements and incorporate sustainability into day-to-day functions of all employment sectors. Therefore, the government must introduce targeted professional training and development policies to close the skills gap to facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy.

### 5.3.1 Identify key skills, and strengthen vocational training across sectors

The government should foremost develop and publicise a skills framework to standardise and conceptualise relevant skills and competencies in demand for the GSF market and other relevant sustainability-based occupations. The Environment and Ecology Bureau should spearhead this in collaboration with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB), the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), the Labour Department and Labour Welfare Bureau (LWB), relevant GSF companies and education institutions. This not only clearly communicates to young professionals evolving market demands, providing guidance for local talents to build future-proof skills, but also encourages skills-based hiring in the sustainability sector.

In terms of strengthening vocational training, the government should model international good practices recommended by the OECD. Austria's Education and Training Action Plan for the Just Transition (2023) places a strong emphasis on skills development and training. It crucially integrates climate-relevant materials into apprenticeship programmes, including specialised modules in green sectors. Austria has been developing new profiles for emerging green jobs and has updated electrical engineering and metal technology to integrate relevant skills for the green transition. It also supported career counsellors by providing tailored guidance and new training measures on sustainability and environmental issues. This addresses the needs of employees through supporting career guidance, stronger sustainability foundations in various specialisations, and promoting in-company training for workers in sectors undergoing transformation.

Hong Kong is firmly committed to promoting GSF to mitigate climate-related financial risk and increase market participation, which is evident in its Pilot Green and Sustainable Finance Capacity Building Support Scheme. However, the government needs to leverage talent development programmes not only across the financial market, but also in civil and industrial engineering industries as well, such as construction, transport, and logistics. Specifically, retrofitting modules on climate adaptation and ESG micro-credentials should be embedded in different vocational training programmes under the Vocational Training Council (VTC). This enables various industries to fully operationalise their respective roles in scaling up GSF and climate adaptation measures.

### 5.3.2 Expand access to local and regional green employment opportunities

In the Chief Executive Policy Address 2026, the government proposed the launch of the two-year “30,000 Youth Employment and Internship Programme” to facilitate youth employment and development, and introduced the expansion of thematic youth internship programmes by the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB). Though such opportunities focus on career development in scientific research, innovation and technology (I&T), and artificial intelligence, the government should similarly expand career exposure and research opportunities related to sustainability.

For instance, the government should consider the resumption of the Green Employment Scheme to cover job positions in the Chinese mainland's green-related industries. Although the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has explored different internship and training opportunities, most remain limited to local organisations or companies, while green employment opportunities have, in recent years, witnessed rapid expansion in the Chinese mainland. This may provide young professionals in Hong Kong with more comprehensive green work experience, broaden industry perspectives, and expand their professional networks.

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