

SUBMISSION OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVISORY TEAM

FOR THE HIGH
COMMISSIONER'S CALL
FOR INPUT TO IGWG
ON AN OPTIONAL
PROTOCOL TO THE
CRC

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Introduction

In many parts of the world, education is treated as a given. But in many other countries like Afghanistan, homeland of one of the child advisors, unfortunately it remains a distant dream for countless children – especially for girls, for those from minority communities, and for those living in poverty or conflict. Education is often spoken about as a goal, but for many of us children, it is a struggle, a demand, a right we are still denied. Education is not charity. It is not a favour or a privilege. It is a basic human right, first and foremost. And it must be treated as such—for every child, everywhere. It must be free, safe, and of good quality, regardless of a child's gender, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, or background. Anything less is a violation not just of law, but of dignity.

Yet, even in the face of these injustices, we continue to believe. With hearts filled not just with hope, but with the will to act, we believe that change is possible. We believe in a future where no child is punished for wanting to learn, grow and know more. Where every child can walk into a classroom without fear. And we know that this future will only come if we listen—truly listen—to the voices of children themselves.

This report is a contribution from the Children's Advisory Team (CAT) of Child Rights Connect to the High Commissioner's call for input to the first session of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on a possible optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Child Rights Connect works with children around the world to ensure their views are included in shaping laws and policies that affect them and their lives in any way. Through the Children's Advisory Team—made up of 17 child human rights defenders from 17 countries—the organisation creates space for young voices to be heard and respected on regional, national and global platforms.

To respond to this call, the team created a questionnaire based on the official questions, translated it into their local languages, and shared it widely with their peers. They organised consultations in schools, communities, churches, and local networks—often under challenging circumstances. Thanks to this collective effort, this report brings forward the voices of 1297 children from 12 countries — not just as participants, but as active contributors to a process that concerns their lives, their rights, and their future.

^[1] 1262 children replied to the online surveys and 35 children took part in consultations.

What makes it difficult for children to attend pre-school and how does this affect them?

Access to preschool education remains a significant challenge for many children all around the globe. Many children who require special care or support are excluded from preschool. This remains a problem, as children who require more support may benefit more from preschool than others. Another major obstacle is poverty, as impoverished families often struggle to afford tuition fees, educational resources, clothing, and transportation, making it difficult for their children to attend preschool. Furthermore, some parents fail to see the many benefits that come with attending preschool. This is a problem because young children are delayed or even stopped from developing critical thinking skills, as well as soft skills such as communication and adaptability.

Additionally, more and more people are having trouble finding work or gaining experience. Due to this, there are less qualified teachers and educators, leading to lack of support. Several areas also have language barriers, which can affect the children's education when they, or their parents are unable to communicate properly with the teachers. As a result of the factors above, millions of children globally are denied the opportunity to develop essential skills and knowledge during this critical brain-developing period, ultimately affecting their future.

When children are unable to attend preschool, they often miss out on critical early learning experiences that support their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Preschool provides a foundation for literacy, numeracy, problem solving, cooperation and communication skills, while also fostering socialization, routine, and independence. Without this early exposure, children may enter primary school at a disadvantage, struggling to keep up with peers academically and socially. This gap can widen over time, impacting long-term effects on their academic performance, confidence, and overall education. In addition special needs children who are unable to attend pre-school due to their conditions may lose the opportunity to adjust to a school environment from an early age, gain basic social skills and make friends as they may remain at home under the care of their parents or even older siblings.

What makes it difficult for children to attend secondary school and how does this affect them?

Secondary school is considered a crucial turning point in students' lives, where they begin to shape their futures by choosing majors and envisioning the lives they want to lead. In this period a lot of pressure is on the children whether by their parents or themselves. For example, children can't decide what school to choose, they are scared of choosing the wrong one and they have to achieve high grades at school and continue on the same path in college to find comfortable and stable job.

From the results of the survey which we shared vastly across different countries we are able to see that the most common barriers that make it a challenge for children to attend secondary school are:

- Some young people have to drop out of school to work.
- School uniforms, materials and supplies are expensive, and parents cannot afford them.
- Children who require special care/support have to either pay for it or do not have access to it.

Generally, these issues seem to stem back to the topic of cost. Things like school supplies, meals and transportation being at a relatively high price it can cause great financial strain on families which can have an abundance of effects on the young people, both mental and academic. It can lead to social exclusion from peers due to the embarrassment, the young person may feel because of their financial problems and increased stress and anxiety. In addition, it can lower academic performance reduce access to learning sources and cause young people to miss learning opportunities (like through extra curriculums). Furthermore, the great health concerns cannot be ignored what they're likely to be nutritional issues if the lack of money leads to young people skipping meals (which would further damage both their physical and cognitive development) or other health issues which could occur like stress or their physical health slowly deteriorating.

Poverty is a significant barrier; financial hardship prevents families from affording the school's tuition. Not all public secondary schools provide a high education quality, because of this a lot of parents feel they have no choice but to send their kids to private secondary schools. These usually offer better quality, but they are expensive, and not all families can afford the cost. School supplies are expensive, and not all children can afford it. Many children prefer to work earning money at a very young age without studying than putting pressure on their families, and even to help them if the economic situation is bad - like in Palestine due to the current war. In some cases, if the situation is not stable, children might be forced to transfer from their schools so some will feel lonely if they have no people known to them in their school and especially if there's no one is aware of the problem.

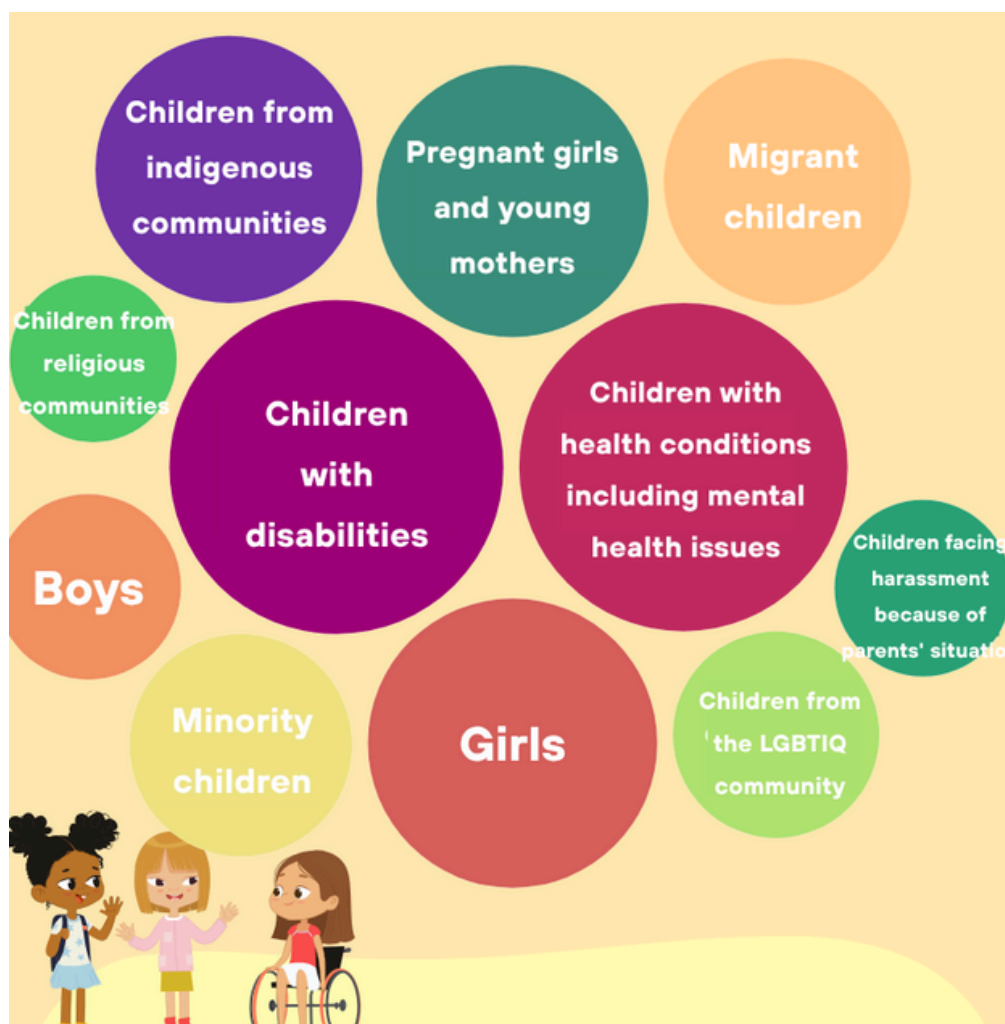
As well as young people affected by prices young people who have drop school to work or do not have access to the special care or support they require or any young person who misses out on school will have further complications in their future. They will have limited jobs opportunities due to the lack of education (which could lead to more poverty in future) and will have reduced educational fulfillment/ attainment since with the lack of resources and opportunities they are likely to fall behind in their education leaving restricted opportunities for higher education.

In some remote regions, the lack of transportation is a major obstacle for children attending school. The cost of transport is high, and countries that have wars and checkpoints are a real problem because parents sending their children alone through military checkpoints poses a serious risk to their safety. So, the occupation is a main reason for children to be prevented from going to school due to the military checkpoints, soldiers, and arresting children without a making sense reason. Unfortunately, in some societies, the belief that girl's education is less important than early marriage still exists, though it is gradually disappearing however, this mindset continues to be a challenge for some girls in secondary school.

Do some children have greater challenges attending public pre-primary and secondary school than other children?

Most of the children who took part in the survey or the consultations said that some children do have greater challenges attending schools. These are usually children with disabilities, children of different nationality and color, children from indigenous communities, children with mental health conditions, girls, pregnant girls and young mothers, children with bad grades, those living in a war-torn country, some whose parents are not supportive, some who have issues with friendships and relationships with teachers.

Children with disabilities have a hard time as there is a lack of trained people who are going to work with them on the level they need. In Palestine children are in fear of death, arresting or school buildings getting attacked any moment.



What should governments do to make sure that all children can attend public pre-primary and public secondary education for free?

The State plays a central role in guaranteeing the right to education and in building a more equitable and inclusive education system. The combination of following measures contributes significantly to the consolidation of a more fair, inclusive, and resilient education system, in which all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have the opportunity to fully develop their potential.

One of its main responsibilities is the implementation of policies that reduce inequalities, such as providing scholarships for students with financial difficulties. This measure not only facilitates access to education but also contributes to retention and academic success, especially for children with disabilities.


It is also essential for governments to ensure that schools are located in safe and accessible areas with good connections to public transportation. They should also promote awareness campaigns aimed at parents to highlight the importance of education, especially in vulnerable communities. Promoting school attendance in these areas is a key step in reducing opportunity gaps.

A fundamental component of ensuring quality education is the training of teaching and administrative staff. Continuous training ensures that professionals are prepared to meet the diverse needs of students and to respond appropriately to both everyday situations and more complex cases. This fosters a safer and more respectful school environment, while also strengthening families' trust in the education system. In this regard, it is essential to adapt school environments to be inclusive of all students, especially those with disabilities, and to offer integrated or alternative learning methods as needed.

To reduce economic barriers, governments must establish clear policies regarding the average cost of school supplies, books, uniforms, and meals, and, to the extent possible, guarantee their free availability. The general population broadly supports these types of measures, as they directly contribute to equal access to learning.

Furthermore, it is essential to include mental health services within schools, as well as to establish early warning systems to prevent school dropouts. Finally, ongoing teacher training remains a key element in ensuring quality education tailored to the needs of all students.

Furthermore, the importance of building more preschools and secondary schools, reducing education costs, and ensuring free school materials and associated services is recognized. Actions such as providing free classroom assistants, organizing school fairs to collect donations, and providing direct financial support to families most in need are also considered necessary.



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