

What children around the world said about access to free public pre-primary and secondary education?

Child Rights Connect's Children's Advisory Team (CAT) is a global team of child human rights defenders who support the organisation to shape and take forward activities on children's rights. The child advisors are empowered to do their own advocacy if they think it is important to engage with a children's right issue. The right to education has been on the top of the agenda of the CAT 2025.



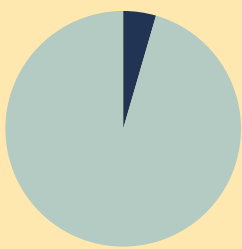
Between May - June 2025, the child advisors prepared a survey, translated to their languages and distributed among their peers. These surveys are the basis of the CAT submission for the call of the High Commissioner for the preparation of the first session of the Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Here you can read about the results of these surveys.

1262 children filled out the survey who were...

Afghanistan: 20
Brazil: 387
Bosnia and Herzegovina: 118
Bulgaria: 118
Canada: 68
Croatia: 160

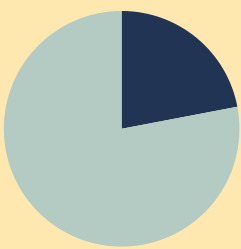


Mexico: 117
Northern-Ireland, UK: 139
Nigeria: 101
Palestine: 21
Spain: 3
Trinidad and Tobago: 10



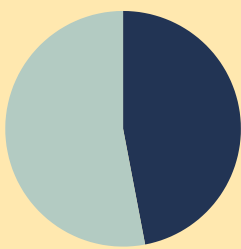
4%

Age 5-10



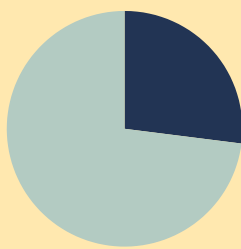
22%

Age 11-12



47%

Age 13-15



27%

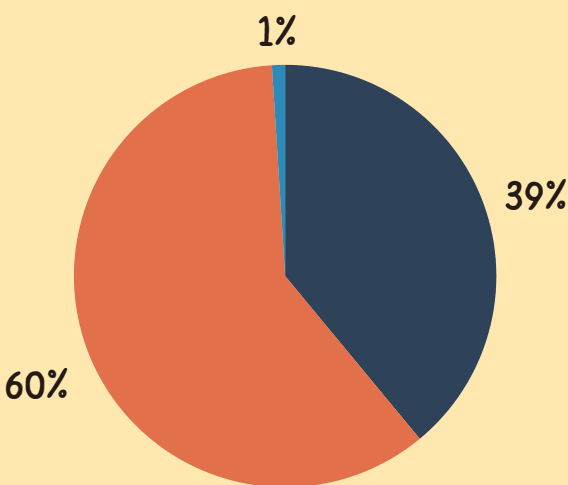
Age 16-17



Girls 52 %

Boys 45%

Other or no answer 3%



student at elementary level

student at secondary level

student at pre-school or not at school anymore




90% of all respondents (children who responded to the survey) studied at pre-school.

Let's see what the children said in the survey about obstacles to attend pre-primary school in the survey!



Half of the respondents were concerned about the situation of children who require special care or support and do not have access to it. Little less than half of the children said that parents not being aware that preschool has important benefits for early development can be an obstacle.



A graphic of a barrier with alternating red and white diagonal stripes, supported by two grey pillars.

Around 40% of the children were concerned that either preschool is not free or the family is poor and cannot pay the fee. They were also worried that parents are unable to afford transportation costs to send their child to preschool.

27% of the respondents said there are no public pre-schools or facilities available nearby so children have no access to preschool.

18% of the children said there are no trained teachers or educators in their area, while 13 % said there is a language barrier between the children and the teachers.

“ The most surprising result that I found from the survey is how many people recognize the difficulties that children with disabilities have gone to school or kindergarten. There have always been difficulties for those children, from no infrastructure like ramps, for those who have a hard time moving, to the lack of specially trained professionals who are able to teach these children on their own pace and in a fun and interactive way. Those problems have always existed, but rarely anyone has been able to see them. When I looked at the statistics this surprised me, this meant that the problem is so bad, that even people who don't face these challenges see how bad the situation is. ”





Let's see what the children said in the survey about obstacles to attend secondary school in the survey!

43%

said that school uniforms, materials and supplies are expensive, and parents cannot pay for them.

41%

said that children might drop out of school and start working to support their family.

32%

said that it is an obstacle if transportation to school is expensive or unavailable.

22%

were concerned that meals are not free and children cannot afford them.

13%

said that it happens that the parents don't believe in the benefits of having secondary education.

11%

were worried about the situation of children who require special care or support have to pay for it or do not have access to it.

10%

said that it is an obstacle that secondary school is not free, and parents are not able to pay for it or there are no public secondary schools available nearby.



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 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.





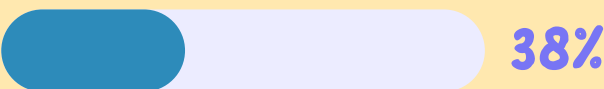
According to the respondents of the survey, what happens if children overcome these obstacles?

If children can go to free public preschool,

they develop their social and communication skills.



their brain develop better.



they learn through play.



they can break the cycle of poverty by continuing their education.



parents can go to work/older siblings can go to school instead of staying home to look after them.



they are less likely to be sent to work at a young age.



If children can go to free public secondary school,

they will be more prepared for adult life, and they will be able to create a better life for themselves and for their own children.



they have more chance to find a decent job and earn their living.



they have the chance to continue their studies at university.



They will be able to break the cycle of poverty and injustice.



they are less likely to get married off as a child or exposed to violence.



They will not be sent to work to support their family.



Nevertheless, 72 % of the respondents said that some children have a harder time or greater challenges attending public pre-primary and secondary school than other children.

Children from indigenous communities

Pregnant girls and young mothers

Migrant children

Children from religious communities

Children with disabilities

Children with health conditions including mental health issues

Children facing harassment because of parents' situation

Boys

Minority children

Girls

Children from the LGBTIQ community



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



Ideas and the percentage of children supporting them:

- To provide free school meals, textbooks, uniforms (93%)
- To provide high quality free education in all regions and areas by building public schools and making online education available (82%)
- To adapt the school environment to be inclusive and offer integrated or alternative learning methods for those who need it (60%)
- To give scholarships (50%)
- To encourage parents to send their children to school, particularly families from vulnerable communities (48%)
- To provide mental health services for children at schools (35%)
- To develop policies and laws to ensure access to free public education (33%)
- To protect the schools and the children therein (32%)

“ I was incredibly surprised to see how deeply interested children and adolescents are in creating public policies to achieve free, quality education. It gave me a mixture of excitement and hope to see their proposals, their opinions, how they want everything to be more fair for everyone, and, above all, to know that many of them were left with the motivation to change the world. I feel they have incredible clarity, and that made me think a lot. It inspires me and makes me believe that we can build something better, starting with themselves. ”



Special thanks to the Members of the Children's Advisory Team who shared the survey in their countries and studied the responses:

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CAT
Children's Advisory Team

child rights connect