

CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA REGIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING SUMMARY

by the child rapporteurs Lana and Denis

New Optional Protocol to the CRC on Free Pre-Primary and Secondary Education



On 28 February 2026, children from [Brazil](#), [Canada](#), [Ecuador](#), [El Salvador](#), [Mexico](#) and [Peru](#), participated in consultations to share their ideas and priorities regarding the new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on free pre-primary and secondary education. The consultations were led and facilitated by the Children's Advisory Team of Child Rights Connect.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

What **difficulties** do children in your country face in attending preschool and secondary school?



Even in countries where school is officially free, families are often expected to pay for transport, uniforms, books, supplies, and extracurricular activities, which can be difficult for low-income households.

For children living in rural areas, long daily commutes are challenging and the costs associated with them. Indigenous children, immigrant families, and children with disabilities face even more difficulties, as they often deal with poverty, unfair treatment, and language barriers.

Concerns were raised about the conditions within schools themselves, from poorly maintained facilities and limited access to technology and the internet, to lack of teachers, and inadequate food and health services. Participants also pointed out that many children experience anxiety at school and that there is not enough support available to help them.

They stressed that making education truly inclusive means more than just removing costs – it also means creating schools that are safe, welcoming, and have the resources children need to thrive.



WHAT DIFFICULTIES DO CHILDREN IN YOUR COUNTRY FACE IN ATTENDING PRESCHOOL AND SECONDARY SCHOOL?



"They just give a list what to buy..."

"In my community, there is a public school, so you should not pay a fee, but they ask money for many things, activities, the uniform."

"They give the school supplies only once per year, but it is not enough for the whole year."

"Tablets, computers are important, but they need internet too! Some families don't have the money to pay for the data."

"Sometimes they change the uniform (style, colour) during the school year, if there is a new government. They should not change it so often!"

"One single teacher teaches all subjects to all the classes."

"If there is violence, they shutdowns the schools for few days or longer periods."

"When school facilities are not in good condition, children have less motivation to study."



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 2.

What do you think happens when a **child can't attend** preschool or secondary school? How do you think this affects not only the child but the entire community?



Participants reflected on the broader consequences of children missing out on education. They noted that without schooling, children lack the opportunity to develop essential life skills, including social, communication, and emotional skills, making it harder for them to navigate everyday situations and integrate into society. The lack of a diploma limits their future job prospects, often pushing children into work at a young age and trapping families in cycles of poverty.

Participants emphasized that the impact goes beyond the individual child, affecting the entire community through a lower quality of life, fewer opportunities for progress, and reduced ability to face collective challenges.

"It increases the risk of poverty."

"Many children must work instead of school. They don't know how to navigate in life."

"Children dropped out of school don't understand what their friends are speaking about. It is social exclusion."

"Early childhood is an important period in life. It affects emotional and social development."

"It has a negative impact on children, their family and their community."

"Many jobs require secondary diploma in my country. Every country needs skilled workers who contribute to the economy."

"If you don't finish school, you will be marginalized and you cannot integrate into society economically and socially."

"After children drop out of school, they cannot find themselves and their quality of life is reduced."

"There are better opportunities in life if the community is educated."

"Criminal organisations recruit children and young people who are uneducated. But this is a job you cannot quit."

"The community will stagnate, if there are no more people contributing to the economy and social life."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 3.



Now you know about the new Optional Protocol. How do you imagine children in your country can contribute to ensuring **it truly meets our needs** and get approved?



To raise awareness among other children and the wider public, the participants suggested using media platforms such as podcasts, videos, news articles, and social media, as well as spreading information through local news channels, campaigns, and even protests. Peer-to-peer communication, whether in person, online, or through organizations, was also seen as a powerful way to spread the message.

Participants called on governments to take children's voices into account when making decisions that affect them and to work with NGOs to support the adoption of the Optional Protocol. They emphasized the need to create spaces where children can be heard and contribute to making free education a reality, and highlighted the value of taking part in events and consultations like this one.

"Children should work with other children."

"We should share it in our network what we learnt today from the CAT."

"We need to know more about our rights. We need to share more about them with other children."

"Social media is a powerful tool that we should use."

"Children can contribute with their ideas, because we know the things that can be improved."

"We should continue with consultations like this, so we can make our voices heard."

"Children have the right to participate and support this Optional Protocol."

"We want to build solutions together with authorities."



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