

ASIA REGIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING SUMMARY

by the child rapporteur Sarah

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



On 16 May 2026, children from [Afghanistan](#), [Bangladesh](#), [Cambodia](#), [Indonesia](#) and [Nepal](#) 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 and the child delegates.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

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



Children explained that the barriers to education go far beyond school fees. Hidden cost remains the main issue, particularly transportation tickets: where there is no public transport or no money to pay for it, children are forced to risk their lives on unlicensed private motorcycles, or simply cannot reach schools that are too far away – making those schools, in effect, meaningless.

Rural children are especially affected, and many families cannot afford enough learning materials. Girls in some countries are blocked from secondary school despite dreaming of becoming doctors and engineers. Some children must work from as young as three or four to help to support their families. Immigrant children face added obstacles and not treated the same way as the children from the country.

"Society cannot advance if half of their people is left behind."

"Education gives children hope, a voice and opportunity."

"Girls study secretly at home, holding on to their books."

"Children should carry books, not burdens."

"Education is not just about the books."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 2.



Why is the Optional Protocol important for you and for other children? 

All the children said that this Optional Protocol is important for them. They saw it as a way to make education real in practice, not just promised on paper. Right now, only primary school is compulsory under the CRC – the Optional Protocol would close that gap by extending the right to free, compulsory education to pre-primary and secondary school.

Many noted that although free or compulsory education is written into their national constitutions, the hidden costs that keep children out of school are never addressed. The Protocol, they argued, would hold governments in developing countries accountable, turn rights into action, and help to reduce drop-out from schools.

Above all, the children stressed that this matters for every child, everywhere – not just for themselves. They described education not as a luxury for a small group, but as the basis of an equal and sustainable life for all. Several said they wanted to take the Protocol to their own governments and ask them to join it, seeing it as a tool that belongs in children's hands as much as adults'.

"It will help children to turn their rights into action."

"No children should be left behind."

"We want to ask our government to join it."

"The Optional Protocol closes the gap – extending free, compulsory education beyond primary school."

"It will help them to improve the situation of education in our country."

"This Optional Protocol is really important for me and other children in the world because it will hold accountable governments in developing countries for providing education."



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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 3.



How can children/young people in your country help support and shape the Optional Protocol?



The children were clear that they have an active role to play. They said children should stay involved in developing the Protocol through children's forums and networks, with support from NGOs that advocate for them, and should take action at home by engaging directly with their local and national governments. They were also firm that this participation must be inclusive, reaching refugee children, children in poverty, and children with disabilities, and that children should speak up especially for the most vulnerable.

They argued that children understand education best because they live it, and that their voices lead to better, more sustainable plans when adults are willing to listen. They pushed back on the assumption that children can't understand how systems work, insisting instead that they are among the most effective drivers of lasting change.

Children can raise awareness, share their experiences and challenges, and organise and mobilise in their own countries – through organising workshops, using social media, and interviewing others. Awareness and participation reinforce each other: children need to know their rights before they can take part, and by taking part they raise awareness among others in turn.

"Adults don't believe children can understand how systems work – but we are the most efficient contributors to sustainable change."

"When adults listen to children, they can make a better plan."

"They can participate in the development of policies to solve issues."

"When children know the law, they can claim and practice their rights."

"Look at the consultation today – it is possible!"