

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING SUMMARY

by the child rapporteur Trond

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



On 25 July 2026, children from [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Morocco](#), [Palestine](#), [Yemen](#), 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?



Participants raised several important barriers to children's access to education across the MENA region. They talked about how political instability and conflict have left an estimated 30 million children out of school, and how the consequences persist long after conflict ends, as rebuilding education systems can take years.

They also discussed the impact of economic hardship. Even where education is nominally free, hidden costs such as transport, school supplies, and basic daily needs can force families to choose between schooling and survival, and in some cases push children into labor instead of the classroom.

They addressed the social, cultural and practical barriers many children continue to face – including discrimination and early marriage affecting girls' access to education, insufficient support for children with disabilities, and the broader impact on children's mental health and motivation to learn.

"When families are displaced or schools are damaged, education can become interrupted for months or even years. But education is not a luxury that can wait until a crisis is over."

"Wars interrupt education. Many times, schools become refugee centers."

"Many crises challenge education in our country."



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 2.



"Schools lack facilities for children with disabilities".

"To pay for extra costs is an unbearable burden for families. Some children are forced to labour because of that."



"The right to education must not depend on whether a child is a boy or a girl. Every girl must be able to dream of becoming a scientist, an engineer, a teacher, a doctor, a leader—or anything she chooses."

"A child living in a major city may have access to several schools, transportation, early childhood centres and different educational opportunities. But a child living in a remote rural area may face a very different reality. The school may be far from home. Transportation may be expensive or unavailable. There may be fewer teachers, fewer facilities and limited access to pre-primary education."

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



There was a broad agreement that this Protocol is ambitious and directly addresses the realities children face, from competition between public and private education to the disruption of learning due to conflict, and that it has the potential to guarantee real, meaningful free education for children everywhere.

"It would guarantee that the right to education remain accessible for every child without discrimination."



"It is very important. It helps children get an education and protects their right to attend school, benefiting children in all countries."

"As young people, we do not want to inherit a continent where some children are given opportunities while others are left behind."

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 3.



How the protocol can be implemented in the best way for children, and from your own experience what could lead to the failure of the protocol and limit its impact?



The text of the Protocol has to be precise: education is not truly free without addressing hidden costs. These additional costs should be included in the definition of “free” in the Optional Protocol.

Children were concerned how states will be encouraged to join the Optional Protocol and then how they will be held accountable for this legal commitment. Some shared their worries that there are countries which need funding for educational projects and even if there is funding, how they will make sure all schools implement the Protocol the same way.

“It does not have to be pretty, it has to be a legal commitment.”



“Free education is disrupted by occupation, iron gates and settler violence.”

“Children, before starting their primary education need safe places to play, but they cannot access these places.”

“In countries, affected by conflict, the implementation will be more difficult. This has to be considered while drafting the text.”

“We have to recognize the barriers against its implementation because some countries cannot fund these projects. We have to make sure that countries have political and security stability first.”

“We need an accountability council to observe and follow-up the implementation of the Protocol.”

“I believe that the solution is not simply to build more schools. We must build education systems that reach every child.”

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS 4.



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



It was agreed that children see themselves as active shapers of the protocol, not only passive recipients. Suggestions included sharing children's views through opinion polls and presenting the results directly to decision-makers, leading advocacy campaigns in their own communities, bringing insights to national forums, and engaging with civil society and government through dialogue sessions. Sustained child advocacy can ensure that the protocol becomes domestic law rather than staying as an international treaty.

"Children can lead initiatives like advocacy campaigns, awareness campaigns, making videos, digital letters. Also to pressure the government to accept this Protocol."



"I believe we can share our opinions, speak openly about the problems we face in our schools and we can suggest ideas to make education better."

"Children in our countries can help shaping this Protocol through student parliaments, national forums - where children are active. We can collect their views, maybe these children can lead advocacy campaigns and raise awareness. about this Optional Protocol. They can conduct research among themselves to take the opinions of their peers and their communities."

"Children can not only make this protocol a reality, but also share their aspirations and ambitions, which is very much aligned with the UNCRC, especially in matters that impact their lives."

"As child parliamentarians, we are not here only to speak about children. We are here to speak with children and to make sure their experiences are heard."