

Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education

FACILITATOR GUIDE FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN

This guide has been developed for facilitators who want to support children to share their opinions to help prepare the first session of the Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education. It is intended for organisations that are already familiar with children's rights and the right to education and are supporting activities with children in these contexts. Adults or children might organise and lead focus groups, or they can do this together. This guide has been developed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), also known as the UN Human Rights Office.

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I. Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education

A. What is the United Nations and the Human Rights Council and who is the High Commissioner for Human Rights?

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Currently made up of 193 [Member States](#), the [UN and its work](#) are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding [Charter](#). The UN has changed over the years to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. But one thing has stayed the same: it remains the one place on Earth where all the world's nations can gather together, discuss common problems, and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity.

The [Human Rights Council](#) is an intergovernmental body within the UN system made up of 47 States responsible for the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It meets at the [United Nations Office at Geneva](#).

The High Commissioner for Human Rights is the principal human rights official of the United Nations. His office is the leading United Nations entity in the field of human rights, with a unique mandate to promote and protect all human rights for all people.

B. What is the Open-ended intergovernmental working group on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education?

On 10 July 2024, the Human Rights Council adopted [resolution 56/5](#), in which it decided to establish an [open-ended intergovernmental working group](#) of the Human Rights Council with the mandate of exploring the possibility of, elaborating and submitting to the Human Rights Council a draft optional protocol to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) with the aim to:

- Explicitly recognize that the right to education includes early childhood care and education;
- Explicitly state that, with a view to achieving the right to education, States shall:
 - Make public pre-primary education available free to all, beginning with at least one year;
 - Make public secondary education available free to all;
- Recall that States shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education;
- Consider a provision that would allow for States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to incorporate all reporting on their obligations under the optional protocol into their reports submitted under article 44 of the Convention, eliminating the need for an initial or other separate reports.

The first session of the inter-governmental working group (IGWG) will take place in September 2025. In order to prepare the first session and background documentation, the UN Human Rights Office has shared a call for submissions on the key topics related to the mandate of the IGWG: **barriers to public pre-primary and public secondary education available free to all** in law, policy, and practice and their **impacts on the rights of the child**; examples of **innovative and sustainable financial mechanisms** to support public pre-primary and secondary education available free to all children; and **country examples** where public pre-primary and secondary education is available free to all children. The call has been shared with States and other key stakeholders, such as relevant UN agencies, national human rights institutions, independent children's rights institutions, and civil society. For more information, see the call for submissions on the [OHCHR website](#).

C. How and when can children contribute?

Children, as rights-holders and experts in their own lives, can get involved and contribute their views on this important topic. If they wish and feel safe and comfortable in doing so, they can share their views in two ways:

- By email in direct response to the UN Human Rights Office's '[call for submissions](#).' (**Deadline for children's inputs: 8 June 2025**). A child-friendly call for inputs has also been published by the UN Human Rights Office to ensure their meaningful participation

in this process, highlighting the importance of listening to children's views on topics which directly affect them. You can access the child-friendly call for inputs in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#).

- By participating in consultations organised by civil society partner organisations between April and June 2025, in accordance with this Guide. In this case, the consultation organisers will prepare a summary report containing children's views and thoughts. You can always share with the participants of the consultations that they can also send their views directly using the first option.

D. Why should children participate in this activity?

- The Human Rights Council emphasized the importance of the meaningful participation of children in an ethical, safe and inclusive manner in this process. It also requested that children be given the opportunity to express their views on the topic and substance of the proposed optional protocol.
- It's important to hear children's views, experiences, and recommendations directly.
- It promotes and advances children's rights at the UN.
- It encourages children's views to be taken into account and listened to by UN decision-makers, including governments.
- It empowers children to learn more about the UN's work and to defend human rights.

E. Feedback to children

- The Secretariat of the Working Group will compile a section dedicated to children's views, based on children's inputs.
- A child-friendly summary version of the working group's progress report, which will be discussed at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland at its 62nd session in June-July 2026. You will be encouraged to disseminate these documents widely with the children and your partners.

II. Planning children's consultations

A. Preparations

- ✓ First, **consider the size of the group** depending on the different factors such as the number of facilitators, the venue, and the particular needs of the children participating. In any case, a group of 10-15 children is usually manageable for such consultations, while keeping in mind that a smaller size may be necessary due to the potential sensitivity of the topic.
- ✓ **Identify the children who will participate** and ensure that they will take part voluntarily. It is recommended that these children are already connected to existing groups/networks that have been working on child rights and/or education. This is an important opportunity to **promote inclusivity and diversity**, mobilising children from as many interested groups and networks as possible and ensuring that the voices of the most marginalised children are heard. This also means that you need to be aware of any situations of vulnerability the participants might be in and adjust the framework and setting of the consultations to ensure their meaningful participation.

- ✓ **Apply all the necessary child safeguarding measures, including ensuring that consent has been given** by children and parents/caregivers (for all the information on child safeguarding see below) and the assignment of the Safeguarding Focal Point.
- ✓ **Arrange the logistics for the consultation.** It can be online or in-person. For example, locate a safe space, provide refreshments, and make sure writing materials are available for children to make or record notes if they want to.
- ✓ **Make arrangements for children** to arrive and leave from the location at the planned time. Ensure any necessary measures are taken to ensure the safe participation of all children.
- ✓ **Identify a facilitator** and ensure that they are familiar with the purpose of the consultations and the questions to be discussed.
- ✓ **Identify a documenter** and prepare them with the discussion questions and the reporting templates.
- ✓ Arrange for **interpretation** during the session, if necessary, and arrange for the **translation** of the report into one of the working languages of the UN Human Rights office: English, French or Spanish.

B. Child Safeguarding

All organisations who will hold or support children's consultations are expected to follow their child safeguarding protocols, or, they can decide to adhere to [Child Rights Connect's Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure](#) (child-friendly version [here](#)). Nevertheless, it is highly recommended to prepare a risk assessment and to assign a Child Safeguarding Focal Point for the consultations who is introduced to the children at the beginning of the consultation and available during and after the consultation as well. The Child Safeguarding Focal Point needs to work closely with the facilitator(s) to prevent and mitigate risks and to react to safeguarding concerns and incidents.

If your focus group is taking place **online**, take time to make sure you are using a secure platform and put any measures you can in place to protect and secure the space. For example, make sure there is a password to enter the space and disable the chat function between participants.

Facilitators and other adult participants should always treat children with respect and ensure they are not asked to comment on matters inappropriate to their age or where they are being asked to specifically disclose any sensitive personal information or any other information that might put them at risk. Even though the questions are not asking children to disclose abuse, the discussion might trigger some children to share that they have experienced abuse or that they have been involved in, or subject to criminal behaviour. Facilitators and Child Safeguarding Focal Points need to plan how any such issues will be dealt with the moment they are disclosed but also afterwards in terms of any need or duty to escalate or follow up. Children need to know that support is available and that they can access it through the Child Safeguarding Focal Point.

C. Basic Requirements for Child Participation

It is important to be familiar with, and apply, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 9 basic requirements for child participation. Here is a [link](#) to the basic requirements. See here for a child-friendly version:

1. *Being able to **access information** about the child participant's right to be listened to and for their views to be acted on.*
2. *It is children's **choice to participate** and they can decide not to take part at any point.*
3. *Children's views and ideas to be **respected** by adults.*
4. *The activities will be **interesting and familiar** to the child's life, and there will be space for child participants to put forward any issues that are important to them.*
5. *There should be **preparations** so that all children will feel happy to participate in the activities within **comfortable and friendly spaces**.*
6. *The activities should be **open equally to all children** to take part from all communities and backgrounds, including children with disabilities.*
7. ***Adults will be prepared** for the different activities so that all children are comfortable and feel supported and listened to.*
8. *Children must be **safe** and know who to talk to if they feel unsafe.*
9. *Children should get **feedback** on how their views have been acted on by adults, and the chance to give your opinion on the results of this project and the activities.*

D. Informed Consent

Make sure you receive **informed consent** from children for their participation in the consultation, and from their parents/caregivers. This involves sharing appropriate information with the children and their parents/caregivers about what is happening and why, how they can take part, how their views will be taken into account, and what kind of follow-up and feedback there will be. Children should be provided with a range of ways to agree to giving their consent, these might include: verbally (via audio recording); thumbprints; writing their name or providing a signature. It is recommended to use written consent forms, in accordance with the national legislation of the country where the consultation is taking place and in a language that the parents/caregivers can read and understand.

You can use these examples of consent form: [ENG](#), [FR](#), [SPA](#)

III. Facilitating the consultations with children

A. INTRODUCE

- ✓ Welcome participants and thank them for coming.
- ✓ Use some icebreakers so the children can get comfortable with you and get to know each other a bit before starting.
- ✓ Explain why the consultations is taking place and what it will be about, particularly mentioning the framework, the inter-governmental working group and its purpose, and its timeline. At least explain about the role of the UN and mention that there are many different bodies and committees within the UN working on human rights. If you want,

you can use the child-friendly leaflet developed by Child Rights Connect to talk about the role of the High Commissioner (in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#)).

- ✓ Make sure you set expectations right, especially if you are consulting children in vulnerable situations.
- ✓ If the group is not familiar with the concept of children's rights, you need to start the consultation with that or organise a preparatory meeting or share resources beforehand. You can introduce children's rights along with the CRC Convention by using the [child-friendly version](#) of it. This child-friendly version is available in several languages and formats. You can even [download](#) the right cards one by one and use it during the consultations.
- ✓ Explain what the rights of the child are, especially the right to education, and the importance of the participants' experiences, recommendations for change, and the ideas they share. You can use the child-friendly information sheet (attached).
- ✓ Clarify confidentiality. Explain that notes will be made during discussions, but these will only be used for inputs to their process and will not be shared with anyone else. Important to mention that quotes and ideas noted down will not be linked to names, so no one can identify later on what was said by whom at the consultations. If needed, you can also reassure the participants that even the fact that they participated at the consultation will not be shared with anyone.
- ✓ Set / agree on ground rules for the session and present the safeguarding focal point. Explain that their participation is voluntary, any child can withdraw at any time or decide not to answer a question if they do not want to. You can also emphasize that aim of this consultation is not to share personal stories – maybe you will need to recall this during the session again – but to think together about the situation of children and their human rights.

B. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Start the discussion explaining to the children that you will be following the main questions raised in the Human Rights Council resolution: **early childhood care and education; public pre-primary and public secondary education available free to all, how these affect the rights of the child, and solutions**. This way the structure of the consultation is clear and the participants know that there will be a moment to talk about all these. Depending on the situation, you can collect their ideas using a big piece of paper, a whiteboard or sticky notes, for example. You can adjust the methods as suits you best.

The questions are the following and are in line with the child-friendly information sheet which you can use during the consultations too:

1) Educational level:

- Do you attend pre-primary education (e.g. kindergarten, crèche, pre-school or similar)?
- Do you attend primary education?
- Do you attend secondary education?

2) Exploring the problems: What makes it difficult for children to attend preschool and how does this affect them?

- *Encourage children to think about barriers they face in their community or country to public pre-primary education (such as fees, money for public transport etc.) and the impact this has on their human rights.*
- 3) Exploring the problems: What makes it difficult for children to attend secondary school and how does this affect them?**
- *Encourage children to think about barriers they face in their community or country to public secondary education (such as fees, money for public transport or school supplies, need to earn money and no time for school etc.) and the impact this has on their human rights.*
- 4) Exploring the problems: Do some children have a harder time / greater challenges attending public pre-primary and secondary school than other children?**
- *Encourage participants to think about whether some children face different or more difficulties than others.*
- 5) Making things better: What should governments do to make sure that all children can attend public pre-primary and public secondary education for free?**
- *Encourage children to think about what they think will help make a difference for children and what governments should change.*

Tips for the facilitator:

- In terms of timing, you can prepare your own schedule about how much time you are planning to dedicate for each question, or you can simply go ahead with the discussions and stop for the breaks agreed with the group at the beginning of the consultation.
- Assure participants that it is fine if they do not know the answers to these questions. There is no right or wrong answer! It is important to recall as well that they do not have to reply to all the questions.
- Try to encourage discussion between participants and the active participation of all involved. Prompt if necessary but try not to give any answers.
- In case children are interested, you can encourage them to express themselves in different ways, not only verbally: this can include art, digital software or any other creative methods.
- If you can organise it, you can go back to the group with the report of the consultations to check it and finalise it together.

C. CLOSING AND NEXT STEPS

- ✓ At the end of the discussion, thank all the participants for their valuable contributions.
- ✓ Ask children for their feedback about the session. What went well? What did not go so well? Any other comments?
- ✓ Remind them that their views will contribute to preparing the 1st session of the inter-governmental working group and to the discussions in September 2025 on how to proceed regarding a possible draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights

of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education.

- ✓ A document will be prepared that compiles children's views and posted to the [webpage of the 1st session of the IGWG](#) before the session in September 2025. There will also be a progress report for grown-ups and a summary of this report for children. They should be able to see these documents in June-July 2026.
- ✓ Depending on the way you interact with this group, you can predict how you will inform them about the publication of the documents. Providing follow-up is important, if you don't work regularly with the children participating at the consultations, you can always refer them to the [website of OHCHR](#).

D. REPORTING

- ✓ Ensure that the documenter records what children say during the session, using the documentation template in Annex 1.
- ✓ If the documenter has not used this template during the session, please make sure that the notes are recorded in this format as soon as possible.
- ✓ Don't forget to record any important quotes. For each quote, please include the child's age, gender, and nationality, if possible.
- ✓ Please record the number of participants, their genders, and any other important information as requested at the reporting form. Please avoid sharing the names or any other personal data about the children that might make them identifiable.

E. SHARE

- Please send all the information collected by **8 June 2025** to: ohchr-children@un.org.

Should you have any questions, please contact:

- Helen Griffiths, Human Rights Officer, OHCHR/UN Human Rights Office: helen.griffiths@un.org, cc. ohchr-children@un.org.

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ANNEX 1: Documentation template for consultations with children

Background information:

- * **Country:**
- * **Date of consultation:**
- * **Where the consultation took place:**
- * **Name of facilitator(s):**
- * **Name of documenter(s):**
- * **Email address to contact the group:**

Child participants:

- * **Total number of children involved:**
- * **Gender of child participants:** Female / Male / Other
- * **Ages of the children:**
- * **Representation:** *Please note any other relevant background details about the children who have participated, including if they are familiar with any specific vulnerabilities and/or exclusion in any way. This might include, but not be limited to, being a member of an ethnic minority group, having a disability, living in alternative care, being out of school, children on the move, etc. This information will be helpful to offer a background and understanding of representation of the consultation and where/if gaps of inclusivity occur and how we can address this.*
- * **Selection:** *Please describe how the children were gathered and selected to take part in this activity. Are they part of an existing project?*

Children's views:

QUESTION 1:

Educational level:

- Do you attend pre-primary education (e.g. kindergarten, crèche, pre-school or similar)?
- Do you attend primary education?
- Do you attend secondary education?

Other comments...

QUESTION 2:**Exploring the problems:**

- What makes it difficult for children to attend preschool, and how does this affect them?
 - *Encourage children to think about barriers they face in their community or country to public pre-primary education (such as fees, money for public transport etc.) and the impact this has on their human rights*

Other comments...

QUESTION 3:**Exploring the problems:**

- What makes it difficult for children to attend secondary school, and how does this affect them?
 - *Encourage children to think about barriers they face in their community or country to public secondary education (such as fees, money for public transport or school supplies, need to earn money and no time for school etc.) and the impact this has on their human rights*

Other comments...

QUESTION 4:**Exploring the problems:**

- Do some children have a harder time / greater challenges attending public pre-primary and secondary school than other children?
 - *Encourage participants to think about whether some children face different or more difficulties than others.*

Other comments...

QUESTION 5:**Making things better:**

- What should governments do to make sure that all children can attend public pre-primary and public secondary education for free?
 - *Encourage children to think about what they think will help make a difference for children and what governments should change*

Other comments...

OTHER COMMENTS FROM CHILDREN

Are there any other comments children would like to share?

Feedback:**FEEDBACK FROM CHILD PARTICIPANTS:**

What worked well? What could be better next time? Other comments.

FEEDBACK FROM FACILITATORS:

What worked well? What could be better next time? Other comments.