

Regional Workshop

“Child Participation and Right to Access Justice”

Beirut, Lebanon, 16-17 August 2023

CONCEPT PAPER

The Regional Office of Defence for Children International in the Middle East and North Africa – DCI MENA - will hold a regional workshop in Beirut, Lebanon, from August 16-18, 2023, to highlight the principles that enshrine children's right to access justice, enhance their participation and have their opinions heard in their communities at different levels: as individuals during their access to services, in the decisions taken against them, or as groups when planning activities and drawing up policies, as well as empowering them as defenders of their rights. While the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) urges states to implement these rights, the actual implementation of such principles is still less than expected and requires advocacy efforts at the local, regional and international levels.

Despite regional efforts by some Arab countries to develop legislation on child justice, the Arab legislative system still does not respond to the requirements of protecting child victims and witnesses, as well as children at risk and the risk of delinquency, such as street children and children in other situations. The actual application of measures to protect children in conflict with the law requires a lot of planning and support, in addition to creating opportunities to hear children's opinion during the implementation of the procedures, or in general.

This workshop will provide an opportunity to discuss the outputs of the questionnaire, developed under the umbrella of the League of Arab States (LAS), on the extent to which Arab legislation and policies are compatible with the principles of the Arab Child-Friendly Justice Manual, which was developed and approved by the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs at the 39th regular session (Amman, 17 December 2019). Law enforcement agents have been trained in 22 Arab countries over the years, and practical recommendations have been suggested to be included while addressing legislation to protect child victims of violence, children in contact with the law, and other children at risk. The preparation and implementation stages of the Manual's recommendations are summarized as follows:

The Arab Child-Friendly Justice Manual

The Manual was developed by a group of child justice experts in the Arab world and was based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international standards on child justice, under the umbrella of and in partnership with the League of Arab States. It was approved by the

Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs at its 39th session as a reference for professionals and law enforcers during interventions with children in conflict with the law, children at risk and at risk of delinquency, and child victims and witnesses.

In a later step, DCI, in partnership with the League of Arab States, trained 200 professionals from different sectors, including judges, prosecutors, social workers, and police officers from various Arab countries. One of the outputs of these trainings was monitoring and measuring the gap between the legislation and policies in force in the Arab world on the one hand, and the guiding standards proposed by the Manual adopted by the LAS on the other hand.

Questionnaire on legislation and policies in light of international standards

As one of the tools for applying the Arab Manual, and for the purposes of building local advocacy plans through DCI sections in the MENA region, and providing specific recommendations to countries to impede in their legislation and policies, DCI, in partnership with the League of Arab States, developed a questionnaire to examine the gaps between legislation and policies and practices in the Arab world on the one hand, and the international standards for child justice included in the Manual on the other hand. **The questionnaire aims to:**

- Provide specific recommendations to countries on measures to protect child victims of violence and witnesses of crime, children in conflict with the law, and children at risk and at risk of delinquency.
- Build local advocacy plans by DCI national sections in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Yemen and Mauritania, based on the recommendations of the questionnaire for each country.
- Serve as a guide for the UN bodies that work in other Arab countries in which there are no DCI sections, to develop plans with governments to adopt the recommendations that result from the questionnaire.
- Adopt the recommendations of the questionnaire by the League of Arab States to address the Arab countries to include these recommendations in legislation, policies, and practices.
- Provide specific recommendations on the importance of realizing the participation of children and listening to their views in all judicial and administrative procedures and issues related to them, as well as the interventions taken against them in order to serve as a basis for advocacy campaigns led by children in their countries, or at the Arab world level.

Furthermore, this workshop is an important space for children from eight DCI sections in the Arab world to present their priorities and discuss actors at the regional level about enhancing children's participation and hearing their opinions, especially girls, and the extent to which children's right to participate and be heard is included in decision-making processes. At the regional level, DCI has created a model for implementing child participation; a basic principle of children's rights, by forming a child advisory council comprising 16 girls and boys to be a constituent council for an advisory council that is elected periodically, and has an active role in planning programs and activities at the regional level, as well as monitoring and advocating for children's rights issues in their communities and through influencers at the regional level and decision makers.

The Regional Workshop – themes and objectives

The regional workshop will be attended by representatives of the League of Arab States and DCI MENA sections, with the participation of representatives of DCI European sections, of the DCI International Secretariat in Geneva (DCI-IS) as well as other international and regional organisations, and local civil society in Lebanon.

The workshop will review the results of the questionnaire on the extent to which legislation and policies in the Arab world are compatible with the child-friendly justice manual.

It will discuss prospects for cooperation and networking between international bodies and DCI sections with regard to implementing the recommendations of the Manual and the recommendations of the [UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty](#) (presented at the UN General Assembly also in 2019). In particular, the [Roadmap for Action](#) adopted at the November 2022 Global Forum on Justice for Children and Deprivation of Liberty (Nouakchott, Mauritania). See also the [Arabic version of the Roadmap for Action](#).

Dialogue sessions will be held among children and adult stakeholders from international organisations on the extent to which they recognise the right of children to participate in advocacy plans and their interventions with states, in addition to dialogue and discussion sessions between children and DCI sections on adopting children's right to participate and be heard in all circles and situations.

Additionally, a dialogue session will be held with the League of Arab States on the implementation of this right.

Working papers and presentations

Time	Title	Presenter
Day 1 Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the results of the Arab questionnaire on child-friendly justice 	Dr. Fawaz Al-Ratrout Independent expert
Day 2 Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction: She Leads Project 	Lizet Vlamings DCI Netherlands Programme Director
Day 2 Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of international organisations in incorporating children's right to participate in advocacy issues at the regional level 	Open discussion with International Organisations
Day 2 Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges of children's participation in the child justice system 	Dr. Lazhar Jouili - Chairman of the Board of Directors of DCI Tunisia
Day 2 Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of the results of the questionnaire on the participation of child victims, children at, and children in conflict with the law in protection and care measures 	Child
Day 2 Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of the Arab League in protecting children's right to access justice 	Representative of the Arab League
Day 2 Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A discussion with children on how to use international mechanisms to protect children's rights Complaints protocol Children's role in shadow reports 	Alex Kamarotos DCI International Secretariat Executive Director