



United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Topic A: Measures to prevent and eliminate child marriage

Nowadays, child marriage deprives girls of their childhoods and has lifelong repercussions for them, with those living in poverty being most in danger. Worldwide, 650 million women and girls alive today were married as minors¹. Furthermore, despite the fact that one of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations is to stop child marriage by 2030, it is now obvious that this objective cannot be achieved without considerable advancements in interventions. If efforts are not accelerated, an estimated 150 million more girls will marry as minors within the decade².

Families in economically disadvantaged areas view marriage as a tool to help them overcome impoverishment, to strengthen family ties, and the preservation of culture. There are other factors outside only the economy, though. Perpetuating factors include a lack of educational possibilities, the idea that marriage offers "protection," family honor, social standards, traditional or religious rules that support the practice, an inadequate legislative framework, and the status of a nation's civil registration system. The practice is also supported by gender roles and age-related prejudices, socioeconomic risks associated with unmarried pregnancies, and other factors.

Child marriage is a violation of children's rights. Although girls are more likely than boys to engage in the practice, it violates everyone's rights regardless of sex. Without their childhoods, they lose their freedom and jeopardize their futures by becoming wives and husbands without the discernment and maturity needed to accept and understand what marriage entails. As early as the wedding night, when women are subjected to sexual assault by their husbands, violence occurs in this tradition. As a result, girls are more likely to experience domestic abuse and are less likely to continue their education.

In addition to isolating girls from their friends and family and limiting their participation in their community, this practice can also have a negative impact on the girl's

¹ UNICEF. "One in every 5 girls is married" in *Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>

² UNICEF. *25 million child marriages prevented in the last decade due to accelerated progress, according to new UNICEF estimates*. 2018. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented-last-decade-due-accelerated-progress-according>





physical and psychological health. Similar to boys, girls frequently aren't permitted to use contraception or aren't aware of it, thus they frequently get pregnant at a young age, which raises the chance of difficulties during pregnancy and labor for both the mother and the kid. Additionally, delivering has the potential to be lethal for both the mother and the baby.

A girl's development is frequently jeopardized by child marriage, which can lead to early pregnancies and social isolation, disrupt her education, reduce her possibilities for professional and vocational progression, and put her in danger of domestic violence. Marriage may also force boys into adult roles for which they are unprepared, put financial pressure on them, and limit their options for further education or job growth.

Concepts and definitions

- *Child marriage*: any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child³.
- *Contraceptive methods*: substances, objects or procedures that prevent a woman from becoming pregnant.
- *Discrimination against women*: any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field⁴.
- *Dowry*: the wealth that the bride-to-be or her family gives to the groom, being in many cases proportional to the social status of the future husband.
- *Forced marriage*: is a marriage in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. A child marriage is a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free, and informed consent⁵.

³ UNICEF. Child marriage. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>

⁴ United Nations. "Article 2" in *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

⁵ UNICEF. Child marriage. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>





- *Gender-based violence*: it includes physical, sexual, mental, or economic harm inflicted on a person because of socially ascribed power imbalances between males and females. It also includes the *threat* of violence, coercion and deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private.⁶

Current problem

Research on early marriage has largely focused on sociodemographic risks, rather than girls' potential power in deciding whether or not to marry, between 2018 and 2030, 150 million girls will be married before reaching age 18⁷. Individual risk factors for child marriage are frequently investigated, and programmatic efficacy is frequently used to assess change agents. The effect on child grooms, however, has not been fully investigated.

There is also a corpus of research on the practice's societal, macro-level influences, such as economic growth and poverty reduction, access to education, and women's entry to the labor market. These elements closely resemble known risk and mitigating elements for child marriage at the individual or family level. For instance, research demonstrates that girls with lesser educational attainment often face a larger risk of child marriage than their peers with higher levels of education. Similar to this, child marriage is less common in nations with higher levels of education.

The connections between child marriage and poverty are likewise well-established and can reinforce one another. The lowest sections of society are most likely to get married as children, and low-income nations have the highest rates of child marriage. High rates of child marriage also have a detrimental effect on a nation's ability to eradicate poverty and experience population increase due to their poor effects on maternal and child health, women's capability for earning and productivity, and fertility.

Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last

⁶ UNICEF. *Gender-based violence in emergencies*. n/d. [https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies#:~:text=Gender%2Dbased%20violence%20\(GBV\),imbalances%20between%20males%20and%20females.](https://www.unicef.org/protection/gender-based-violence-in-emergencies#:~:text=Gender%2Dbased%20violence%20(GBV),imbalances%20between%20males%20and%20females.)

⁷ UNICEF Data and Analytics Section. *Progress for every child in the SDG era: Are we on track to achieve the SDGs for children?* New York, NY: UNICEF Division of Data, Research, and Policy. 2018.





10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted⁸. In order to further curtail and ultimately abolish this damaging practice, it is crucial to comprehend the range and depth of the elements that either cause child marriage or work to prevent it.

Initiatives taken by the international community

We are incapable of discuss a single course of action to take to end child marriage. The people who are most at danger of becoming child brides are frequently the most difficult to reach since they belong to marginalized or remote populations that are frequently unnoticed by the rest of the world. The international community pledged to put an end to child marriage by 2030 when it signed up to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which shows the relevance that the topic still has.

Numerous international conventions and accords address the problem of child marriage. For instance, article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women addresses the right to be shielded from child marriage. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that everyone has the right to "free and full" consent to marriage, but it also states that consent cannot be "free and full" if one of the parties is not old enough to make an educated choice regarding a life partner.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child does not explicitly mention marriage, but other rights, such the right to freedom of speech, the right to protection from all types of abuse, and the right to be safeguarded from harmful traditional practices, are linked to child marriage. The Convention on Consent to Marriage⁹, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child¹⁰, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa¹¹ are additional international agreements that address child marriage.

⁸ UNICEF. *Towards Ending Child Marriage: Global trends and profiles of progress*, UNICEF, New York, 2021. p. 8.

⁹ See: General Assembly United Nations. *Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages*. United Nations, New York, 1962.
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/convention.pdf>

¹⁰ See: African Unity. *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, Organization African Unity. Monrovia, 1990.

¹¹ See: African Unity. *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. Organization of African Unity, Maputo, 2003.





The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program to End Child Marriage is in charge of advocating for teenage girls' rights so that they can avoid pregnancy and marriage and can pursue their own objectives with the help of education and the freedom to make their own choices. Since 2016 UNICEF, together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), launched a program to tackle child marriage in 12 of the most high-prevalence or high-burden countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia¹².

Ending child marriage encompasses a wide range of issues. Through specialized interventions, project models, methodologies, and expertise, gender equality, faith development, health and nutrition, education, livelihoods, resilience, local advocacy, child protection, urban development, emergency response, and more are all part of the answer. Children who are married are among the most vulnerable, thus it is important to safeguard them against exploitation, abuse, and violence. Increased attention should be paid to married children's unique needs, taking into account their age and status as vulnerable individuals.

Guiding questions

- How common is child marriage in your delegation?
- Who is most affected by child marriage in your delegation?
- What happens when girls seek help after suffering violence in their marriage?
- What happens when girls try to resist early marriage?
- Does your delegation have clear information on the number of people affected by these events in your territory?
- In your delegation, has any action been taken to protect girls, boys and adolescents who are (or were) victims of child marriage?
- What actions does your delegation consider would be useful to prevent child marriage?

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