



Why governments must address child marriage to achieve quality education for girls

What's at stake?

Child marriage undermines efforts to improve girls' education. Unless we address it, we will not make progress on global education goals such as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. At the same time, keeping girls in school is a critical strategy in preventing child marriage.

- **Child marriage is a global problem** that cuts across countries, cultures, and religions. Every year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18. If there is no reduction in the practice, the global number of women married as children will reach 1.2 billion by 2050.
- Child marriage usually means an **end to formal education** for girls. They tend to drop out of school before marriage or shortly after when marital or domestic demands increase.
- More girls than ever before are getting an education. But **progress continues to stall** in some of the poorest countries. There are over 130 million girls out of school. The majority of those girls live in sub-Saharan Africa, and Central & Southern Asia where the rates of child marriage are highest.ⁱ
- Child marriage **reduces girls' expected earnings** in adulthood by 9%. In a 2017 report, The World Bank estimates that in 15 countries, if women had not married early, the gains in earnings and productivity would have been \$26 billion.ⁱⁱ
- By ending child marriage, governments in 18 sample countries could **save up to \$17 billion per year** by 2030 just from the savings related to providing public education.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Educated girls are less likely to marry**: girls with secondary or higher education are three times less likely to marry by 18 than those with no education.^{iv}
- Children of educated mothers have **higher survival rates** and are more likely to stay in school.^v

What must governments do?

To improve girls' education, governments must address child marriage and the social norms that keep girls out of school.

- Develop and implement **gender-responsive education plans** which target and prioritise girls at-risk of child marriage and married girls.
- **Invest technical and financial resources** in strategies which prevent child marriage and support married girls.
- **Track progress on the SDGs**: monitor and publish married and unmarried girls' access to, and engagement in, education on a national level. This will highlight progress as well as areas for improvement.
- Encourage, lead and champion **cross-government strategies** to end child marriage.

What education strategies can help prevent child marriage and support married girls?

The good news is that there is a lot of evidence on interventions which help keep girls in school and avoid school dropout and child marriage.

1. Ensure girls' access to primary and secondary education

- Guarantee **access to free, compulsory primary and free / low-cost secondary education** for all girls and boys, including married girls.

2. Ensure girls' safety within and on the way to school

- Support initiatives to **increase girls' physical accessibility to school**. Build schools in remote and rural areas. Provide safe and affordable transportation to school by working with education, transport and infrastructure sectors.
- Establish mechanisms for **reporting violence** in school, and make girls aware of them.
- Train teachers on **non-violent teaching** methods and being gender-sensitive, provide safe spaces for girls, both those at risk of child marriage and married girls, at school.

3. Improve quality and relevance of education for girls, and create girl-friendly environments within schools

- Ensure **education is relevant** to girls and advances their knowledge and life skills.
- Include **comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education** in school curricula. It should explicitly address girls' rights and gender inequality.
- Provide girls with **access to safe, private toilets** and sanitation facilities to manage their menstrual hygiene in school (working with education, water, sanitation and hygiene sectors). Train girls in menstrual hygiene management and distribute sanitary towels.
- Develop strong recruitment and **retention strategies for teachers**, particularly female teachers, and invest in teacher training.

4. Develop retention strategies

- **Provide incentives for families to keep girls in school**, offering scholarships and stipends, subsidising or eliminating costs of uniforms, exams, and textbooks.
- **Support initiatives to increase the value of girls' education**, which inform parents and communities of the benefits of girls attending school, bust myths and raise awareness of the links between education and future employment.
- **Develop life skills programmes for married girls** through targeted outreach and support programmes. Initiate evening or part-time formal schooling and vocational training opportunities, and follow up with students who drop out of school (working with education, employment and livelihoods sectors).
- **End discriminatory policies and practice of excluding pregnant girls or married girls from school**. Offer flexible schedules, provide childcare, and change the attitudes of teachers and parents through community dialogue.

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 900 civil society organisations in 95 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential. Find out more at www.GirlsNotBrides.org.

ⁱ UNESCO, *Reducing global poverty through universal primary and secondary education*, Policy Paper 32 / Fact Sheet 44, 2017

ⁱⁱ World Bank and International Center for Research on Women, *The Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Brief*, 2017

ⁱⁱⁱ World Bank and International Center for Research on Women, *The Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Brief*, 2017

^{iv} UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

^v *Girls Not Brides* and ICRW, *Taking action to address child marriage: the role of different sectors: education*, 2016