



Advocating for Grandmothers, Vulnerable Children and Youth in Africa
Soutien aux grands-mères, enfants et jeunes vulnérables en Afrique

Child, Early and Forced Marriage Backgrounder

Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a human rights violation according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ often following from and leading to further human rights violations. Child marriage, defined as a formal marriage or informal union before age 18, is a reality for both boys and girls, although girls are disproportionately the most affected. It constitutes a grave threat to young girls' lives, health and future prospects.

Human rights instruments relevant to CEFM:

- UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- UN General Assembly Resolution on child, early and forced marriage adopted December 18, 2014
- UN Human Rights Council Resolution on strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, adopted July 2, 2015
- UN Sustainable Development Goals

Signatories to such conventions must ensure that commitments are implemented and enforced at the national level.

Statistics

- Every year, an estimated 15 million girls aged under 18 are married worldwide.²
- One in three girls in the developing world is married before they turn 18; one in nine girls is married before the age of 15.³
- Between 2011 and 2020 more than 140 million girls under 18 will be married, this translates into 39,000 girls married each day.⁴
- Of the 41 countries worldwide with a child marriage prevalence rate of 30% or more, 30 countries are located in Africa.⁵
- Compared to older groups, child brides have both the lowest use but highest unmet need for contraception.⁶

- Child marriage is a challenge across Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, 40% of women are married as children.⁷

Impacts

- Marriage for girls can lead to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, and in developing countries these are the main causes of death among 15-19 year-old girls.
- Stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50% higher in mothers younger than 20 years than in women who give birth later.
- Married girls are at greater risk of contracting HIV than unmarried girls because of their greater sexual exposure, often with an older husband with whom it is extremely difficult to assert their wishes and needs, particularly when it comes to negotiating safe sexual practices and the use of family planning methods.
- When girls are married as children, they are denied an education, robbed of their childhood and opportunities to develop their potential at the pivotal life stage when they should become healthy, empowered and productive.
- For many girls child marriage condemns them to a life of poverty, powerlessness, domestic violence, and domestic and sexual slavery.
- Many of these marriages are unstable and a significant number end in divorce. Girls experience significant trauma during these transitions as well as social isolation and lack of support following marriage.⁸

The Economic Costs of Child Marriage

The joint International Centre for Research on Women -World Bank study of the economic impacts of child marriage is still underway, but preliminary analyses suggest quite strongly that, in addition to harmful effects on girls' health, education, rights and wellbeing, the economic impacts of child marriage, from the individual to the national levels, are very large. In addition, most of the benefits from ending child marriage would accrue to the poor, who are almost always the most likely to have higher rates of child marriage. Ending child marriage would help greatly to eradicate extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity.

Why does child, early and forced marriage happen?

The causes of child early and forced marriage are complex, but the practice is driven by these main factors:

- **Gender inequality** -women and girls often occupy a lower status in societies and are denied their rights and restricted in their ability to play an equal role in their homes and communities.
- **Poverty** – in poor families, girls may be viewed as an economic burden. The perception of girls' potential to earn an income as comparatively poor pushes girls out of their homes and into marriage.
- **Traditional, cultural or religious practices** – in many countries the importance of preserving family 'honour' and girls' virginity is such that parents push their daughters into marriage well before they are ready. There is a belief that marriage safeguards against 'immoral' or 'inappropriate behaviour'.

- **Failure to enforce laws** – sometimes families are not even aware they are breaking the law. In some countries early marriage is so prevalent that there is seldom a decision to prosecute.
- **Conflicts, disasters and emergencies** – increase economic pressures on households and many families that wouldn't previously have considered early marriage turn to it as a solution.

Protecting girls' right to choose when and who they will marry, and when and if they have children will create a critical cycle of improved health, education and opportunities. Investing in girls through adolescence will lead to higher levels of gender equality, empowering girls to develop into women who contribute to stronger societies and economies. When investments in girls are made, everyone benefits: their families, communities, and most importantly, the girls themselves. Ending child marriage will significantly improve the lives and futures of children globally, including the many children being cared for by grandmothers in sub-Saharan Africa.

¹ “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses” [Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 16(2)]

² <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

³ <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/press-release-inclusion-of-end-child-marriage-as-indicator-in-high-level-panel-report-on-post-2015-development-agenda-is-bold-and-crucial-effort-to-address-global-poverty/>

⁴ <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriages-39000-every-day-more-than-140-million-girls-will-marry-between-2011-and-2020/>

⁵ <http://allafrica.com/stories/201405281417.html?viewall=1>

⁶ UNFPA, State of the World Population, 2013

⁷ <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/reports-and-publications/ending-child-marriage-africa-brief-girls-not-brides/>

⁸ <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/building-an-evidence-base-to-delay-marriage-in-sub-saharan-africa>

Other Sources:

<http://www.plan-uk.org/because-i-am-a-girl/about-because-i-am-a-girl/violence-against-girls/early-and-forced-marriage>