



**Issue:** Promoting the reduction of child marriage

**Forum:** Special Conference 2

**Position:** Deputy Chair of the SPC2

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## Introduction

Child marriage is a violation of the human rights. Although there are many laws against it, it's still a big dilemma. Each year over 12 million girls under the age of 18 get married. Many different circumstances like poverty, lack of education, religious/cultural practices, insecurity, and/or gender discrimination can lead to child marriage.

Girls suffer much more from child marriage than boys. About 82 percent of the children that are married under the age of 18 are girls and 18 percent are boys. One third of the girls in developing countries are married before the age of 18 and 1 in 9 are married before the age of 15. These children aren't as developed as they should be by reason of lack of good education, early pregnancy etc. It also puts them at risk of violence, abuse or sometimes even slavery.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Arranged marriage

'Arranged marriage is a type of marital union where the bride and groom are selected by individuals other than the couple themselves, particularly by family members, such as the parents.'

### Bride

'A bride is a woman who is about to be married or who is newlywed'

### Bride price

A price paid by the groom (or his family) to the family of the bride's parents. This money can help the couple to establish the new household. Bride price is often confused with dowry.

### Child

Any human being under the age of 18.

### Child marriage

A marriage or informal union between one or two minors. Child marriage is a human rights violation.

### Dowry

The money, goods or estate that the bride (or her family) pay the groom's parents. In some cultures the dowry is seen as a gift, instead of a buyoff.

## Gender discrimination

'Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.'

## (Bride)groom

A man who is about to be married or newlywed.

## Marriage

'The state of being united as spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law'

## Poverty

Not being able to provide yourself with basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing.

## Sustainable Development Goals

'The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.'

## General Overview

Child marriage happens all around the world. While this concerns both boys and girls, girls suffer disproportionately. 1 in 5 girls are married before the age of 18. The highest rates come from the Sub-Saharan and South Asia.

Child marriage was a very common thing until the 20th century. Life expectancy was low and child marriage was seen as an effective way to sustain and grow the population. Marriage was never seen as a union between two people in love, but were arranged for the good of the family.

Child marriage is a result of many factors. Poverty is seen as the biggest factor for child marriage. When marrying a bride off, the family of the bride receives a large payment. In some cases the family of the bride pays the groom's family a large sum. Some of the poor families use this money either to close big debts or to end a long cycle of poverty. Other families marry their kids off so they do not need to feed, clothe and take care of another child. Most of them see bride price or dowry as a solution to poverty. But it is not. By marrying at such a young age, the children will not be properly educated or be able to take part in a good workplace.

Insecurity is also a big factor that leads to child marriage. The parents believe that by marrying a girl off that young, they will protect her sexuality in a world full of sexual harassment. By doing so the family's honour will be intact, because their daughter will marry a virgin.

Gender discrimination is another factor that can lead to child marriage. Women are seen as minorities and are oppressed by men for centuries. This often results in psychological, physical and sexual violence and economic and social inequalities. They often have to marry a man to take care of him and the household and to have his children.

Another factor is marriage of state. Marriage of state is an diplomatic/arranged marriage between two members of different nations, states or cultures. Those different states or families would arrange a marriage between their kids to strengthen their ally or to end a series of wars. This dates back into the prehistoric and Grecian era.

The reason of child marriage is usually a combinations of these four factors.  
The individual rights denied by child marriages are:

- The right to an education.
- The right to be protected from physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual assault, rape, and sexual exploitation.
- The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.
- The right to rest and leisure, and to participate freely in cultural life.
- The right to not be separated from parents against the child's will.
- The right to protection against all forms of exploitation affecting any aspect of the child's welfare.
- The right to eventual employment.<sup>1</sup>

Ending child marriage will help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Ending it is not only a reasonable thing to do, but also an economically practical decision. Child brides are less likely to work, and when they do, it's usually a underpaid or hard job. Girls that aren't married can go to school, earn their own money and support their families. This can end poverty (goal 1) and hunger (goal 2). It will make sure that girls are good educated (goal 4) and it will make the economy grow (goal 8). Ending child marriage is not only economical, but also important for the health of many girls. A lot of these girls are under pressure to have children. This puts their health at high risks and often ends in death related to pregnancy or childbirth (goal 3).

## Major Parties Involved

### Girls Not Brides

Girls not Brides is one of the biggest organizations that is against child marriage. It has a partnership with 1000 civil society organisations over 95 countries. They spread awareness and try to end child marriage. Girls Not Brides was established in 2011, when the Elders, a group of independent global leaders working together for peace and human rights, aimed to draw more attention to the awful situations of a lot of girls and women and to create a world without child marriage. In 2013, Girls Not Brides became an independent charity.

To end child marriage, they've set up 6 goals.

Goal A is what the governments have to execute. The government and all relevant ministries have to take action to address child marriage and the civil society organisations have to be key partners to government effort.

Goal B is global. The three points Girls Not Brides tries to accomplish are: 1. international and regional actors support implementation of commitments. 2. Related actions take action to address child marriage. 3. The global community recognises child marriage as a priority issue.

Goal C is about community. The three main points of goal C are: 1. Community-level efforts are supported. 2. Community-based organisations have increased capacity. 3. Community voices are valued.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/child-marriage-facts-causes-consequences-2353030>

Goal D is about funding. With goal D they want to accomplish these three things: 1. Existing and new donors increase their funding. 2. Civil society can access funding. 3. Government of high-prevalence countries allocate funding.

Goal E is learning. This goal only two points they want to see: 1. New data and evidence are generated and inform decision making. 2. The collective expertise of civil society drives the global discourse.

The last goal is goal F. This goal is about partnerships. The things Girls Not Brides wants to see are: 1. Girls Not Brides have greater impact by working together. 2. Girls Not Brides members have increased capacity. 3. There is increased diversity in partnership. 4. Girls Not Brides is inclusive and reflects the voices of those most affected.

## International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

The ICRW was one of the first organisations to collect information and engage advocacy around child marriage. They searched for all the root causes of and best way to end child marriage. Not are they only trying to prevent child marriage, they also support women and girls that are married at a young age.

## United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF started as an organisation to provide emergency food and healthcare to children in countries that had been devastated by World War II. Now, it's the biggest organisation devoted to the welfare of children all around the globe.

## United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA)

The UNFPA is the UN's sexual and reproductive health agency. Their mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. UNFPA works with governments and civil society organisations to promote and protect human rights of girls.

## India

India had the highest number of child brides in the world. 27 percent of the girls in India are married before their 18th birthday. Over the last decade, India has witnessed one of the largest declines in child marriage rates, from approximately 50% to 27%. Although the rates of child marriage before the age of 15 are decreasing, the rates of child marriage between the age of 15-18 have increased. The caste system in India is one of the biggest motives for child marriage. Women and girls are seen as property of their father/husband and have to take care of household chores.

## Niger

Niger has the highest percentage of child brides. 3 in 4 girls get married before the age of 18 and 28 percent is married before the age of 15. The main reason of child marriage in Niger is poverty. Social and religious traditions, like the fear of dishonour from pregnancy outside a marriage, and insecurity are also main factors that lead to child marriage in Niger.

## Norway

Norway recently banned marriage from under the age of 18, by approving a law that was against child marriage. In the hope of setting a good example to all the countries, that allow marriage under the age of 18. "We believe ... this law will send a clear message, nationally as well as internationally, that we do not accept children getting married in Norway," Minister of Children and Equality Linda Hofstad Helleland said. Finland's Justice Minister also called for a child marriage ban shortly after the law in Norway, confirming the theory of Norway.

## Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
3000 BC - 1945 AD	In the Antiquity, late Middle Ages and even until the Mid-Modern History child marriage was a very common thing. The average life expectancy was very low and to keep growing instead of dying the population, children married at a young age. Both girls and boys were expected to marry at a young age.
1924	Geneva Declarations of the Rights of the Child announced that children have the right to receive the requirements for normal development, the right of the hungry child to be fed, the right of the sick child to receive health care, the right of the backward child to be reclaimed, the right of orphans to shelter, and the right to protection from exploitation.
2006	Prohibition of Child Marriage act makes it illegal for girls to marry under the age of 18 and boys under the age of 21. Child marriage can be made voidable by the child within 2 years of becoming an adult.
2010	158 countries reported that the minimum age of legal marriage is 18. However 146 of those countries (or states) allow girls under the age of 18 to marry with consent of the parents or other authorities.
11 October 2012	International Day of the Girl Child. This day supports more equality for girls, increases awareness of gender discrimination, is against child marriage etc.
2013	The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted its first resolution against child, early and forced marriage. This resolution recognises that child, early or forced marriage 'prevents individuals to live their life free all forms of violence and that has adverse consequences on the enjoyment of human rights, such as the right to education, [and] the right to the highest attainable standard of health including sexual and reproductive health'
18 December 2014	Resolution adopted by the General Assembly against child, early and forced marriage.
2 July 2015	The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted another resolution against child, early and forced marriage. It was co-sponsored by 85 countries and would affect over 15 million girls every year.
22 June 2017	The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted its third resolution against child, early and forced marriage.

## Previous attempts to resolve the issue

In 2006, the UN adopted a resolution against child marriage. It states that any child marriage is to be voidable at the option of the party to the marriage who is a child, provides for custody and maintenance and gives the Court power to mandate an injunction in a case of child marriage.

*Action for Adolescent Girls* is a program by UNFPA that was approved in 2012. UNFPA's goal was to step up investments towards ending child marriage and reducing adolescent pregnancy by supporting governments to reach those that are most at risk of child marriage.

A/RES/66/140: This resolution focuses on the girl child.

A/RES/67/144: This resolution is against violence against women

A/RES/69/156: The General Assembly adopted a resolution on child, early and forced marriage.

A/HRC/24/23: The first Human Rights Council resolution on child, early and forced marriage. It was co-sponsored by over a 100 countries, including some countries with high child marriage rates. India, the country with the highest number of child marriage, had decided not to sponsor this initiative to end child marriage.

A/HRC/29/8: The second HRC resolution adopted to strengthen efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage. The resolution was co-sponsored by 85 countries, including those with high child marriage rates. This resolution would affect 15 million girls every year. In this resolution, child marriage is recognised as a 'barrier' to the sustainable development goals.

A/HRC/35/L.26: The third HRC resolution on this problem. It was led by The Netherlands and Sierra Leone and was adopted without a vote, with, again, 85 co-sponsors.

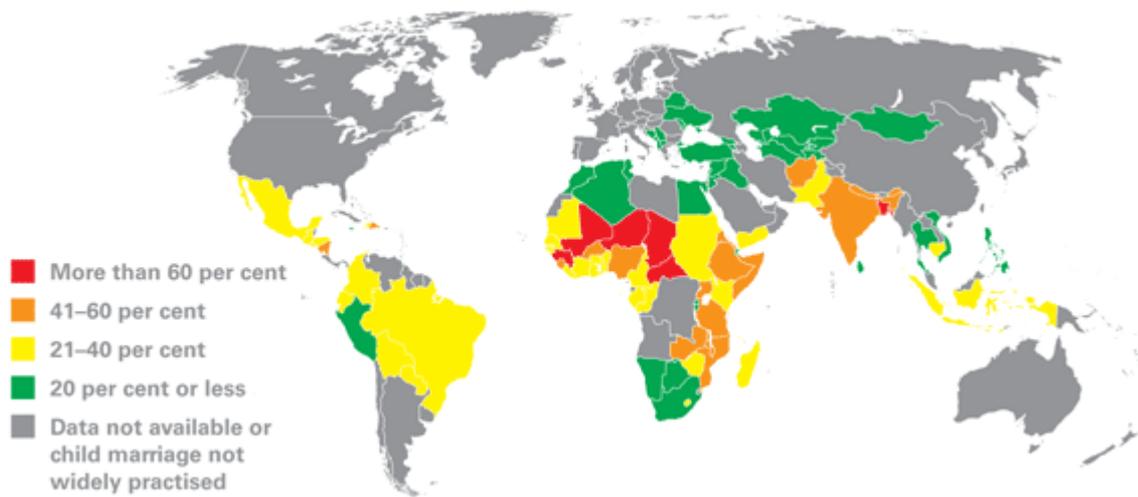
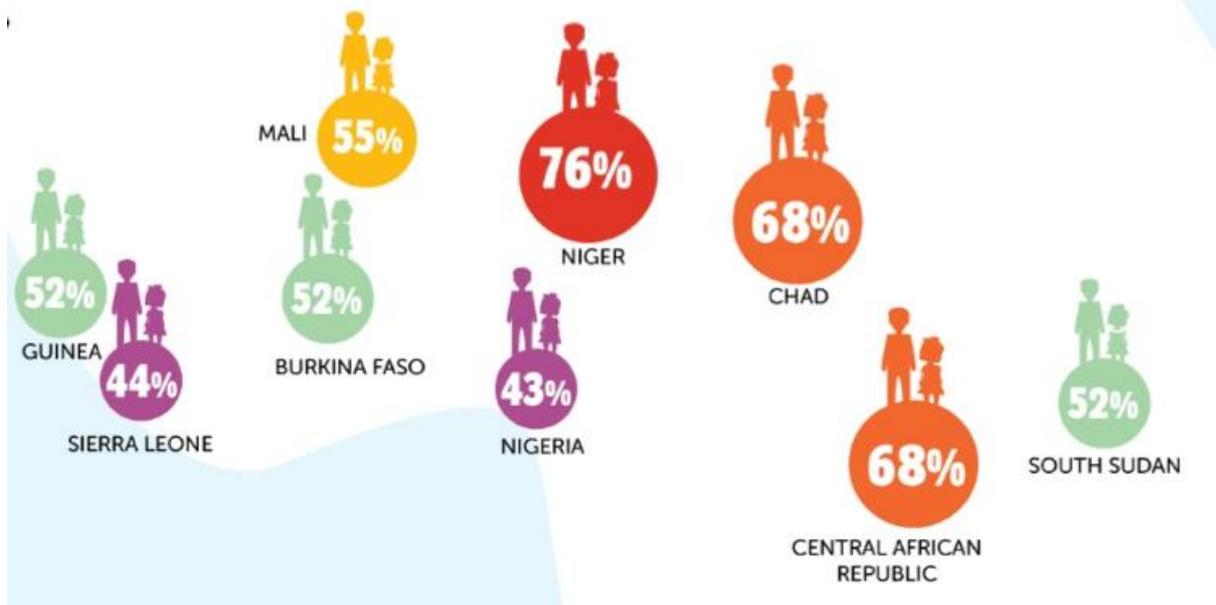
## Possible Solutions

To end this long cycle of child marriages, there has to happen a few things. The ICRW identified these five points as best solutions to prevent or delay child marriage:

1. Empower girls with information, skills and support networks;
2. Provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families;
3. Educate and rally parents and community members;
4. Enhance girls' access to high-quality education;
5. Encourage supportive laws and policies.

Although the main ambition is to decrease child marriage, young girls that are already married also need support. They're being isolated and didn't have the opportunity to finish their education. They're also more at risk of domestic violence (sexually, physically and psychologically). For these girls there needs to be some kind of hotline or trustee they can rely on, guides and maybe even educates them.

# Appendices



Picture by: Girls, Not Brides

## Useful articles

- UNICEF, 2013  
[https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child\\_Marriage\\_Report\\_7\\_17\\_LR..pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR..pdf)
- USAID, September 2015  
[https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID\\_CEFM\\_Resource-Guide.PDF](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID_CEFM_Resource-Guide.PDF)
- Girls Not Brides  
<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/>
- 'Too Young to Wed' is a short documentary on child marriage and its issues. The link contains the documentary screening and discussion.  
Too Young to Wed: The Secret World of Child Brides, Stephanie Sinclair, 2011  
<https://pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/too-young-wed-secret-world-child-brides-documentary-screening-and-discussion-24316>

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- k4health,  
<https://www.k4health.org/toolkits/youthpolicy/early-marriage-0>
- Wikipedia,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forced\\_marriage#Historical\\_context](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forced_marriage#Historical_context)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child\\_marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_marriage)