



SDGs AND CHILD MARRIAGE

UNLESS WE END CHILD MARRIAGE, WE WON'T ACHIEVE 8 OF THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Child marriage is a global problem that cuts across countries, cultures, and religions. Around 650 million women and girls alive today were married as children.

Unless we accelerate our efforts, 150 million more girls will be married by 2030.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out global development priorities between now and 2030. They are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy

peace and prosperity, centred on the realisation of human rights. The SDGs include a goal on gender equality and as fundamental part of it, a target to end the harmful practice of child marriage by 2030. However, the consequences of not achieving this target reach beyond Goal 5. **Unless we make significant progress on ending child marriage, we will fall short on eight of the SDGs**, including those related to: poverty, food security, health, education, gender equality, economic growth, and peace and justice.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

Governments must:

1. **Ensure** that all reporting on the progress of the SDGs includes meaningful involvement from civil society, including community based organisations, youth, and women's collectives, at the national, regional and global level.
2. **Prioritise** this issue within the 2030 Agenda in order to achieve real, long-term change. We will not end child marriage by 2030 unless action is scaled up.
3. **Commit** to action by developing costed, national action plans to address child marriage, and that work across different development sectors.

Child marriage is a cross-cutting issue, and to achieve the goals it must be addressed by stakeholders working across different development sectors, including governments.



WHICH SDGS ARE AT RISK IF WE DON'T END CHILD MARRIAGE AND WHY?

GOAL 1: No poverty

Child marriage is linked to higher household poverty, and perpetuates the cycle of poverty across generations. It is both a driver and consequence of poverty, and is most common in the world's poorest countries and poorest households. Taking girls out of school as child brides takes away their access to education, and limits their opportunity to earn an income.

When girls have the skills and opportunities to secure a job and develop their skills they can support themselves and their families and break the cycle of poverty.

GOAL 2: Zero hunger

Food insecurity and malnutrition can be a cause and consequence of child marriage. Marrying off daughters means families can save limited food resources, but babies born to girls under the age of 15 are more likely to have low birth weight, suffer from poor nutrition, experience stunting, and are at higher risk of dying before their fifth birthday.

Tackling child marriage will contribute to progress on better nutrition and food security for adolescent girls and their children.

GOAL 3: Good health and wellbeing

Child brides and their children often suffer a range of harmful health consequences due to early pregnancy. Complications related to adolescent pregnancy and childbirth are consistently among the leading causes of death for 15- to 19-year-old girls worldwide, and the risk of post-pregnancy complications is also higher for girls. Child marriage is also associated with poor mental health problems including depression and feelings of isolation.

By acting to prevent child marriage, and by improving married and unmarried adolescent girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services, we can dramatically improve health and broader development outcomes for millions of girls and children worldwide. Not only will we see positive outcomes for girls and their future, delaying marriage and motherhood will also reduce related high rates of infant mortality.

GOAL 4: Quality education

In most cases, child marriage means an end to formal education for girls, as they take on domestic responsibilities as well as childbearing and motherhood. Girls who are already out of school are also more likely to be married early. Poorly educated young mothers face more barriers in taking proper care of their children's nutrition and health.

Education is one of the most powerful tools available to prevent child marriage and promote gender equality. It provides protection for girls and also provides them with the knowledge and skills to determine their future.

GOAL 5: Gender equality

Structural gender inequality is at the root of child marriage. Girls are valued less than boys and often have little say in whom, and when, they marry. Gender equality is an effective indicator of overall progress towards a more equitable world, one we won't achieve while child marriage persists.

Addressing child marriage can be an entry point to addressing broader gender inequality. By tackling harmful practices and entrenched unequal social norms, we can work towards making sure the voices and decisions of girls and women are as valued as those of boys and men.

Goal 5 includes the target to end child marriage:

SDG 5.3: 'Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation'

GOAL 8: Economic growth

As well as being a human rights violation, the economic impact of child marriage has a significant impact on girls, their families and their nations, costing the world trillions of dollars.

By ending child marriage and ensuring that adolescents have access to the education, information and services they need, they would be able to decide if, when and how many children to have, and increase their educational attainment. This would result in increases in productivity, and enable countries to make significant advances to alleviate poverty and benefit from economic growth.

GOAL 10: Reduce inequalities

Child marriage rates vary across regions and countries. Areas with a higher than national average prevalence of child marriage are often in the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations, and include the most vulnerable and hardest to reach girls—whether they are married, or at risk of child marriage. These girls are also often at higher risk of being trafficked or exploited, and are unable to access government services, often because their births or marriages were never legally registered.

Reducing inequalities means not leaving anyone behind, no matter where they are and how hard they are to reach.

GOAL 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions

Child marriage is not only a human rights violation, it is a form of violence against women and girls. Girls who marry as children are at risk of sexual, physical, and psychological violence throughout their lives; they are particularly at risk of violence from their partners or their partners' families.

Ending child marriage—and violence against women and girls—means investing in programmes that address the root causes, with emphasis on addressing the norms and beliefs that discriminate by placing less value on girls and women than boys and men. It means implementing strong legal and political frameworks which set the minimum age of marriage at 18, ensure access to education and health services, and protect girls' rights.

Ending child marriage is not only the right thing to do, it is also necessary to make a more equitable and prosperous world a reality.

GOAL 17: Partners for the Goals



The SDGs champion the power of partnership. They highlight the importance of bringing together multiple stakeholders to make progress on sustainable development. As a global partnership of civil society organisations committed to ending child marriage, *Girls Not Brides* amplifies the message behind this goal. We know we are stronger when we work together.

To follow through on the commitments behind the SDGs and to bring an end to child marriage, we need long-term, costed plans at the global, regional and national level to ensure adequate and large-scale implementation of effective child marriage interventions. Civil society must have a role in inputting into these plans, supporting their implementation and holding governments to account for the promises they have made.

Reviewing the SDGs

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the official mechanism for reviewing progress on the SDGs. In 2019, as the UN reviews this system, *Girls Not Brides* highlights:

Civil society has a critical role to play in achieving the SDGs, and in holding governments accountable for their promises. Meaningful civil society engagement, including community based organisations and youth and women's collectives, is needed at every stage of the HLPF process, including national and regional consultations, and at global reviews. National follow-up mechanisms need to include civil society representatives. Civil society offers unique insights to the SDGs and plays an important role in holding governments accountable for their commitments, and in highlighting local challenges.

Progress must be reported in a consistent and comprehensive method. It is important for country level Voluntary National Reviews to use a standardised format to assess the progress of each and every Goal, including challenges and actions. By providing realistic and holistic reviews, we can better assess gaps to be addressed, and take action. All regions should introduce Peer Review Mechanisms to ensure collaborative, regionally specific learning and sharing of best practices on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Turning commitments into actions. Governments must prioritise clear action and pathways through showing leadership in ending child marriage, and implementing programmes that will ensure that every girl is able to determine her future.

Published in April 2019 by
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***Girls Not Brides* is global partnership made up of more than 1000 civil society organisations from over 100 countries, committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their full potential.**