



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
21 December 2023

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-third session

19 June–14 July 2023

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Girls Not Brides: The  
Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, Forum des  
femmes autochtones du Cameroon (FFAC), Fundacion para  
Estudio Investigacion de la Mujer, Global Campaign for  
Education, non-governmental organizations in special  
consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is  
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Girls' Education Is Key to Preventing Child Marriage**

Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage and the NGOs co-sponsoring this statement express their appreciation of the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Education to promote the right to education. This statement focuses on the child, early, and forced marriage and unions ("CEFMU", "child marriage") as a critical issue that needs to be addressed to enable the full realization of the right to education.

Child marriage is a human rights violation and a global problem that crosses borders, cultures, traditions, and religions. Annually 12 million girls are married worldwide, with huge variations in prevalence between and within countries. The vast majority of girls who are affected by child marriage are from the poorest households and living in areas affected by conflict or fragility.[1] In most circumstances, CEFMU implies the end of formal education for girls as they undertake domestic and unpaid care work responsibilities including reproductive roles.

Globally, child marriage has seen a decline. Currently, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 were married as children, compared to nearly one in four a decade ago.[2] Nevertheless, as we reach the midpoint towards the deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, significant challenges remain in ending child marriage, including concerning effective access to education. While progress has been made worldwide, at the current rate it would take another 300 years to completely bring an end to child marriage globally.[3]

There are intricate two-way relationships between child marriage and girls' education. On the one hand, child marriage restricts girls' access to quality education, with evidence indicating an intense negative correlation between child marriage and girls' education.[4] Depending on the geographical and socioeconomic context, child marriage can be either a cause or a result of girls' lack of educational opportunities. Girls may drop out of school because they are forced to get married, or they may be married off because they do not have a chance to go to school.[5]

Keeping girls in school is one of the best methods to delay marriage. On average, the likelihood of a girl marrying as a child is six percentage points less for every additional year she stays in secondary education.[6] The effect of girls' education is intergenerational. Research shows that girls whose mothers are educated are two times less likely to marry under age 18 than girls whose mothers are uneducated.[7]

Work to end child marriage and keep girls in school needs to be holistic, intersectional and gender-transformative. This work needs to address shared underlying drivers of CEFMU:

### **1. Inequality and Discriminatory Gender Norms**

Child marriage and the lack of educational opportunities for girls are rooted in gender inequality. This inequality denies girls and women their human rights, undervalues girls' education and leads to a preference for the education of boys; girls are primarily seen as wives and mothers, and marrying at a young age is often preferred to avoid stigma and control girls' sexuality. Ending child marriage necessarily means transforming patriarchal masculinities and dismantling stereotypical social norms that drive the abuse of girls' rights and gender-based discrimination.

### **2. Poverty**

Economic pressures – combined with gender inequality – can lead to girls dropping out of school to take on work or care responsibilities at greater rates than boys. In the countries with the fewest available resources and most inequality, funding for accessible, affordable, quality education systems are often lacking, and families bear many of the costs – both direct (school fees at secondary level) and indirect (uniforms, books, exams and transport costs). Such costs are a barrier for many, with girls more likely to be taken out of school than their brothers when families struggle to pay.[8]

### 3. Adolescent Pregnancy

Child marriage often results in adolescent pregnancy, which is strongly linked with school dropout and exclusion.[9] Many adolescent mothers do not return to school after giving birth because their school excludes them.[10] Married girls' return to school is also hindered by the fact that they lack childcare options, their families do not let them, or they do not feel able to face the stigma and judgement of their classmates and teachers.

### 4. School-Related Gender-Based Violence

The risk of violence in and on the way to school can make families less willing to let girls go to school.[11] A significant proportion of gender non-conforming students experience school violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity.[12] Lack of single-sex sanitation facilities can also increase the risk of school-related gender-based violence, leading to disrupted studies and early school leaving.[13] 10% of girls and adolescents in West, Central, East and Southern Africa miss school during menstruation due to a lack of facilities and materials such as sanitary pads.[14]

### 5. Conflict and Humanitarian Crises

Child marriage is exacerbated in conflict and humanitarian crises. Every tenfold increase in conflict deaths is associated with a 7 per cent rise in the prevalence of child marriage,[15] and each year of conflict sets back the efforts to eliminate child marriage by four years.[16] Schools are often the target of direct attacks, and girls are at particular risk of sexual violence, trafficking and violence aimed at stopping their education. Girls are less likely than boys to return to school during and after conflict because families fear sexual violence and general insecurity.[17] Despite the increased risk of child marriage, very little humanitarian funding focuses on the issue. Only 0.12% of all humanitarian funding went to address gender-based violence between 2016-2018.[18]

### 6. Disease Outbreak

Ensuring girls have continued and safe access to education in health crises situations is vital. The recent Ebola and COVID-19 outbreaks have highlighted the disproportionate impacts of disease outbreaks on girls and women. Lockdowns, curfews and school closures are linked to increases in violence against women and girls, adolescent pregnancy and forced marriage, child neglect and sexual violence, and disrupted access to education and family planning.[19] Education systems have limited resilience and have neither the resources nor the capacity to quickly put in place an alternative system in times of crises.[20]

We call on the HRC and its members and observer states to:

- Take the learnings from the interactive dialogue on the UN Special Rapporteur's report on the right to education, advances and challenges and integrate them into the upcoming biannual HRC Resolution on forced marriage and the Sustainable Development Goals Summit outcome declaration;
- Guarantee access to 12 years of quality gender-transformative education;
- Ensure domestic financing for education receives at least 4-6% of GDP and/or constitutes at least 15-20% of public expenditure and that financing is spent equitably, effectively and efficiently to ensure gender equality in education and incorporating strategies to address child marriage;
- Ensure donor governments dedicate increased resources to education – particularly girls' education – working towards the goal of 0.7% of GDP on overseas aid, with 20% of this spent on education;

- Ensure girls at risk of child marriage and married girls have continued and safe access to quality education in humanitarian and crisis situations and that education sector plans and budgets anticipate risks and respond to the needs of girls in crisis situations;
- Ensure that schools are free from violence and support a gender-transformative curriculum, which includes age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education;
- Support community sensitisation to ensure that parents, leaders and other community members are aware of the importance of girls' education and of delaying marriage.

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AAWAAJ, Nepal; Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), Kenya; Bal Kalyan Samaj Makwanpur, Nepal; Brain Builder Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI), Nigeria; Center for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CREHPA), Nepal; Centro de Estudios y Fortalecimiento Comunitario Mano Vuelta A.C, Mexico; Coordinadora Institucional de Promoción por los Derechos de la Niñez (CIPRODENI), Guatemala; Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia (CDIA), Paraguay; Creative Institute Nepal (CIN), Nepal; Fundación Desarrollo Integral Manos Anaranjadas, Dominican Republic; Girl Up México, Mexico; Janaki Women Awareness Society (JWAS), Nepal; Juntas Por Ti y Tus Derechos (JUPTIDE), Dominican Republic; Movement for the Development of Women (MOWODE), Dominican Republic; Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas (MUDHA), Dominican Republic; Partenaires Contre la Pauvreté (PACOPA), Democratic Republic of Congo; Red Peruana de Mujeres con VIH, Peru; SENDAS, Ecuador; YUWALAYA, Nepal, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

[1]UNICEF, 2023, "Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 update".

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Girls Not Brides, 2022, "Child Marriage and Girls' education in West & Central Africa", p.8.

[6]The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women, 2017, "Economic impacts of child marriage: Global synthesis brief", p.7.

[7]Erulkar A., 2013, "Early marriage, marital relations and intimate partner violence in Ethiopia", *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 39(1):6–13.

[8]Girls Not Brides, 2022, "Child marriage and education".

[9]UNESCO, 2022, "Global education monitoring report. Gender report: Deepening the debate on those still left behind".

[10]UNESCO, 2022, "Protect her rights, strengthen your laws. Her Atlas: Status report on girls' and women's right to education", p.19; Human Rights Watch, 2021, "Africa: Rights progress for pregnant students".

[11]UNESCO, 2020, "A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education", *Global Education Monitoring Report, Gender Report*, p.53; Plan International, 2014, "Hear Our Voices".

[12]UNESCO, 2020, "A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education", *Global Education Monitoring Report, Gender Report*.

[13]See, Girls Not Brides, Gender-based violence and child marriage (webpage).

[14]Girls Not Brides, 2022, "Child marriage and education", p.5.

[15]UNICEF, 2023, "Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 update", p.19.

[16]Ibid, p.20.

[17]Girls Not Brides, 2020, "Child marriage in humanitarian contexts".

[18]Ibid.

[19]Girls Not Brides, 2022, "Child marriage and education", p.6.

[20]West and Central Africa Commitment for educated, healthy and thriving adolescents and young people, 2021, *Situation analysis*, p.27.