



**GIRLS NOT BRIDES**

The Global Partnership  
to End Child Marriage



# CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD MARRIAGE

**Working paper**

May 2021

## CONTENTS

Executive summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
A child protection approach to child marriage.....	4
Child protection contributions to ending child marriage.....	5
Child protection and the <i>Girls Not Brides</i> Theory of Change.....	8
How the child protection sector prevents and responds to child marriage.....	10
Community-based protection, mobilisation, social and behaviour change.....	12
Child protection systems.....	15
Legislative reform, policy and budget advocacy.....	20
Child protection in humanitarian contexts.....	24
Advocacy recommendations.....	26
Glossary of key terms.....	29
Notes and references.....	30

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This working paper was written by Joachim Theis and Gillian Mann of Child Frontiers and supervised by Rachel Yates and Zoe Birchall from *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*.

The members of the reference group provided valuable comments and additional materials:

Maya Abousamra	Himaya
Bill Bell	Save
Denise Stuckenbruck	Options Consultancy
Elsa Maarawi	<i>Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage</i>
Emma Puig de la Bellacasa	HIAS, LAC
Ghasiram Panda	Action Aid India
Marta Gil Gonzalez	Terre des Hommes, Access to Justice (A2J) Programme – MENA Region Coordinator
Mohammed Bun Vida	Muslim Family Counselling Services, Ghana
Mona Aika	UNICEF
Raša Sekulović	Plan International Asia Pacific
Rashmila Shakya	CWIN, Nepal
Roselyn Were	Global Child Protection Network

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child protection is grounded in children's rights and protects girls and boys of all ages from abuse, violence and exploitation. Child protection actors work to equip girls and boys with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from violence and have the power to express their opinions and be involved in decisions that affect them, those around education, work and marriage for example.

Child protection efforts include multi-sectoral prevention and response services at community and district levels that are designed to address a broad range of child protection issues, including child marriage.<sup>a</sup> At the community level, the aim of this work is to strengthen the family and community environment that protects and enables adolescent girls and boys to thrive and broaden their aspirations. Child protection actors support community-based and community-owned approaches that include child protection committees, the promotion of social and behaviour change, and community mobilisation.

These efforts are part of a broader system that aims to provide a continuum of services and supports that protect children at risk of abuse, violence and exploitation – including girls who are married, pregnant and mothers – through prevention, early intervention and specialised response services. Depending on need, services may cover safety and protection, health and psychosocial care, education, economic support, birth registration and justice. They may include complaints and reporting mechanisms like child helplines, referral and case management systems, and care and protection services like safe houses and other care facilities and arrangements. Effective provision requires strong linkages between *core* child protection actors and *allied* services. Accordingly, child protection systems include coordination mechanisms between different service providers and between community, district, province and national levels.

The ultimate aim of any child protection system is to reach national coverage and scale and to ensure that every child receives the care and support they need and is entitled to in order to ensure their safety and protection. Key investments include: a coherent regulatory framework of policies, procedures and guidelines; adequate financing of child protection services; a well-trained and supported child protection workforce; child protection information systems; and committed and dedicated community approaches to protect children.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) working on issues related to child marriage are well-placed to contribute to and strengthen various aspects of the child protection system, including targeted interventions to identify and reach the most marginalised girls, promoting gender and social norms change, and mobilising key community gatekeepers and decision-makers to end child marriage and other forms of violence against children.

In many countries, CSOs have formal or informal roles in child protection structures like statutory child protection committees or boards; they link child protection interventions at community and district levels; provide child protection services such as running shelters and safe houses, and operating child helplines. CSOs also make important contributions to building the capacities of the child protection workforce by providing technical support to government departments. Moreover, they play a key role in legislative and budget advocacy

---

<sup>a</sup> *Girls Not Brides* is committed to ending all formal and informal child, early and forced marriages and unions. In this working paper we use the term “child marriage” to refer to all these forms.

and in holding governments to account for delivering on commitments to invest in child protection systems and ending child marriage.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this child protection working paper is to increase understanding of how child protection services and interventions can accelerate action to prevent and respond to child marriage. The working paper draws on best practice from civil society and presents advocacy and programmatic recommendations. The paper identifies the roles that CSOs can play to strengthen the protection of children and contribute to accelerated holistic efforts to end child marriage. The primary audiences for this working paper are CSOs, including *Girls Not Brides* member organisations.

*Girls Not Brides*' evidence-based [Theory of change](#) sets out the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to ending child marriage and other forms of violence against children. This child protection working paper complements other *Girls Not Brides* factsheets and briefs that highlight the role of other sectors in child marriage prevention, mitigation and response efforts, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), education and economic strengthening.<sup>b</sup>

This working paper focuses on select areas of work of child protection actors – community-based protection, social and behaviour change, birth registration and others – and their core contribution to efforts to end child marriage.

## A CHILD PROTECTION APPROACH TO CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage happens in all parts of the world and is not associated with any particular culture or religion. It is rooted in harmful gender norms and discrimination against girls and women. It is not a single phenomenon and covers a wide range of relationship types, each with its own causes and drivers, risks and preventive factors that often vary depending on setting and circumstance. Evidence shows that effective approaches must be tailored to the specific contexts in which girls, boys and families live.

Depending on the specific manifestations of child marriage, it may be seen as a manifestation of violence against children, sexual and gender-based violence, child trafficking or sexual slavery and other exploitative practices. Although voluntary unions between consenting adolescents are common in some areas,<sup>c</sup> when marriages are forced, take place without the consent of the child, and are the result of physical or emotional pressure, they are regarded as a form of violence against children that disproportionately exposes girls to physical, sexual and emotional violence that must be prevented or responded to. In some jurisdictions, marriages of this kind are recognised as a form of violence that requires safeguarding and the intervention of child protection authorities.<sup>1</sup> Children's rights and child protection approaches overlap with work on gender equality and the promotion of the rights of girls and women. The two perspectives complement each other in mutually reinforcing ways and should be combined to accelerate progress to end child marriage.

---

<sup>b</sup> See *Girls Not Brides* [Resource Centre](#) for more information.

<sup>c</sup> "Voluntary early unions" are commonly attributed to a lack of opportunities for young people or a negative coping strategy in response to economic hardships. In light of these explanations, in many cases, they may reflect a lack of options rather than a true choice.



A **child protection system** consists of a collection of interlinking components at community, district and national levels that are organised around the common goal of preventing, mitigating and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children. A child protection system operates within the framework of the law<sup>d</sup> and a coherent regulatory framework of policies, procedures and guidelines. Typically, one ministry or department – like a ministry of social welfare or its equivalent – interacts with all other sectors – like justice, education, health and security – to lead and coordinate effective child protection responses. Child protection systems should be rights-based, child-friendly and gender-responsive, in children’s best interests and guided by the principle of *do no harm*.

## CHILD PROTECTION CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

This section identifies four contributions and perspectives that child protection actors bring to the movement to end child marriage.

### **Contribution 1: Child protection promotes the rights of girls and boys of all ages**

Child protection is grounded in children’s rights and works for the protection of all girls and boys from birth to adulthood. The best interests of the child are a primary concern and require that child protection approaches are age-appropriate, recognise children’s evolving capacities and are tailored to the specific child marriage risks experienced by girls and boys of different ages.

Protection risks increase in forced marriages, for girls married to older men, younger adolescent girls, pregnant adolescent girls, adolescent mothers,<sup>e</sup> and for adolescents who are divorced or separated. Boys are also subject to forced marriage – although in lower numbers – and their needs and interests should also be addressed in child protection interventions.<sup>2</sup> Child protection supports children’s rights to information, expression and involvement in the decisions that affect them, so they can better protect themselves.

### **Contribution 2: Child protection includes prevention and response services**

Child protection goes beyond stand-alone sector-specific and issue-based approaches to child wellbeing. Child protection systems, services and approaches at community and district levels are designed to prevent and respond to all forms of abuse, violence and exploitation of children, including child marriage. Child protective response services go beyond prevention to ensure that the most vulnerable children are protected. This includes the provision of comprehensive services for girls who are married, pregnant and mothers, including safety and protection, health and psychosocial care, education, economic support, and justice.

---

<sup>d</sup> Many countries with high prevalence of child marriage have plural legal systems, combining civil, customary and religious laws. Customary and religious systems of justice administration significantly affect the ways legal frameworks are implemented, and in many cases constitute one of the key driving factors for the perpetuation of child and forced marriage.

<sup>e</sup> Many adolescent pregnancies are involuntary and a result of sexual violence.

### **Contribution 3: Child protection systems coordinate services and providers at different levels**

Coordination is essential to ensure that all parts of the child protection system work together to achieve the desired outcomes. Coordination between different sectors and services ensures that children are protected. Relevant sectors and services include child and family welfare, education, health, economic security and social protection, civil registration, children's access to justice, and law enforcement.

A child protection system links community-based child protection approaches, district-level services, and national-level decision-making regarding legislation, policies and budget allocations. Case management and referrals ensure effective connections between all elements of the continuum of care to ensure positive outcomes for each child. Child protection recognises the importance of coordinating with allied services but focuses on core child protection services and mechanisms to ensure positive outcomes for children.

### **Contribution 4: Child protection system investments aim for scale and long-term sustainability**

Work to strengthen child protection systems – rather than issue-based approaches – establishes structures and mechanisms at central, provincial, district and community levels to prevent and respond to all forms of violence and exploitation of children. These investments are designed to be more sustainable through the adequate financing of child protection services; a well-trained and supported child protection or social service workforce; child protection information systems; and committed and dedicated community approaches to protect children. The aim of any child protection system is to reach national coverage and scale and ensure that every child receives the care and support they need and is entitled to in order to ensure safety and protection.

Child protection is critical to realising the wellbeing and rights of girls and boys. It is an essential operational and conceptual perspective that must be included in comprehensive approaches to prevent and respond to child marriage.

### **Allied systems and services**

To be effective, *core* child protection systems rely on *allied* systems and services such as safe and non-violent schools that guarantee free education for all children, including married and pregnant girls and adolescent mothers; access and referral to SRHR and mental health services; social protection and livelihood support to lower the risk of child marriage; civil registration of births and marriages to verify a child's age and prevent early marriage; and access to child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice for children.

### **Child protection and gender<sup>3</sup>**

**Gender transformative approaches<sup>4</sup>** actively examine, question and change harmful gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women and gender non-conforming people. These approaches address the root causes of gender inequality and unequal power relations; they move beyond individual self-improvement among girls and women towards redressing the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities. A gender-transformative approach therefore promotes gender equality by:

- Fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms and dynamics.
- Recognising and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment.
- Promoting the relative position of girls, women and marginalised groups and transforming the underlying social structures, policies and broadly-held social norms that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequalities.

The initial work done by child protection and children's rights agencies were narrow in that they were primarily focused on the prevention of child marriage, and not on the broader context in which these relationships unfold.

In so doing, they neglected to address the different ways violence affects girls and boys, the power imbalances between girls and boys and women and men, and the underlying discriminatory gender norms and practices that shape the everyday lives of children and their families and communities.

In recent years, the focus of these agencies has broadened to include gender transformation and adolescent girls' empowerment. This shift has come about as a result of evolving evidence<sup>5</sup> and through programmatic collaboration with agencies working for adolescent sexual and reproductive health, girls' empowerment and women's rights.

While there has been some real progress towards gender-transformative and girls' adolescent empowerment approaches in child marriage work supported by child protection agencies,<sup>6</sup> promoting gender equality has not yet been mainstreamed across all dimensions of the child protection sector and systems.

**Working with boys and men** is a critical part of taking a gendered approach to child protection, recognising the relational aspect of child marriage and the need to work with fathers, grooms, brothers, and male leaders and opinion formers, and to address harmful masculinities and what it means to be a man in a specific setting. These interventions can reduce the demand for younger brides and lead to less abusive marriages.<sup>7</sup>



PICTURED: Girls take part in a workshop about child marriage delivered by Solidarity of Refugee Women Social Welfare (SOFRES) in Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Thom Pierce

## CHILD PROTECTION AND THE GIRLS NOT BRIDES THEORY OF CHANGE

The table on page 8 presents the key contributions of the child protection system, agencies and actors to ending child marriage. The first column shows the *Girls Not Brides* strategies as identified in the [Theory of change](#), the second column presents a list of relevant programmes, services and interventions that are supported by various child protection actors, like governments, CSOs and international agencies.

At the heart of the work of child protection actors are adolescent girl empowerment; community-based approaches with an emphasis on the prevention of violence and early intervention; “formal” child protection system strengthening with an emphasis on prevention and response services; legislative, policy and budget advocacy, mobilisation and coalition building; and gathering and analysing data on violence against children and on effective protection interventions.

The rest of this working paper explains in greater detail how child protection is contributing to each of the four strategies outlined.



## Contributions of a child protection system and how they relate to other sectors, agencies and actors to prevent and respond to child marriage<sup>8</sup>

<i>Girls Not Brides</i> strategy	Programmes, services and interventions
<p><b>Empower girls</b></p> <p>A wide range of programmes invest in girls, their participation and their wellbeing</p>	<p><b>Adolescent empowerment and children’s participation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and knowledge to empower children and adolescents</li> <li>• Children’s participation in child protection systems</li> <li>• Involvement of children and adolescents in research and programming</li> <li>• Activism and advocacy by children and young people</li> <li>• Safeguarding of children and adolescents who exercise their agency</li> <li>• Participatory research with children and adolescents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mobilise families and communities</b></p> <p>Families, communities and young people are engaged to change attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage</p>	<p><b>Community-based child protection approaches:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based child protection mechanisms (i.e., local committees)</li> <li>• Social and behaviour change promotion</li> <li>• Community mobilisation</li> </ul> <p><b>Data and evidence:</b> Evidence about what works to end child marriage</p>
<p><b>Provide services</b></p> <p>Services across sectors reinforce one another and are tailored to the specific needs of girls at risk of child marriage and married girls</p>	<p><b>Formal child protection systems:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints and reporting mechanisms</li> <li>• Child protection services (i.e., shelters)</li> <li>• Coordination between service providers and between community, district, province and national levels</li> <li>• Child protection information systems</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Allied systems:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Education:</b> access to quality education, including sex education and safe learning environments</li> <li>• <b>Health:</b> access to SRHR and to mental health services</li> <li>• <b>Economic security:</b> social protection, income support and youth employment</li> <li>• <b>Civil registration</b> of births, marriages and deaths</li> <li>• <b>Law enforcement and justice for children</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Establish and implement laws and policies</b></p> <p>A robust legal and policy framework for preventing child marriage/unions and supporting married girls is in place and effectively enforced</p>	<p><b>Legislative, policy and budget advocacy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislative reform</li> <li>• Evidence-based policy advocacy</li> <li>• Budget analysis and advocacy</li> </ul> <p><b>Data and evidence:</b> Statistical data about child protection issues</p>

## HOW THE CHILD PROTECTION SECTOR PREVENTS AND RESPONDS TO CHILD MARRIAGE

This section provides more detail on some of the core work of child protection actors to prevent and respond to child marriage.

### Adolescent empowerment and children's participation

Support for the empowerment of adolescent girls and boys lies at the heart of an ecological approach – that is, one that is focused on the interdependent relationship between individuals and the systems in which they act – to preventing and responding to child marriage. Child protection organisations support a wide range of activities related to adolescent empowerment and children's participation in their efforts to prevent and respond to violence and exploitation of children, including child marriage.<sup>9</sup> Civil society organisations are key for the implementation of interventions with adolescent girls and boys at community level.

**Ensuring children and adolescents** have skills and knowledge builds their confidence and power to express their views, protect themselves and seek support and access services. Life skills education – including comprehensive sexuality education both in and out of school – can increase adolescent girls' agency and promote their self-efficacy, decision making, bodily autonomy and SRHR. Approaches supporting adolescent girls' agency raise awareness and understanding of how child marriage can block girls' voice, choice and control over the key decisions affecting them, and deny them opportunities for education and economic empowerment. Providing support for girls' clubs and safe spaces can ensure they are able to challenge gender inequalities and harmful social and gender norms.

### CASE STUDY

#### Abriendo Oportunidades: Girls as agents of change in Guatemala<sup>10</sup>

The Population Council – in collaboration with local and international partners – launched Abriendo Oportunidades (Opening Opportunities) in Guatemala in 2004. The programme increases Mayan girls' social support networks, connects them with role models and mentors, builds a base of critical life and leadership skills, and provides hands-on professional training and experience. Abriendo Oportunidades makes critical investments in girls aged 8–17 so they can successfully navigate adolescent transitions. It engages community leaders and trains girls to run girls' clubs, safe spaces where they learn practical skills and assume leadership roles.

From a few rural communities in Guatemala, the programme has expanded nationwide to over 10 departments. The Population Council trains professionals from local governments and organisations in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to ensure high-quality programs for adolescent girls who have been marginalised. The programme has expanded to include tutoring and is now being adapted for girls in urban areas and for boys. The programme is also working with partners in the Central American Learning Circle to promote and adapt the Abriendo Oportunidades model for other marginalised girl populations in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, and with Batonga Foundation in Benin.

Through the DREAM Initiative, Abriendo Oportunidades has shared systematic guidance for empowerment programming for adolescent girls – including lessons learned – with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government institutions, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has requested tutoring to adapt the programme for the Dominican Republic.

**Children’s participation in child protection systems** ensures that all girls and boys can identify violence, know where to go for help and have access to child-friendly and gender-responsive complaints and reporting mechanisms and helplines. Child protection systems should have provisions for children’s views to be heard in administrative or judicial proceedings that affect them. This includes child-friendly and gender-sensitive police stations and courts.

**Involving children and adolescents in research, programme design and implementation** ensures that interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage are informed by their views. Data collection, monitoring and evaluation should include children’s perspectives and be disaggregated by gender, age, disability, ethnicity and other factors.

## CASE STUDY

### **BALIKA – empowering adolescent girls to delay marriage<sup>11</sup>**

The Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents (BALIKA) is a randomised controlled trial involving more than 9,000 girls aged 12–18 in 72 communities – located in primary schools – within three districts of Bangladesh. It was set up to determine what works to delay child marriage. Communities were assigned to participate in one of three intervention strategies in the 18-month trial. They are:

- **Education:** Girls were offered tutoring in mathematics and English (in-school girls), and computing or financial training (out-of-school girls).
- **Gender-rights awareness training:** Girls were offered life skills training on gender rights and negotiation, critical thinking and decision making.
- **Livelihoods skills training:** Girls were offered training in computers, entrepreneurship, mobile phone servicing, photography and basic first aid.

Results show that programmes that educate girls, build their skills for livelihoods and engage their communities can reduce the likelihood of child marriage by a third, and produce better health, educational and social outcomes for girls. Girls living in BALIKA communities were nearly a third less likely to be married as children than girls living in communities not reached by the BALIKA project. In addition to delaying child marriage, the study found that girls participating in the project were:

- 18% more likely to attend school.
- 20% more likely to have improved mathematical skills if they were offered education support and gender rights awareness training.
- 1/3 more likely to be earning an income if they were offered gender rights awareness or livelihoods skills training.

**Supporting children's and youth activism and advocacy** ensures that children's opinions and perspectives are reflected in the development of the laws and policies that affect them.<sup>12</sup> This means that girls and boys are informed about their legal rights and what they can do to demand them. CSOs play a critical role in supporting children's advocacy and in strengthening youth groups and alliances.

**Safeguarding children and adolescents who exercise their agency** and participate in adult spaces ensures that children are protected when they speak out. Interventions to promote girls' empowerment should therefore be accompanied by work to transform social and gender norms and strengthen an enabling environment that supports and protects adolescent girls who exercise their agency. Working with adolescent girls and boys requires specialised facilitation skills and adherence to ethical standards to ensure that interventions reach the most marginalised children - rather than the most educated and articulate girls and boys - and protect children and adolescents from harm.

## COVID-19

### **Adaptations of life skills interventions<sup>13</sup>**

COVID-19 has forced countries to adapt life skills interventions for girls, as they are usually delivered in adolescent clubs in either school or community settings. In Ethiopia, Niger and Zambia, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage adapted the clubs' approach to adhere to physical distancing guidelines by reducing the size of the groups and increasing the number of mentors. In Zambia the meeting time was also reduced to one hour.

In Nepal, the programme is disseminating the national life skills package in several local languages through radio broadcasts. To compensate for the lack of face-to-face meetings, girl peer leaders call the girl group members by phone to follow up the broadcasts with questions and answers. To support the peer leaders, the programme also topped up their phone credit.

In Uganda, the programme disseminates messages in different local languages through more than 36 radio stations and supports radio talk shows and TV programmes to involve adolescent girls and boys.

In Yemen, the programme engages teachers to conduct life skills sessions as part of remote learning programmes through TV and radio. Teachers were trained to deliver life skills sessions in 2019, and the curriculum has now been adapted to the TV and radio formats. With this approach, broadcasts are expected to reach larger audiences, including family members.

## **COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION, MOBILISATION, AND SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE**

Communities and families are critical for the creation of an enabling and protective environment in which adolescent girls and boys can thrive. Community-level actors also provide essential links between adolescents and more specialised services at the district level through referral and case management mechanisms.



Community-based child protection approaches are part of the child protection system. They aim to prevent and respond to abuse, violence and exploitation of children through child protection mechanisms, community dialogue and mobilisation, and social and behaviour change communication.

These approaches aim to create an enabling and protective environment to ensure girls are empowered. They also link to district-level child protection services through referral mechanisms. These approaches should encourage authentic community leadership and sensitive facilitation, rather than impose an external agenda.<sup>14</sup> This means spending time to understand the nature and strengths of existing community practices. This community-level work is critical for the protection of children because district-level child protection workers are often too far removed to be first responders.

**Community-based child protection mechanisms** include child protection committees that monitor and prevent child abuse; identify and provide support for vulnerable children and their families; mediate cases of conflict related to violence against children; identify and provide community-based care; and refer cases that require additional care and support to district-level child protection service providers, and other interventions. CSOs play an important role in supporting and strengthening community-based child protection committees and in working with community and religious leaders to ensure customary and religious laws, justice and mediation conform to international standards and do not violate children's rights.

## CASE STUDY

### CARE Tipping Point in Nepal and Bangladesh<sup>15</sup>

CARE's Tipping Point project addresses the root causes of child marriage by working with girls, boys, parents, community and religious leaders in marginalised communities in Bangladesh and Nepal. The Tipping Point approach is based on an in-depth understanding of the gendered social norms driving child marriage in each context, and develops targeted, context-specific activities to identify social and structural factors that must be dismantled to address the root causes of child marriage.

Tipping Point developed a series of [social norms innovation briefs](#) to share examples of how to operationalise social norms theory in programming activities, to make it easier for other practitioners to adapt and use the ideas. Activities that had the greatest impact were football competitions for girls, cooking competitions for boys and men, and street dramas and intergenerational dialogues with community members.

### Findings

- The project succeeded in loosening some of the norms that restrict girls' opportunities and autonomy. Members of Tipping Point groups gained greater freedom to move around their village, ride bicycles, play sports outdoors, work with boys to organise community events and express their opinions.

- The project also achieved some positive changes in adolescent boys' attitudes and behaviours, including behaviour that challenged traditional norms of masculinity and a growing understanding of reciprocity within marital relationships. The boys began taking on more household work to allow their sisters time to study and relax, and advocated for their sisters in discussions with parents.
- In Nepal, parents began to support delaying marriage to reduce the costs of weddings and dowry when girls are educated or earning an income.
- Parents and communities increasingly valued girls' education.
- In Bangladesh, the evaluation found little evidence of change in the core social expectations related to marriage. Beyond age, dowry as part of traditional marriage practices did not shift and romantic relationships between unmarried couples remained highly stigmatised.

### Lessons

- Addressing social norms may not need an entirely new programming approach; in some cases, it might just mean adapting existing activities.
- Gendered social norms are a critical driver of child marriage, but they are only one part of the puzzle. Policy-makers and practitioners should not see changing norms as a “silver bullet” solution, but as a strategy that complements other actions to effect change.
- The gendered social norms that drive child marriage vary according to context, so it is essential to take the time to understand which norms are motivating child marriage in order to develop targeted activities.

**Mobilising communities and promoting changes in social and gender norms** that support harmful attitudes and behaviours towards children is essential to end child marriage. CSOs have a comparative advantage in promoting gender and social norms change and in facilitating community dialogue to promote gender equality and children's rights by mobilising key community gatekeepers and decision-makers and challenging the underlying power dynamics that harm girls and women; working with religious and community leaders as change makers; actively involving boys and men in the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriage; and raising public awareness – including that of children and families – of protective services. Community groups, religious and community leaders, community-based organisations and CSOs play a critical role in the prevention and response to all forms of violence – including GBV – and exploitation of children.

## COVID-19

### Community-based care during COVID-19

In Kenya, a presidential directive responding to the pandemic called for the closure of children's institutions, including safe houses for girls facing female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage in 2020. An estimated 1,587 girls in 13 rescue centres who had avoided FGM/C were sent back to their communities, increasing their risk of undergoing the practice. In response, community-based protection structures and family-based care were used as an alternative to safe houses.<sup>16</sup>

## CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Interventions at the child, family and community level are often not sufficient to protect girls and boys from violence and exploitation. A comprehensive child protection system also requires interventions delivered by state and civil society actors to provide essential services to prevent and respond to violence against children, including child marriage.

### Components of child protection systems

When properly coordinated, components of a rights-based national child protection system strengthen the protective environment around each child and their family. Child protection structures may include child helplines, mandatory reporting mechanisms, and boards which review each child protection case and decide on the most appropriate steps to take to ensure the safety and protection of the child, taking into consideration the child's best interests.<sup>17</sup>

Child protection systems must be child-sensitive and gender-responsive to enable girls to report abuse and access care and support. This means removing barriers that prevent children from seeking help, reporting abuse and accessing services, and establishing a gender-sensitive workforce that creates safe spaces for girls.

### FACT BOX

**Case management** is a core child protection and social work approach that provides a systematic and individually tailored approach to providing child protective services. It is a way of organising and carrying out work to address an individual child's needs in an appropriate, systematic and timely manner, through direct support and/or referrals, and in accordance with a project or programme's objectives.<sup>18</sup> By definition, case management supports individual children who need more intensive care and support services. It reaches relatively few adolescent girls compared with life skills education and other preventive interventions.<sup>19</sup>

### Strengthening child protection systems

While most countries have some elements of child protection systems, in many low- and middle-income countries these systems are often under-developed, under-resourced and fragmented. Child protection legislation is often outdated and not implemented; little data and research exists on abuse, violence and exploitation of children; interventions are not based on evidence; insufficient public resources are allocated for the child protection system; and the social service workforce is small and has limited skills and resources to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised children and their families.

Over the past decade, international child protection organisations have stepped up efforts to strengthen child protection systems in low- and middle-income countries. Functioning child protection systems require investments at all levels, from national policies and budgets to

district services and community-level child protection mechanisms. These investments are also critical for preventing and responding to child marriage. Efforts to build a professional and sustainable child protection system have concentrated on strengthening the social service workforce, case management systems, reporting mechanisms and child helplines, child protection information management systems, continuum of care services, and community-based child protection approaches.

Strengthening child protection systems is a long-term process that develops capacities, coordination processes, inter-departmental partnerships and links between district and community levels. Child protection systems must be adapted to each context and consider differences in laws, beliefs, governance structures and capacities.

## FACT BOX

### **Strengthening of the social service workforce.<sup>20</sup>**

A child protection system needs an adequate, skilled and stable social service workforce. The child protection/social service workforce includes all categories of people who work on behalf of vulnerable children and families. This includes a range of providers and actors, including paid and unpaid individuals, non-formal community volunteers and formal employed professional and paraprofessionals.

The workforce must be well-managed and deployed to respect children's rights to protection, with a focus on family-based care. All professionals working with or for children – such as police, teachers, government staff, caregivers, judicial officers, health professionals and social workers – should be trained to identify violence, provide referrals, and ensure care and confidentiality.

Training and support for informal actors such as community groups is also important to enhance the care and protection of children.

CSOs play a critical role in the implementation and strengthening of child protection systems that prevent and respond to child marriage at community, district, provincial and national levels. In many countries, CSOs have a role – both formal and informal – in child protection structures like statutory child protection committees or boards; they link child protection interventions at community and district level; and provide child protection services like shelters, safe houses and child helplines.

CSOs make important contributions to building the capacities of the child protection workforce by providing technical support to government departments. CSOs are also central for advocacy and holding governments to account.



## FACT BOX

### **Childline India – Using the child protection system to prevent child marriage<sup>21</sup>**

Aadita<sup>f</sup> – a 16-year-old girl from Mandya district in Karnataka, south western India – called the Childline team. She told the counsellor her family was making her marry against her wishes. The Childline team visited her home with staff from the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) and the police. They spoke with her family about the negative effects of child marriage, and about the law which sets the minimum age of marriage – for girls and boys – at 18 years. Aadita's parents agreed to postpone the marriage.

The Childline team then presented the family to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), where Aadita's parents signed a statement saying they would not make her marry before she turned 18. Aadita did not want to stay with her parents, so she was offered shelter at a government home for girls.

Timely intervention by the Childline team – supported by the police, DPCU and CWC – stopped Aadita being married as a child.

<sup>f</sup> Name changed to protect her identity.

## Safeguarding children

Where the system fails to work in the best interests of the child and is not gender-sensitive, it may cause further harm – in alternative dispute resolution systems where families negotiate to be compensated for their child having been raped, for example. In such contexts, the rights of girls and women are often overlooked in favour of male-dominated community-level conflict resolution.<sup>22</sup>

Like all adults working with children, child protection actors have an obligation to safeguard boys and girls in their care and to ensure that interventions and services do not harm them and are in their best interests. This requires mechanisms that protect children – in care homes, safe houses or shelters for girls at risk of child marriage – from further violence from the very people and institutions who should be keeping them safe.<sup>23</sup>

## FACT BOX

### **Key principles of working with and for children's protection**

**Best interests of the child:** The right of the child to have their best interests assessed and taken as a primary consideration in reaching a decision. This refers to the wellbeing of a child and is determined by a variety of individual circumstances, including age, level of maturity, the presence or absence of parents, and the child's environment and experiences.<sup>24</sup>

**Child safeguarding:** The responsibility of organisations to ensure their staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children. This includes policy, procedures and practices to prevent children from being harmed, and steps to respond and investigate when harm occurs.<sup>25</sup> Every organisation that works with or for children should have child safeguarding at the heart of everything they do, every day.

They need to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children and that any concerns about children's safety are reported to the appropriate authorities.

Preventing violence against children in organisations takes more than policies and procedures, it requires leadership, accountability and culture change. It means listening to children and – when this is not already the case – transforming the organisation's mission to put children's rights, dignity and safety at the heart of every decision.<sup>26</sup> Safeguarding should be a priority when working directly with children, including interviewing young and marginalised people and using images of them for communications and advocacy purposes.<sup>27</sup>

**Do no harm:** The concept of child protection agencies avoiding unintended negative consequences for children.

## COVID-19

### Gender-based violence and the protection of children

The COVID-19 pandemic has massively increased the risk of GBV and child marriage, and child protection systems need to be maintained and expanded to those at risk. Priority actions are:

- Consider how case management systems can be adapted to identify and respond to girls at risk. Where GBV and child protection structures are disrupted, governments and service providers must identify new referral pathways for girls and women at risk of violence.
- Prioritise child protection and GBV services for the most marginalised adolescent girls, including internally displaced people and those living in refugee camps.
- Where physical distancing policies are in place, adapt life skills and girl empowerment programmes through distance learning, using radio or online platforms.
- Where online platforms are used, put in place safeguarding measures against online harassment, bullying and other types of cyber violence.
- Increase provision of virtual and telephone-based hotlines providing psychosocial support for girls and women affected by the outbreak who have also experienced GBV. Use mobile applications to communicate relevant messages to help girls and women report GBV and child marriage, and to identify girls and women at risk.

**Core child protection services during the pandemic include** child helplines, case management and referral, a well-trained child protection workforce – which should be recognised as essential during emergencies – and safe houses and other care facilities.

### COVID-19 adaptations in Kenya:<sup>28</sup>

- Technical and financial support to the Child Helpline, which now allows counsellors to access calls remotely.
- Dissemination of key prevention and response messages.
- Advocacy with state duty bearers to enforce relevant laws and policies and deliver essential services.
- Continuation of case management services.
- Advocacy to include child protection as an essential service in the COVID-19 response.
- Efforts to strengthen the child protection volunteer workforce at the local level.

## Allied systems and services

Diverse sectors play critical roles in preventing child marriage. They must work together to provide a comprehensive response and a continuum of care for vulnerable girls and adolescents. For example, gender-responsive social protection brings together cash or in-kind transfers and gender-transformative interventions to address the economic drivers and harmful gender norms that underpin child marriage. The following case study is an example of the importance of “allied services” and a multi-sectoral approach to child protection.

### CASE STUDY

#### Conditional cash transfers to prevent child marriage<sup>29</sup>

The Bangladesh Development Society and Save the Children implemented Kishoree Kontha – “Adolescent Girl’s Voice” – is one of the largest adolescent empowerment programmes ever implemented in low-income countries.

**Activities:** Communities identified safe spaces where girls could meet five to six days a week to socialise and access educational support and social competency training. In half of the empowerment communities, the programme also included financial literacy training. The conditional incentive programme delivered cooking oil to families with unmarried girls aged 15 to 17. Community volunteers distributed ration cards to these girls at the start of the programme.

Every four months between April 2008 and August 2010, girls who remained unmarried could collect cooking oil by presenting their ration card to community volunteers at a distribution point in the community, who would then confirm the girls’ marital status with other community members. The value of the oil was approximately US\$16 per year, an amount chosen to offset the estimated increase in dowry for every additional year a girl remains unmarried.

**Results and policy lessons:** Four years after the programme ended, a study was conducted of all girls who were unmarried and aged 15 to 17 at the beginning of the programme. Parents were asked about daughters’ current marital status, childbearing history and school enrolment. Researchers found that:

- The conditional incentives led to a significant reduction in child marriage and adolescent childbearing, and increased educational attainment.
- The empowerment programme increased educational attainment but did not affect child marriage or adolescent childbearing.
- Taken together, these results suggest that a conditional incentive for families of adolescent girls can lead to substantial reductions in child marriage and adolescent childbearing in a setting with high rates of child marriage.
- Unlike incentives conditional on schooling which only focus on girls in schools, this incentive programme – in which marriage was the conditionality – also had positive effects for out-of-school girls.

## LEGISLATIVE REFORM, POLICY AND BUDGET ADVOCACY

Legislative reform, child protection policies and the allocation of public resources for child protection systems, services and interventions are key for the effective protection of children from abuse, violence and exploitation. This type of advocacy may be done at global, regional, national and sub-national levels, especially in countries with federal structures.

CSOs play an important role in advocating for legislative change and implementation, and in ensuring governments are held to account for upholding the law. CSOs can also advocate for government and donors to provide adequate budgetary allocations across relevant ministries for the effective implementation of these laws and policies.

### Legislative reform

From a children's and women's rights perspective, legislative reform amends laws to bring them in line with international standards based on relevant human rights treaties. Laws related to child marriage include the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys, and legal guarantees of the rights of married, divorced and separated girls and adolescent mothers. These include their right to education and SRHR, and reforms to dowry, bride price and inheritance laws.

Advocacy for legislative and policy change and implementation related to child marriage includes the identification of laws and policies that need to change to promote positive gender norms.<sup>30</sup> Legislative and policy advocacy requires CSOs to consult and engage with all stakeholders, and develop context-specific strategies for legislative reform processes that preempt backlash.<sup>31</sup> The South African Development Community (SADC) Model Law provides useful lessons and guidance on how CSOs can advocate for legislative change.

### CASE STUDY

#### **SADC Model Law approach to reforming child marriage laws<sup>32</sup>**

In June 2016, the SADC Parliamentary Forum adopted the SADC Model Law to serve as guidance to legislators and policy makers in SADC Member States to strengthen their legal frameworks to address child marriage. The SADC Model Law highlights what a comprehensive legal framework for addressing child marriage involves and reaffirms the range of rights affected by child marriage.

#### **The SADC Model Law on child marriage is designed to:**

- Encourage the adoption of progressive marriage laws and the reform of outdated laws.
- Provide specific guidance to national legislators in Southern Africa on the content and provisions of effective child marriage laws that would be binding at the national level.
- Promote regional and country level harmonisation of child marriage-related laws across and within Member States. These include laws on sexual offences, those relating to gender equity and equality, penal laws, marriage laws and divorce laws.



- Provide clear definitions of terms – such as “child” and “child marriage” – to avoid ambiguity and enhance consistency. For example, it sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and boys, without the exceptions commonly seen in existing national laws.
- Reaffirm a human rights approach – focused on the rights of women and children – to addressing child marriage in Southern Africa.
- Serve as a standard for national legislators and policy-makers and promote accountability.
- Put the issue of child marriage on the agenda and serve as a stimulus for debate and an entry point for advocacy.
- Encourage data collection and in-depth research to guide design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure they address the needs of the most marginalised and at-risk groups of girls.

#### **The SADC Model Law:**

- Reaffirms basic rights, concepts and principles related to the child.
- Includes provisions for the prohibition of child marriage and voids existing marriages in certain circumstances.
- Proposes measures to prevent child marriage.
- Provides guidance to mitigate the harmful effects of child marriage.
- Supports monitoring and evaluation, awareness raising and improved access to data.
- Establishes measures for enforcement and compliance.

### **Evidenced-based policy change**

This approach uses data and research to reform policies related to child marriage, child and family welfare, and child protection and adolescent and youth policies, including those related to SRHR. Child protection and child marriage policies articulate a country’s commitment to the wellbeing and protection of girls and boys.

### **Comprehensive national strategies**

These policies should be accompanied by more detailed and comprehensive funded national strategies to strengthen child protection systems and end child marriage.

### **Budget advocacy**

Scaling up child protection systems that prevent and respond to child marriage requires much larger allocations of public resources. CSOs can play an important role in tracking spending and advocating to governments to allocate larger budgets to finance child protection systems, including for an expanded and better-trained social service workforce.

### Key lessons on budget advocacy for civil society organisations:<sup>33</sup>

- Budget advocacy on child marriage helps lift the political profile of the issue at the national and sub-national level. CSOs have a unique role to play in holding governments to account for their budgetary commitments to address child marriage.
- Civil society must negotiate their role as both advocates and “encouraging friends” to government in their budget advocacy work.
- Strong relationships between civil society and key stakeholders – national and local government officials, parliamentarians, the media, other CSOs, community leaders and young people – are key to budget advocacy success.
- Before any advocacy can be done, public financing for children needs to be clearly articulated. Current government budget allocation towards activities that contribute to ending child marriage and to strengthening child protection systems need to be analysed. A solid budget analysis is a powerful tool that complements other advocacy strategies. Civil society must leverage technical expertise to conduct budget analyses and ensure budget advocacy is supported by strong data.
- Budget advocacy is not a one-off exercise, it is a long-term process to engage with as part of a broader advocacy plan.

### Role of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations in budget advocacy<sup>34</sup>

The aim of budget advocacy is to influence the mobilisation, allocation and utilisation of domestic public financial resources for children’s and women’s health, education and protection.<sup>35</sup> Civil society participation in public budgeting can have a significant impact on budget processes, policies and outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

*Girls Not Brides*’ approach to budget advocacy is aligned with that of the International Budget Partnership, which suggests that budget advocacy is most effective when it combines two key elements: budget analysis and strategic advocacy.

**Budget analysis** is the capacity to secure budget information, analyse it and explain its implications in clear and compelling ways.

**Strategic advocacy** is the ability to get the word out about a campaign, mobilise the public and reach out to policymakers and other stakeholders.<sup>37</sup>

## Implementing a gender-responsive budgeting approach in Enugu State, Nigeria<sup>38</sup>

The Society for the Improvement of Rural People (SIRP) worked with different government departments to institutionalise a gender-responsive budgeting approach to preparing annual budgets in the Enugu and Nsukka zones of Enugu State in Nigeria. They worked to direct budgetary allocations towards interventions that support adolescent girls and address child marriage in the 2020 Enugu State Budget. SIRP used the National Gender Policy Strategic Framework 2008-13, the National Strategy to End Child Marriage 2016-21, enforcement of the Enugu State Child Rights Law 2004, and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Bill 2019 to strengthen accountability systems and increase financing.

### SIRP's achievements:

- **Budget lines that support adolescent girls and address child marriage were included** in the 2020 Enugu State Budget, and implementation has been followed up on by CSOs. Approximately US\$6.8 million was allocated to child/social protection; primary school completion for girls; reduction of gender disparity and increase of (girls') secondary school attendance; and provision of sanitary pads to girls and young women. In 2020, three classroom blocks were upgraded, including with gender-responsive toilets.
- **The body of Permanent Secretaries officially committed to gender-responsive budgeting as a framework for the state annual budget, beginning in 2020.** They will promote gender mainstreaming by considering revenue raising and spending; analyse the budget's gender-differentiated impacts; and adjust budgetary decisions and priorities according to the different needs of girls, boys, women and men.
- **Small grants to member organisations have supported collective action and budget advocacy.** In 2020, SIRP trained 15 CSOs to monitor and track budget spending, using the Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) tool. Budget expenditure tracking during COVID-19 showed the budget line to provide menstrual hygiene products had been dropped, resulting in advocacy to reinstate it and CSO provision of these products.
- **Young people's voices and women affected by child marriage are part of budget advocacy work.** In 2020, SIRP trained 40 women leaders and individuals who have experienced child marriage and FGM/C on conducting social audit interviews, so they can verify that State funds reach their intended populations.
- **The media and civil society have greater knowledge of the key policy issues affecting a government's budgetary decisions and are able to influence this at the state level.** They are also more aware of the role they play in monitoring government expenditure and can flag up misspending via elected members of the Enugu State House of Assembly, the media and public mobilisation. This was achieved through training on gender-responsive budgeting.
- **Relationships between SIRP and the Ministries of Budget and Planning, Education and Gender Affairs are stronger and dedicated to gender-responsive budgeting from 2020.** A WhatsApp group was set up for government and non-state actors to share information on global best practices and resources on gender-responsive budgeting and child marriage.
- **A committee headed and convened by Mrs. Peace Nnaji – the Honourable Commissioner for Gender Affairs – will develop a framework to enforce the Enugu State Child Rights Law and Enugu State Violence Against Persons Prohibition Law.** These two statutes criminalise all forms of GBV.

In **Sierra Leone**, the COVID-19 crisis forced a reassessment of policies that excluded pregnant girls from attending school. The Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education issued a new policy on “radical inclusion” and “comprehensive safety,” allowing pregnant girls and adolescent mothers to attend school, take exams, and learn safely once schools reopened.<sup>39</sup> This is a good example of “building back better” during COVID-19.

## CHILD PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

Child marriage – and violence against children more broadly – tends to increase during humanitarian crises, just at times when the capacities and resources of service providers and CSOs are stretched and often diverted to interventions deemed more urgent than those focused on preventing child marriage and other forms of violence against children.

During humanitarian crises, child protection actors have focused mainly on the provision of services, case management and best interests determinations for specific groups of children. This includes alternative care and support for separated, unaccompanied and neglected children; durable solutions for refugee children; safe spaces for children displaced by conflict, generalised violence and natural hazards; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and armed groups (so-called child soldiers); services for children who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence; and mental health and psychosocial support for children affected by disasters.<sup>40</sup>

In order to broaden the scope of child protection work in humanitarian settings, the Alliance on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action developed a set of minimum standards on child protection in humanitarian settings, including on child marriage.<sup>41</sup> Other relevant resources include the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Actions’ technical note on the [protection of children during the coronavirus pandemic](#)<sup>42</sup> and the briefs on child marriage in humanitarian contexts by [Girls Not Brides](#)<sup>43</sup> and by [UNICEF and UNFPA](#).

### FACT BOX

#### Minimum standards on child marriage in humanitarian settings<sup>44</sup>

Child marriage is a critical issue in many settings. It becomes even more critical in humanitarian crises. In collaboration with GBV actors, child protection actors must:

- Consult with children – particularly girls – communities and other stakeholders to identify risk factors and social practices related to child marriage.
- Understand relevant GBV case management standards for child marriage.
- Include the following in assessments and programme design: different risk factors for child marriage for all children, and the specific needs of married children, adolescent girls who are pregnant because of rape and child/adolescent parents. Married girls face increased risks of intimate partner violence and are often not accounted for in humanitarian programming.

- Collaborate with multisectoral actors – including those working on GBV and SRHR – on interventions that prevent child marriage and support children who are already married and/or parents.

Child protection actors might want to stop a marriage, but fear that doing so could bring harmful unintended consequences to the child, family and other actors. The best response in this situation is to:

- Understand the child's situation and what they want to happen.
- Assess and plan for safety.
- Provide information and support.
- Connect the child to people and services that will be supportive and useful.

The safety and best interests of the child need to be prioritised. If a child is facing an immediate safety concern, connect them with services that can provide short-term protection and potentially lead to a longer-term protective option.

## CASE STUDY

### **Girl Shine – International Rescue Committee (IRC) Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) teams reaching married adolescent girls in Lebanon<sup>45</sup>**

In 25 countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, The IRC's WPE programmes focus on providing care for girls and women who have experienced violence. They also address the root causes of violence, restore the dignity of those who have experienced violence, and create opportunities for girls and women to rebuild and transform their lives and communities.<sup>46</sup>

Low levels of participation of married adolescent girls in the WPE intervention led the programme team working in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon to carry out assessments and focus group discussions to understand why. Based on these findings, the activities were adapted as follows:

- WPE teams scheduled outreach visits after lunch, which suited married girls better as they were occupied with household and childcare responsibilities in the morning.
- The WPE team engaged the whole community through non-formal gatherings to build trust; provide information about birth and marriage registration and work permits; and provide support in making referrals to these services.
- More targeted and focused gatherings with women were organised to better understand the perspectives of married girls. These meetings sometimes took place with married girls only.
- Childcare volunteers and a room or space for children to play in were provided, so that married girls were able to meaningfully participate in activities.
- Since married adolescent girls were only able to access safe spaces if their mothers-in-law were participating, the WPE team organised parallel activities for married girls and their mothers-in-law, allowing girls to finish a full cycle of an activity.



## ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

Not enough is being done to protect children from abuse, violence and exploitation, including child marriage. This section presents advocacy recommendations for governments, donors, UN agencies and civil society to strengthen child protection systems to prevent and respond to child marriage.

### For civil society organisations at the national level

#### Budget advocacy

- Influence the allocation of public financial resources – budget processes, policies and outcomes – for services and initiatives to end child marriage by combining budget analysis and strategic advocacy.<sup>47</sup>

#### Strengthen child protection systems

- Make use of the existing child protection system – including child helplines, referral and case management mechanisms, and safe houses – and align with and strengthen the capacities of its social service workforce, rather than creating parallel systems for service delivery.
- Promote a “do no harm” approach across the child protection continuum of care, from intervening in child marriages/rescue; running care/shelter/homes; protecting adolescent advocates and activists; avoiding secondary victimisation by the child protection system; and promoting access to justice.
- Work with child protection actors and service providers to ensure child protection mechanisms are more gender-responsive and child-friendly. Ensure they promote social and gender norms change and the empowerment of adolescent girls.
- Promote children’s rights in community-level justice and protection approaches that are based on customary and religious law.

#### Evidence and research

- Include the views, perspectives and suggestions of adolescent girls in data collection related to child marriage.

### For national governments

#### Financing

- Allocate adequate public resources at national and sub-national levels to strengthen multi-sectoral child protection systems and services that prevent and respond to child marriage. This includes funding and developing the capacity of the core child protection workforce, education and SRHR services for adolescent girls, and social protection transfers to ensure the economic security of vulnerable families whose daughters are at particular risk of child marriage.

## **Data**

- Strengthen national statistical offices to collect data on child marriage as part of their regular data collection processes.

## **Legislation and policies**

- Promote children's rights and gender equality in national legislation and policies and in community-level customary and religious justice and protection approaches.
- Ensure national responses to end child marriage include comprehensive approaches to child protection which put in place strong legal frameworks and include interventions to prevent and mitigate child marriage at the girl, family and community level.

## **Child protection systems and services**

- Strengthen the social service workforce to protect children through a comprehensive human resources development approach, including planning, developing and supporting the social service workforce.<sup>48</sup>
- Ensure investment in civil registration systems – including birth and marriage registration – to identify girls marrying when they are under age.
- Classify social service workforce as essential workers during humanitarian crises to ensure the continued provision of child protection services during emergencies.
- Strengthen links, coordination and referral mechanisms between education, health, social protection and child protection in order to provide a continuum of care services for the most marginalised and at-risk adolescent girls.

## **Education**

- Refine education policies to support adolescent girls to have full access to 12 years of quality education, including for adolescents who are married, pregnant and mothers.
- Provide adequate support and resources to ensure schools are safe learning environments. This includes anti-violence measures; water, sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities; and safe transport to and from schools.
- Provide life skills and comprehensive sexuality education in schools to ensure that adolescent girls and boys have the knowledge and skills to protect themselves from violence and to guarantee their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

## **Social protection**

- Identify and invest in opportunities to scale up “cash-and-care” interventions which combine cash transfers and child welfare support to reduce adolescent risk of early marriage and sexual exploitation.

## For global and regional actors: donors, regional institutions, UN agencies and international NGOs

### Evidence

- Invest in context-specific data collection and evidence of what works to end child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in different contexts, and what can be effectively scaled up.
- Include the views, perspectives and suggestions of adolescent girls in data collection related to child marriage.

### Financing

- Donors must provide long-term, flexible funding to strengthen child protection systems, and explore how investments in systems can achieve their aims. This includes investment in case management systems that can support girls at risk of harmful practices, trafficking, and GBV.
- Ensure that all humanitarian funding appeals include programmes to protect girls and boys from violence and exploitation.

## FACT BOX

**Global and regional child protection platforms** have the potential to mobilise support. Here are some examples:

- Child Protection Global Protection Cluster: <https://www.cpaor.net/>
- Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children: <https://www.ignitephilanthropy.org/>
- Global Workforce Strengthening Alliance: <http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/>
- Alliance for the Protection of Children in Humanitarian Action: <https://www.alliancecpha.org/en>
- African Child Policy Forum: <https://www.africanchildforum.org/index.php/en/>

**Global summits and regional high-level meetings** related to the protection of children and adolescents offer opportunities to influence governments and donors to invest more in child protection.

This includes global summits to end abuse, violence and exploitation of children, including sexual exploitation; girl summits; and regional high-level meetings, such as those organised by regional inter-governmental bodies and supported by international child protection organisations.

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**Abuse:** A deliberate act with actual or potential negative effects on a child's safety, wellbeing, dignity and development. It is an act that takes place in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.<sup>49</sup>

**Case management:** A way of organising and carrying out work to address an individual child's needs – and those of his/her caregiver – in an appropriate, systematic and timely manner, through direct support and/or referrals, and in accordance with a project or programme's objectives.

**Child protection:** Consists of measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation affecting children.

**Child protection sector:** Includes government departments, services, civil society organisations, community approaches and mechanisms that protect children from abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation. Many different ministries and departments have responsibilities for child protection, which is often coordinated by the ministry of child welfare, or similar. International agencies and NGOs, foundations and donors, and academic and research institutes play an important role in supporting child protection interventions and advocacy at country, regional and global levels. In advocacy, there is significant overlap between children's rights and child protection actors and institutions. Some child protection agencies cover the whole spectrum of child protection violations, while others are focused on specific forms of abuse, violence and exploitation.

**Child protection systems:** Consist of a collection of interlinking components at community, district and national levels that are organised around the common goal of preventing, mitigating and responding to abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation affecting children.<sup>50</sup> Child protection systems operate within the framework of the law<sup>51</sup> and a coherent regulatory framework of policies, procedures and guidelines. Typically, one ministry or department – like a ministry of social welfare or its equivalent – interacts with all other sectors – like justice, education, health and security – to lead and coordinate effective child protection responses. Child protection systems should be rights-based, child-friendly and gender-responsive, in children's best interests and guided by the principle of *do no harm*.

**Continuum of care:** To ensure that children are protected, child protection systems must include effective measures for early detection, reporting and referrals, response, recovery and rehabilitation and reintegration of children at risk of violence. These child protection processes and mechanisms must be timely and effective, age appropriate, child-friendly and gender-aware to ensure prevention, mitigation and response to abuse, violence and exploitation of children.

**Core and allied systems:** The effective protection of children from abuse, violence and exploitation requires a core child protection system with strong links to allied systems and services, especially health, education, social protection, justice, law enforcement and civil registration.

**Formal/informal:** Child protection systems encompass more formal and less formal services and supports at different levels – family, community, district, national and transnational – and rely on effective links between these levels. Child protection mechanisms and systems



should address risk factors and reduce vulnerabilities while building on the strengths and resilience of children, families, communities and governments.

**Multi-sector coordination:** Child protection is a multi-sectoral field that depends on the contributions of many other sectors and actors at different levels. While core child protection actors provide important specialist child protection functions, they also play a critical role in coordinating other actors and stakeholders.

At the central level, child protection actors ensure that key government ministries collaborate and coordinate their actions, that laws and policies are harmonised, and that child protection services meet quality standards.<sup>52</sup> At the district level, child protection actors coordinate between service providers, and with central and community levels.

Coordinated case management of the individual child brings together a range of services and support. CSOs play an important role in service provision, organisation and mobilisation at the community level and in connecting at-risk individuals and households to services. Systems only work if the different parts work together. In fragile contexts all systems perform poorly, not just child protection systems.

PICTURED: Girls play after participating in activities organised by GoJoven in Livingston, Guatemala. Photo: *Girls Not Brides/Colectivo Nómada/Priscilla Mora Flores*





## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> CEDAW and UNCRC, 2014, [\*Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices.\*](#)
- <sup>2</sup> Misunas, C., Murray Gastón, C., and Cappa, C., 2019, [\*“Child marriage among boys in high prevalence countries: an analysis of sexual and reproductive health outcomes.”\*](#) *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 19:25.
- <sup>3</sup> Gupta, T., 2018, [\*“Thrive. Gender-transformative child Protection: An Annotated Bibliography.”\*](#) *Plan International*; UNICEF, 2011, [\*Promoting Gender Equality through UNICEF-Supported Programming in Child Protection\*](#); and WHO, 2018, [\*INSPIRE handbook: Action for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children.\*](#)
- <sup>4</sup> UNFPA and UNICEF, 2019, [\*Technical note on gender-transformative approaches in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage Phase II: A summary for practitioners.\*](#)
- <sup>5</sup> For examples, see the work of the ICRW, Population Council, ALIGN and GAGE.
- <sup>6</sup> For examples, see the work of UNICEF, Save the Children and Plan International (Because I Am a Girl campaign).
- <sup>7</sup> Greene, M. E., et al., 2015, [\*“Engaging men and boys to address the practice of child marriage,”\*](#) Washington, DC: *GreeneWorks*, p. 4.
- <sup>8</sup> *Girls Not Brides*, n.d. [\*Theory of change\*](#); UNICEF, 2017, [\*Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Children and Adolescents Theory of Change\*](#); WHO, 2018, op. cit.; WHO, 2019, [\*School-based violence prevention: A practical handbook\*](#); World Vision, 2011, [\*A systems approach to child protection: A World Vision discussion paper.\*](#)
- <sup>9</sup> For more information on approaches to children’s participation by child protection agencies see: Save the Children, 2019, [\*Strengthening child protection systems: Guidance for country offices\*](#); Plan International Asia Pacific Regional Hub, 2019, [\*Girls get equal. Their time is now – Time to act! Report of the regional comparative analysis of approaches to youth activism and engagement in eliminating child, early and forced marriage in Asia\*](#); and Plan International Asia Pacific Regional Hub, 2019, [\*Girls get equal. Their time is now – Time to act! Engaging young people in accelerating efforts to eliminate child, early and forced marriage in Asia: Thematic Brief.\*](#)
- <sup>10</sup> Population Council’s [\*Abriendo Oportunidades \(“Opening Opportunities”\)\*](#) programme; and the CEFMU and Sexuality Programs Working Group, 2019, [\*Tackling The Taboo: Sexuality and gender-transformative programmes to end child, early and forced marriage and unions.\*](#)
- <sup>11</sup> Population Council, 2020, [\*BALIKA empowering girls to delay child marriage in Bangladesh.\*](#)
- <sup>12</sup> Mantri, G., 2020, [\*“Let us decide: Young women speak out on raising age of marriage from 18 to 21,”\*](#) *The News Minute.*
- <sup>13</sup> UNICEF, 2020, [\*Protecting children from violence in the time of COVID-19: Disruptions in prevention and response services.\*](#)

- <sup>14</sup> For a typology of community approaches, see Benham, N., 2008, [\*Agencies, communities, and children. A report of the interagency learning initiative: Engaging communities for children's well-being.\*](#)
- <sup>15</sup> Subden, E., n.d., [\*Case study: Mobilising communities to tackle child, early and forced marriage in Bangladesh and Nepal. CARE's Tipping Point project in Bangladesh and Nepal.\*](#)
- <sup>16</sup> UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, 2019, [\*Accelerating change: Annual report 2018.\*](#)
- <sup>17</sup> For more information, see Save the Children, 2019, op. cit.; and WHO, 2018, op. cit.
- <sup>18</sup> Save the Children, 2019, op. cit.; UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, 2010, [\*Child protection programme strategy and programming process.\*](#)
- <sup>19</sup> Bradford, B., 2017, [\*"Case study on case management for children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV \(OVC\). From the ground up: Developing a national case management system for highly vulnerable children. An experience in Zimbabwe," Catholic Relief Services.\*](#)
- <sup>20</sup> Save the Children, 2019, op. cit.; [\*Global Social Service Workforce Alliance.\*](#)
- <sup>21</sup> For more information, see the [\*Childline India\*](#) website.
- <sup>22</sup> D'Costa, B., 2016, [\*"Gender justice and \(in\)security in Pakistan and Afghanistan," Postcolonial Studies, 19:4, pp 409-426.\*](#)
- <sup>23</sup> Biswas, S., 2018, [\*"The horror story inside an Indian children's home," BBC News.\*](#)
- <sup>24</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, [\*Minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian action.\*](#)
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> For more information, see the [\*Keeping Children Safe\*](#) website.
- <sup>27</sup> For more information, see the *Girls Not Brides* [\*Safeguarding Standards for Girls Not Brides members.\*](#)
- <sup>28</sup> UNICEF, 2020, [\*Protecting children from violence in the time of COVID-19: Disruptions in prevention and response services.\*](#)
- <sup>29</sup> IPA, n. d., [\*Empowering girls in rural Bangladesh.\*](#)
- <sup>30</sup> Jones, N., 2019, *Child Marriage and Social Norms* (unpublished PowerPoint presentation). GAGE.
- <sup>31</sup> Balchin, C., 2010, [\*Family law in contemporary Muslim contexts: Triggers and strategies for change.\*](#)
- <sup>32</sup> *Girls Not Brides*, 2018, [\*A guide to using the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage.\*](#)
- <sup>33</sup> *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, [\*Civil society and budget advocacy to end child marriage: Lessons learned from six pilot projects.\*](#)
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> UNICEF, 2017, [\*UNICEF's engagements in influencing domestic public finance for children \(PF4C\): A global programme framework.\*](#)

- <sup>36</sup> For more information see the [International Budget Partnership](#) website.
- <sup>37</sup> Children’s organisations label budget advocacy “public finance for children,” while women’s rights organisations use the label “gender-responsive public financial management. UNFPA and UNIFEM, 2006, [Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice: A Training Manual](#).
- <sup>38</sup> *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, op. cit.
- <sup>39</sup> Jenkins, R., and Winthrop, R., 2020, “[5 actions to help bring the most marginalized girls back to school after COVID-19](#),” *Brookings*.
- <sup>40</sup> UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2020, [Preventing and responding to child marriage in humanitarian settings: The Global Programme approach](#).
- <sup>41</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, op. cit.
- <sup>42</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2020, [Technical note: Protection of children during the coronavirus pandemic](#).
- <sup>43</sup> *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, [Child Marriage in Humanitarian Contexts](#); UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2020, op. cit.
- <sup>44</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, op. cit.
- <sup>45</sup> International Rescue Committee, 2019, [Girl Shine. Advancing the field: Designing girl-driven gender-based violence programming in humanitarian settings](#).
- <sup>46</sup> International Rescue Committee, n.d., [Violence prevention and response at the International Rescue Committee](#).
- <sup>47</sup> International Budget Partnership, n. d., [Orientation to budget advocacy](#).
- <sup>48</sup> Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, n. d., [Framework for strengthening the social service workforce](#).
- <sup>49</sup> The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, op. cit.
- <sup>50</sup> These paragraphs are based on Save the Children, 2019, op. cit.
- <sup>51</sup> Many countries with high prevalence of child marriage have plural legal systems, combining civil, customary and religious laws. Customary and religious systems of justice administration significantly affect the ways legal frameworks are implemented and in many cases constitute one of the key driving factors for the perpetuation of child and forced marriage.
- <sup>52</sup> Governments are responsible for quality assurance, inspection and periodic review functions.