



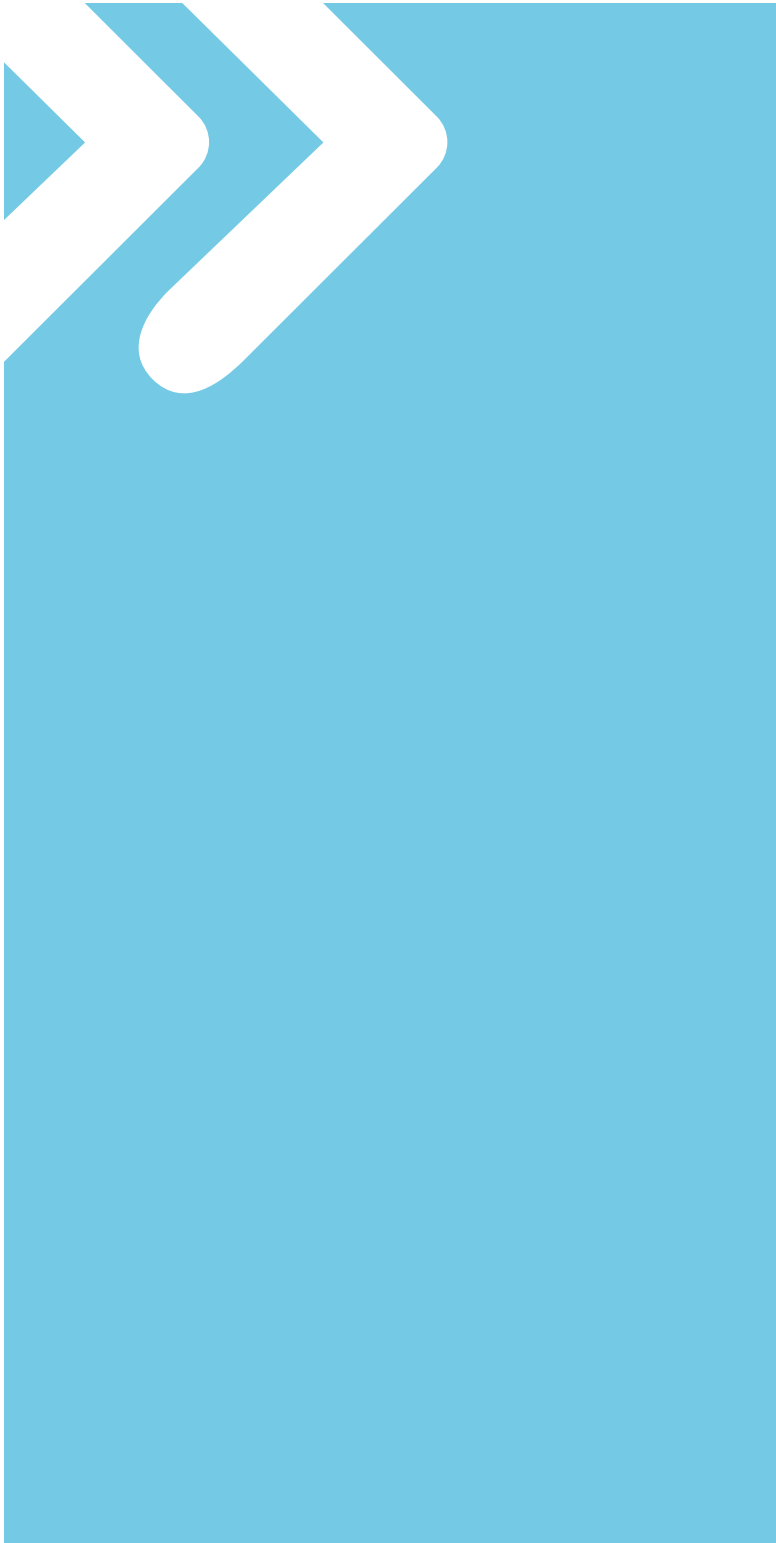
GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

DECADE OF PROGRESS

TEN YEARS OF GIRLS NOT BRIDES AND THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD MARRIAGE





DECADE OF PROGRESS

Ten years of *Girls Not Brides* and the global partnership to end child marriage

www.GirlsNotBrides.org

PICTURED ON COVER: Girls participate in Rise Up's "Let Girls Lead" programme in Chimaltenango, Guatemala. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/James Rodríguez/Arete

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, millions of girls have enjoyed greater freedoms, opportunities and powers to decide and direct their own lives. Change has been incremental, gaining momentum as *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*^a has grown in size, experience and influence.

On our tenth anniversary, we assess the progress we have made, insights we have gained and steps we must all take to harness this collective energy and accelerate change over the next decade. Six reasons to join us on our journey are:

1 Measurable, large-scale change is possible

Globally, child marriage prevalence^b has declined by around 15 percent since 2010. That means 25 million girls have avoided child marriage over the last decade.¹ But progress has been uneven, and unless we accelerate change, 100 million more girls will marry as children before 2030,² even without accounting for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will use the evidence we have gathered to galvanise the Partnership and move forwards.

2 Our Partnership is stronger than ever

In just 10 years, our Partnership has grown from only 50 member organisations to over 1,500 from all over the world. These diverse organisations have pooled their experience, harnessing [the power of the collective](#) to catalyse change.

3 Leaders around the world are taking action

When *Girls Not Brides* was launched in 2011, child marriage was not on the political agenda. Now, leaders around the world have stepped up commitments to end child marriage and promote gender equality. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have been instrumental in advocating and holding their governments to account for these commitments. More donor governments and private foundations have also declared support, and *Girls Not Brides* continues to work with them to diversify funding and fill gaps.

^a *Girls Not Brides* as a global partnership is committed to ending all formal and informal child, early and forced marriages and unions. In this report we use the term “child marriage” to refer to all of these forms.

^b The standard indicator for measuring child marriage is prevalence. This is defined as the percentage of women aged 20-24 married or in a union before the age of 18.

4 **We have built consensus on how to end child marriage**

We have strengthened global understanding of why child marriage happens, its impacts and what works to end it. As a result, we are in a stronger position to advocate for investment and support for the strategies that will most effectively prevent child marriage, support married girls and achieve gender equality. Our [Theory of Change](#) shows the range and combination of approaches needed, and the role everyone has to play.

5 **We have validated and strengthened our approach**

We have tested our Theory of Change, drawing on the experience of our member organisations to provide further evidence of what works to end child marriage. We have become bolder, shifting to gender-transformative action that dismantles the structures that discriminate against girls and drive child marriage; we have engaged families and communities – including boys and men and religious and traditional leaders – to support this change and feel its benefits in their own lives; we have deepened our understanding of how to provide services that prioritise girls' needs and ensure they are empowered to fulfil their potential, even in humanitarian settings; and we have built on early legal changes to call for holistic, well-funded national policies and programmes to end child marriage and ensure gender equality.

6 **We know what still needs to be done**

The last decade has been a time of great success not only for the global Partnership, but also for the broader movement to end child marriage. However, with 12 million more girls marrying each year³ – and even more at risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic – our work is far from done.

For the movement to be effective and to end child marriage – so together we can ensure ours is the last generation where girls become brides – we need more and better targeted funding, political will and collective action that delivers on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We must put girls at the centre, transform social norms, focus on scale and support civil society movements to drive change at all levels.



The pathway to zero child marriages is long, but we have the experiences, learnings and connections built over the last decade to keep moving forwards until, finally, every girl is free to reach her full potential in every aspect of her life.





FOREWORD



When I sat down to write this foreword, I found myself asking “what is progress?” In a world as diverse as ours, and with an issue as complex as child marriage, how can a decade of achievement be presented in a single report? How can progress be qualified through a data point, a statistic, a learning? How do you measure the work of our global Partnership, the movement, and all the governments, leaders, friends and allies that have stood with us to ensure that girls are free to decide if, when and whom to marry?

I came up with some reflections, that perhaps progress is in the number of laws that now set a minimum age for marriage, or in the national policies that have been funded and implemented. Or maybe it is measured in the decreasing prevalence of child marriage and the greater number of girls graduating secondary school.

While each of these numbers shows that we are getting closer to our vision of a world free from child marriage, I know for sure numbers can never tell the full story.

So, I settled on progress being Asha, who left a violent early marriage and returned to school. She now dreams of joining the armed forces.

Progress is Rodrigo, who is making sure that the men and boys in his community are part of the solution to ending child marriage.

Progress is Sumita, who I met in India, who is training to be a teacher. She shared how she ran away from her husband at the age of 12 because she believed she was born for more.

Progress is Amira, married at 13 and a mother quickly after, whose daughter is in school in a refugee camp, dreaming of being a nurse.

The story of our progress is in each and every girl who dreams of being an astronaut, a pilot, a CEO, a doctor. Every woman who has the family she wants, not the one that is forced upon her. Progress is the dreams of every single girl whose name we do not know, but whose future we believe in.

This report is about the progress we – *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* – have made, and where we need to do more and work faster. It is a story we often tell in numbers – over 1,500 organisations standing together to end child marriage, 25 million marriages averted in the past 10 years.⁴ These numbers matter, but they are not the full story.

The girls are the story. And our progress must be measured by the changes in their lives. When we meet in 10 years' time, I hope many more girls will tell you their stories of how child marriage used to happen, and how it used to be normal for them to be told what to say, do or even dream. For the two halves of the world's population to be equal to one other, surely that is not such a radical idea, is it?

Dr. Faith Mwangi-Powell, CEO

PICTURED: Girls take part in a workshop at a girl's club run by BRAC in Tongi, Bangladesh. Photo: Girls Not Brides/Abdullah al Kafi

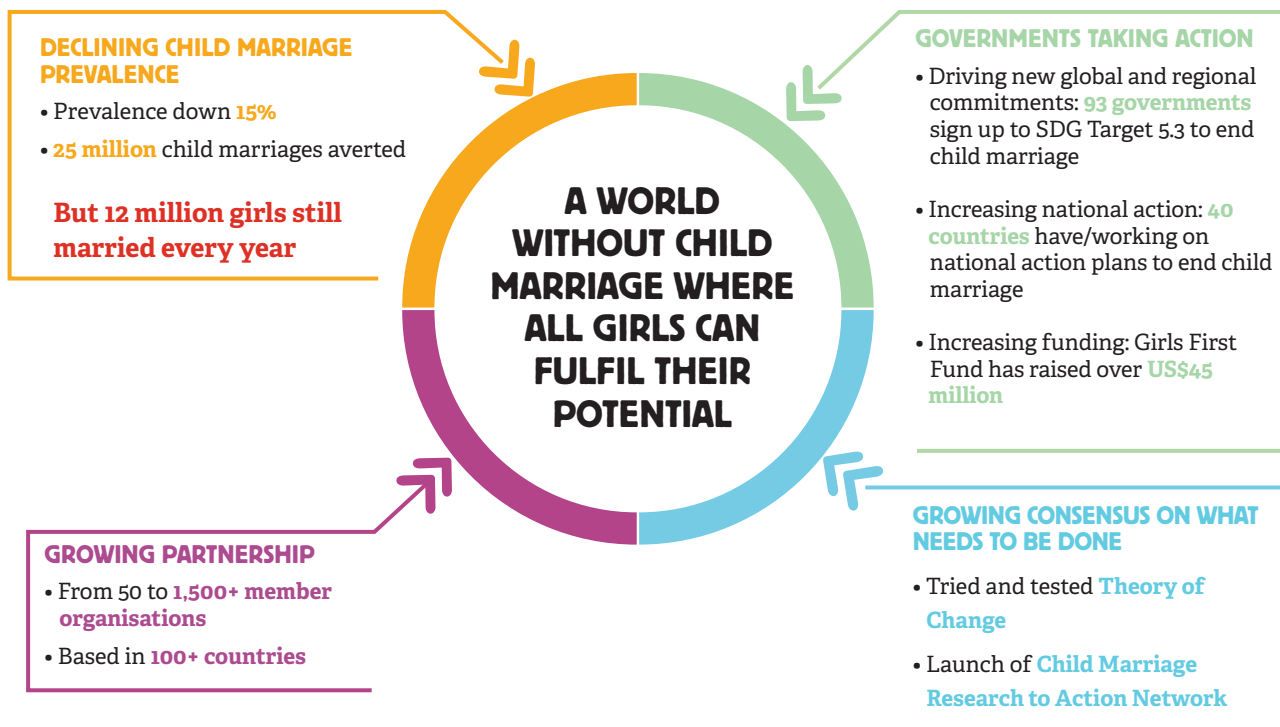


1. PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE

Over the past decade, millions of girls have enjoyed greater freedoms, opportunities and powers to decide and direct their own lives. This is largely thanks to the determined collective work of civil society, united around the vision of a world without child marriage, where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men, and can achieve their full potential.

Change has been incremental, gaining momentum as our Partnership has grown in size, experience and influence. In this section, we assess the progress we have made, the distance left to travel and the tools we already have, so we can harness this collective energy and accelerate change over the next decade.

Figure 1: Progress towards a world without child marriage

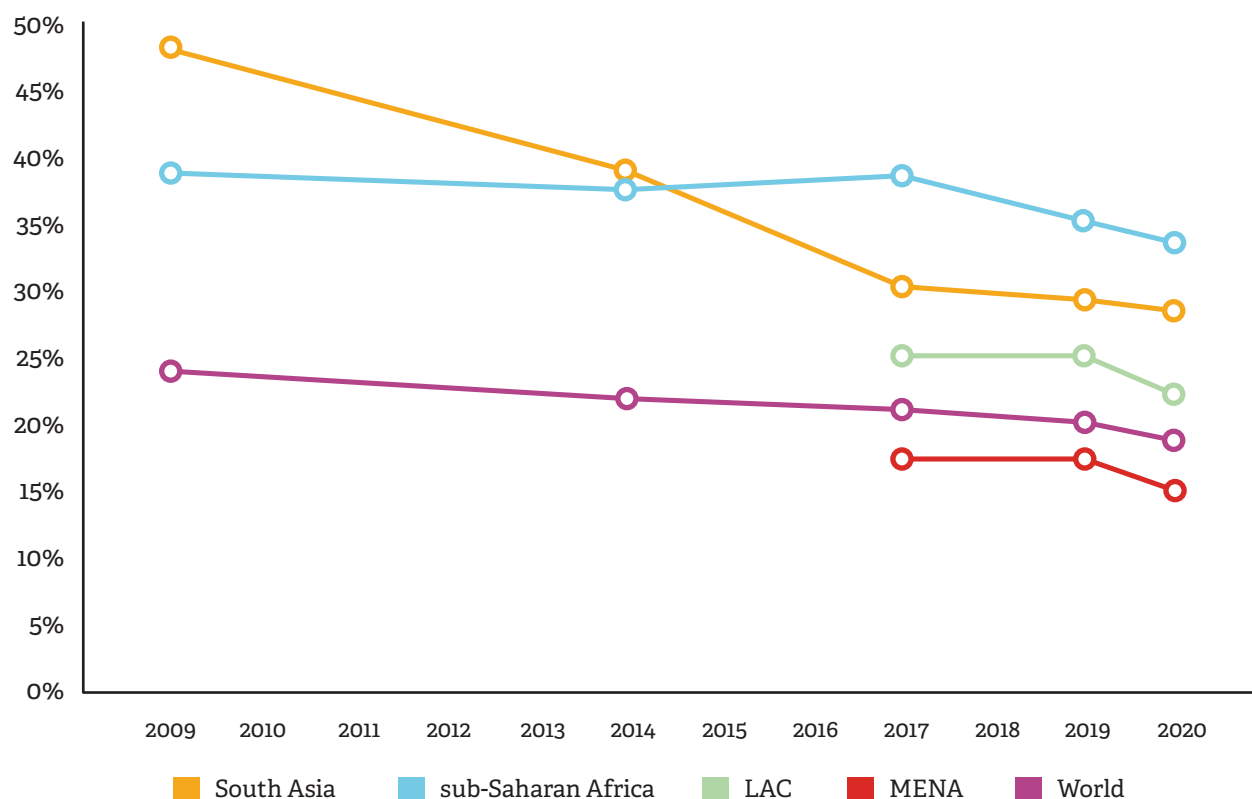


1.1 DECLINING CHILD MARRIAGE PREVALENCE

Every girl who avoids marrying as a child is a girl who is more likely to finish her education, remain healthy and live free from violence and poverty throughout her life. According to UNICEF, 25 million child marriages had been averted over the past decade due to declines in the prevalence of child marriage globally.⁵ That is 25 million reasons to celebrate successes and galvanise our Partnership for another decade of action.

Globally, the proportion of girls marrying as children has decreased by 15 percent over the last decade. Today, fewer than one in five girls marry before the age of 18, down from around one in four in 2010.⁶

Figure 2: Percentage of women aged 20-24 married before 18 by region



The most dramatic change has been in South Asia, where fewer than three in 10 girls are married before age 18,⁷ compared to almost half of all girls 10 years ago.⁸ At the country level, India and Ethiopia stand out for their reductions in child marriage. The proportion of girls marrying before age 18 (prevalence) in India dropped from 47 to 27 percent between 2007 and 2017.⁹ And in Ethiopia, prevalence dropped by a third, from 59 to 40 percent in the same time period.¹⁰

In these numbers, we show that measurable, large-scale change is possible – and underway. But progress has been uneven between – and within – regions, countries and communities. The most marginalised girls – those in rural, poor or humanitarian settings – are also the most at risk of child marriage.¹¹

Child marriage prevalence has remained almost constant in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and West and Central Africa.¹² Rapid population growth means that the number of girls and young women who experience child marriage will increase in some regions, even as prevalence drops. In Mali – where the prevalence of child marriage is 52 percent¹³ – a predicted threefold increase in the number of adolescent girls by 2050 means that the number of child brides could also increase three times.¹⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted on these numbers. Even before the pandemic, change needed to happen 17 times faster for us to meet the post-2015 [SDG](#) target of ending child marriage by 2030.¹⁵ Because of the pandemic – and the resulting disruptions to education, health care, economies and child marriage programming – 10 million more girls are expected to marry as children this decade.¹⁶

Source: United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2020, Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary-General. Supplementary Information: UNICEF, 2021, Child marriage database.

Reaching zero child marriages by 2030 will not be an easy journey, but it is one we have already started, and which we are equipped to complete.

» THE RESPECT I DESERVE: ASHA'S STORY

[Asha](#) is in school and dreams of joining the Indian armed forces. One day, she might choose to marry someone who understands and respects her. Married at 15, this future seemed out of reach just a few years ago. But Asha left her violent husband and joined an adolescent girls' group at the Srijan Foundation. She re-enrolled in school and is now clear about the respect she deserves.

1.2 A GROWING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

Ten years ago, the issue of child marriage was almost invisible for many across the globe. A few determined civil society organisations (CSOs) were working on the issue, but there was little scope for them to learn from one another, share resources or work together to increase their impact. In 2011, some of these CSOs [came together](#) with global advocates for the first time. They agreed to use their collective influence to focus the world's attention and build a global partnership dedicated to ending one of the greatest violations of human rights and gender equality around the world: child marriage.

In just 10 years, the [Girls Not Brides global partnership](#) has grown from 50 to over 1,500 member organisations, based in over 100 countries. These diverse organisations have pooled their experience, unique understanding and longstanding work with girls and communities affected by child marriage, harnessing [the power of the collective](#). They work alongside girls, governments, international organisations, youth groups, religious and traditional leaders, communities and donors to agree and implement effective solutions to end child marriage and promote gender equality in their national contexts.



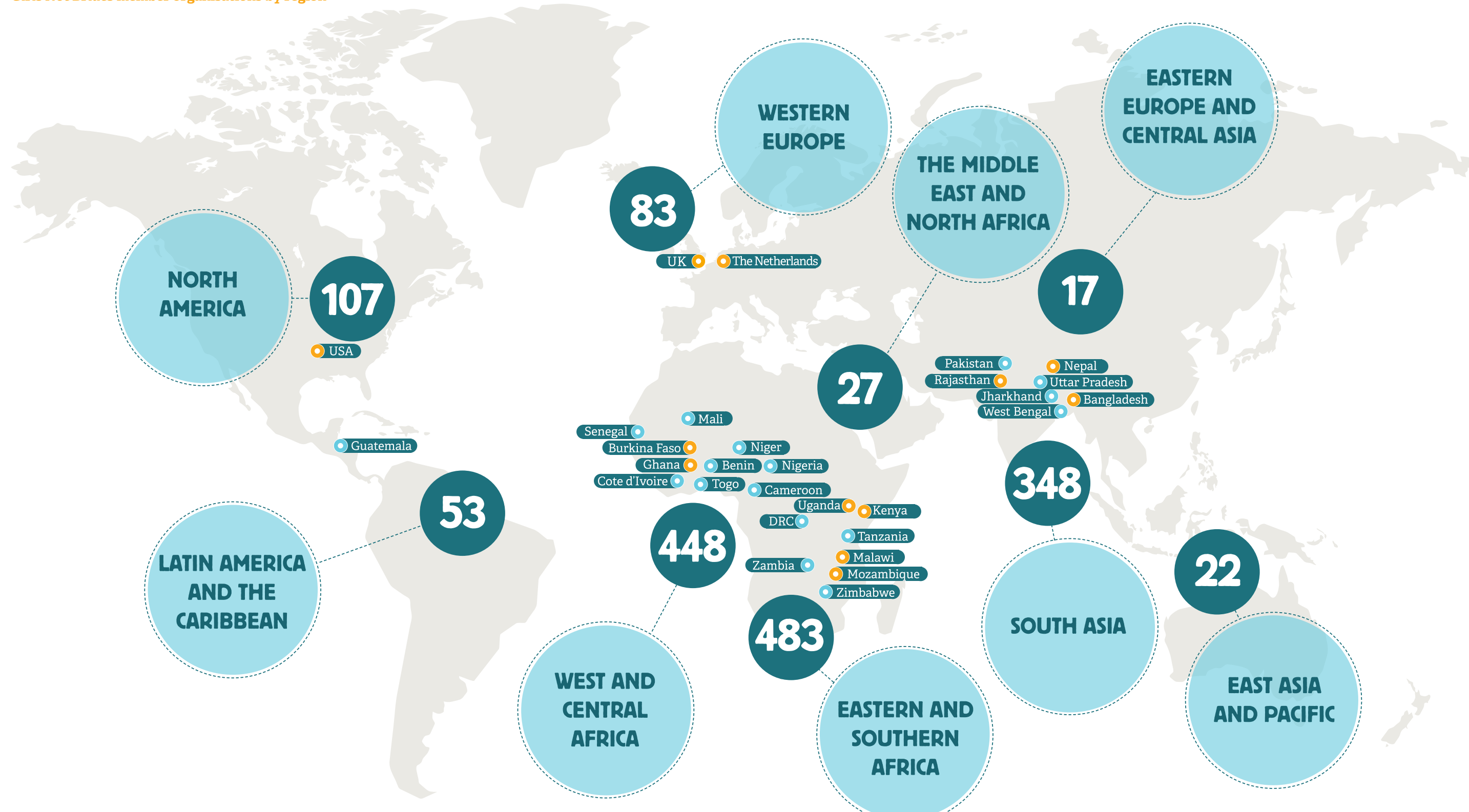
“Our unity is our greatest strength. With a spirit of teamwork, partnership and solidarity – even with limited funds – we are able to carry out activities and have an impact. We have been able to raise our voices and create more change across borders.” *Member of Girls Not Brides Mozambique*



Many member organisations have also come together to form [National Partnerships and coalitions](#). Through these networks, member organisations have combined efforts, expertise and evidence to push for constitutional change, develop and implement national strategies, raise awareness, share learnings, and engage communities, families and girls in ending child marriage.



The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage:
Girls Not Brides member organisations by region



- Girls Not Brides National Partnerships
- National civil society coalitions working to end child marriage



1.3 GOVERNMENTS TAKING ACTION

When *Girls Not Brides* was launched in 2011, child marriage was not on the political agenda. Following a decade of persistent, collective advocacy, political leaders around the world have stepped up commitments to end child marriage and promote gender equality. They have developed and ratified international agreements, passed laws, and developed and funded plans and programmes centred on the autonomy and rights of girls. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have been instrumental in holding their governments to account for these commitments.

Driving new global and regional commitments

Since its launch, *Girls Not Brides* has been instrumental in driving and influencing new global and regional commitments, advocating for child marriage to be included in their agendas, commitments and monitoring mechanisms, with successes at every level.

Through collective advocacy at the global and national level, *Girls Not Brides* influenced the decision to include Target 5.3 in the post-2015 SDGs, committing 193 governments around the world to ending child marriage by 2030. *Girls Not Brides* has coordinated and supported input from civil society on a series of substantive resolutions at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, and supported national-level member organisations to advocate directly with their governments. Neither UN body had drafted a resolution on child marriage prior to 2013.

Girls Not Brides has also collaborated with regional and intergovernmental bodies like the African Union (AU), the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), the Commonwealth and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, which have all made commitments on child marriage.

In 2014, the governments of 28 countries supported the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage. Since then, the campaign has grown in scope and deepened its focus on addressing the gender and power inequalities that perpetuate child marriage. It has already led to laws and strategies in Southern and West Africa and *Girls Not Brides* is working with the AU on new plans for approval in 2021. These plans will draw on our experience as a dynamic Partnership to focus on coordination and collaboration across sectors and between state and non-state actors.

In Asia, *Girls Not Brides* has provided technical input to the SAIEVAC, an apex body of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. We drafted a concept note for a SAIEVAC-organised national consultation on ending child marriage in India in 2018, and supported the participation of our member organisations.

In 2020, we attended their regional meetings in West and East India, sharing the perspective of [2,500 young people](#) on the government proposal to raise the legal age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 years. These virtual meetings – with more than 100 participating organisations – helped build a consensus around the need to shift focus from age of marriage to investment in expanding education and decent employment opportunities for girls. We continue to advocate on this issue.

Over the last three years, *Girls Not Brides* has also stepped up its work in LAC, where progress to end child marriage has been slowest. We launched our Spanish language website and used platforms like global conferences – including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25), Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and Women Deliver – to raise awareness and advocate for action on child marriage in the region. Seven governments in LAC have since committed to addressing the issue. Child marriage is now on the region's gender equality agenda, and SDG Target 5.3 on ending child marriage is formally included as an indicator in the Economic Commission for LAC's Gender Equality Observatory.



SIERRA LEONE AND TANZANIA END BANS ON PREGNANT GIRLS IN SCHOOL AFTER REGIONAL COURT RULINGS

Girls Not Brides member organisation [Equality Now](#) worked with civil-society organisations in Sierra Leone and Tanzania to file legal cases – at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Court of Justice and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights respectively – challenging discriminatory policies banning pregnant girls from attending school. In both countries, the laws – which had long been the focus of national, regional and global advocacy – were changed.



Increasing national action on child marriage

More than 40 countries now have or are developing national action plans to end child marriage, and many have also taken steps to strengthen their laws to address child marriage. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have been instrumental in working with governments on these developments, and in pushing for coordinated implementation and financing across government ministries. A [checklist](#) developed by *Girls Not Brides* to analyse national strategies to end child marriage has been cited by multiple governments – including Ghana, Lebanon and Nigeria – as being an important resource in this process.

» CIVIL SOCIETY MONITORING GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS ON CHILD MARRIAGE

In Guatemala, *Girls Not Brides* member Asociación Pro Bienestar de la Familia de Guatemala ([APROFAM](#)) is one of more than 100 CSOs supporting the online [Mira que te miro](#) social platform to monitor and hold governments to account for their commitments to the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through the platform, CSOs can also access evidence to support further investment in education, sexual and reproductive rights and action to address child marriage.

Girls Not Brides has supported civil society coalitions and member organisations to advocate for the domestic financing and implementation of their governments' commitments. Since our initial budget advocacy workshop in 2019, member organisations have formed a working group on budget advocacy to address child marriage, created seven budget advocacy action plans, held meetings with Ministers and government committees, shared analyses of past budgets and made recommendations for how their governments can resource key budget lines to support girls.

» BUDGET ADVOCACY TO FUND ADOLESCENT GIRLS' PRIORITIES

In Nigeria, *Girls Not Brides* member organisation the Society for the Improvement of Rural People ([SIRP](#)) successfully advocated for budget lines relevant to adolescent girls and ending child marriage to be included in the 2020 Enugu State Budget. As a result, the government has already begun building toilet facilities fit for girls' needs in three schools. This is important because girls often struggle to stay in school if they lack access to safe, single-sex and hygienic facilities.¹⁷ Girls who are not in school are more vulnerable to child marriage.¹⁸



“What a great effort on the part of government to improve the learning environment of our children. Kudos to SIRP Nigeria for their advocacy efforts engaging the government to put in place a favourable school environment that will ensure that our girls do not drop out of school and be exposed to early and child marriage.” *Chief Ikeje Asogwa, community leader, Enugu State, Nigeria*



Girls Not Brides' support for National Partnerships continues to have an impact. In Uganda – where we invested most funds in 2020, supporting the coordination and activities of *Girls Not Brides Uganda* – we saw parliamentarians make new commitments to advocate on the National Strategy to End Child Marriage, grassroots advocacy with religious leaders on ending child marriage, and increased media coverage of the issue.

The number of programmes addressing child marriage has also grown dramatically over the last decade, with increased action from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), community-based organisations and many others. This includes the 12-country UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the Global Programme), which *Girls Not Brides* will continue to influence as part of its Advisory Group during its second phase.

Increasing funding to address child marriage

Over the last decade, *Girls Not Brides* has worked with donors to raise awareness of the impact of child marriage on girls' lives, how it undermines the work they are already supporting and how they can be part of the solution. As the Partnership and wider movement to end child marriage have grown, more donor governments and private foundations have declared support, committed funding and collaborated on this issue.

Girls Not Brides has been at the forefront of creative initiatives to generate funding to address child marriage. Recognising that grassroots organisations play a crucial role in ending child marriage but are often underfunded, *Girls Not Brides* was a driving force behind the [Girls First Fund](#). This multi-donor initiative has already raised over US\$45 million to support community-based organisations working to end child marriage. Sitting on its board committee, *Girls Not Brides* provides technical expertise and ensures that the interests of CSOs are included in all aspects of the fund's work.

Girls Not Brides also catalysed the creation of [VOW for Girls](#), a fundraising initiative that leverages the multi-billion dollar United States wedding industry to support the Girls First Fund. VOW partners with companies to invite individuals to donate a portion of profits from products, experiences and wedding registries to locally-led grassroots projects working to end child marriage. In VOW, we have created a new model for building global solidarity around a human rights issue.

There are still significant funding gaps, and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated shortfalls, but *Girls Not Brides* continues its work closely with donor partners and to encourage increases to this funding base, and its strategic allocation.

PICTURED: Poster session during *Girls Not Brides* 2018 global meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Graham Crouch



1.4 GROWING CONSENSUS OF WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

New research on child marriage has increased over the last 10 years. *Girls Not Brides* has drawn on and consolidated the expertise of our member organisations and partners to build global understanding of why and how child marriage happens, its impacts, how it links to other development issues and what works to end it. As a result, we are in a stronger position to advocate for investment and support for the strategies that will most effectively prevent child marriage and support married girls. Our resources have influenced UN resolutions, national strategies and programming.

Our overarching Theory of Change has contributed to increased global understanding of the range of approaches needed to address child marriage and achieve gender equality, and the role of different sectors. This Theory of Change has been used by a wide variety of actors: national governments in high prevalence countries – like Nepal – have used it to develop their national strategies; civil society actors use it to inform programming and communicate about their work; and international donors and funds – including the UK Department for International Development (now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) and the Girls First Fund – have used it in their own work.

In 2019, *Girls Not Brides*, the World Health Organization, and the Global Programme brought together researchers, policy makers and programmers to review the evidence on child marriage and identify research gaps. We agreed to facilitate greater interaction and coordination between these actors, and to fill priority research gaps. In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* and the Global Programme launched the [Child Marriage Research to Action Network](#) (the CRANK) to meet this need. The CRANK provides a platform for a better coordinated and harmonised global research agenda on child marriage, and encourages the uptake of research by policy makers and practitioners to ensure solutions are based on the evidence.

Girls Not Brides has also increased the connections between different sectors and how they think about the impact of child marriage on their issue. We advocate for a comprehensive and holistic approach to programming for girls, which recognises the multiple and intersectional barriers that block girls' access to rights, to ensure that different sectors – including health, education, HIV/AIDS and child protection – work to end child marriage in a coordinated way.

PICTURED: Two participants in GoJoven programmes in Livingston, Guatemala.
Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Priscilla Mora Flores/Colectivo Nómada

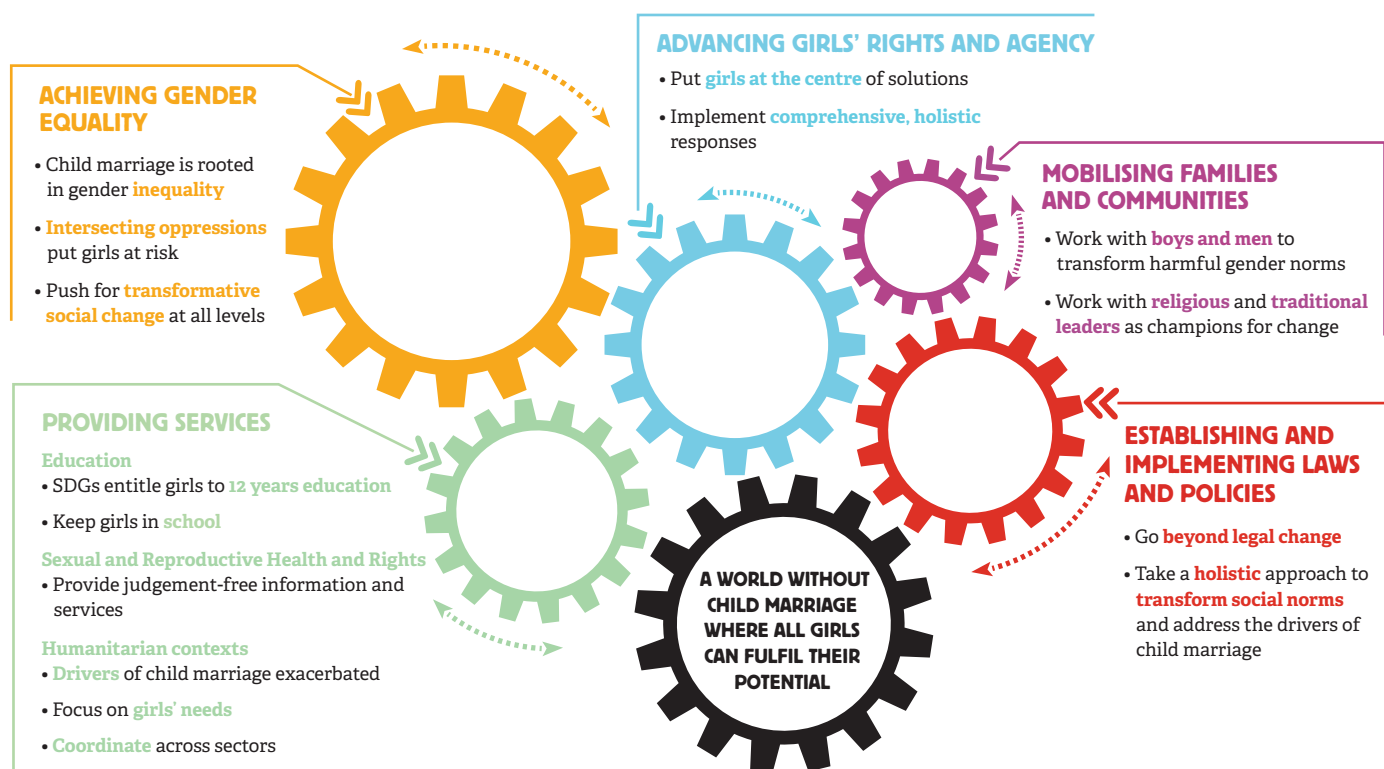


2. LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO PLOT A PATH FORWARDS

The last decade of action has seen our Partnership – and the broader movement to end child marriage – grow in experience and knowledge. We have put child marriage on the international agenda, helped develop regional and national plans and programmes to end it, and have seen global child marriage prevalence decline. But we have also confirmed that child marriage looks different from one community to the next, and requires multi-faceted solutions and actors to end it.

Our [Theory of Change](#) shows the range and combination of approaches needed, and the role everyone has to play to end child marriage and achieve gender equality. In this section, we share the key insights which underpin this guiding document, ensuring our responses are based in the evidence and are effective in securing a future where all girls can decide if, when and whom to marry. These insights are organised around the themes of achieving gender equality, advancing girls' rights and agency, mobilising communities, providing services, and enacting and implementing laws and policies.

Figure 3: Key insights into how to end child marriage and achieve gender equality





2.1 ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

Gender inequality is the root cause of child marriage. It – and the social norms and practices it informs – means that girls and women are treated as second-class citizens, denied their human rights and valued less because of their sex.



“The impact of poverty on child marriage is undeniable, but sometimes you also have to ask ‘why don’t they sell their sons?’ So it’s the whole issue around gender inequality and looking at women as ‘things’, not as people.”

Maria Malomalo, founder of Mwana Pwo in Angola



Over the past decade, we have deepened our understanding of what gender inequality means for girls and how it interacts with other aspects of their identities and lives – including their education, economic status, race, sexuality, religion, ability and migration status – to create different discriminations that place them at risk of child marriage.

By recognising that gendered social norms are the root cause of child marriage, and that the girls most at risk of child marriage face multiple interlocking oppressions, we can develop strategies that go beyond preventing child marriage to push for more transformative social change. Change that empowers girls and women – in all their diversity – and achieves gender equality.

Successful gender-transformative approaches to social norms change are grounded in strong gender and power analyses, and understanding of context. They include investing in quality education for girls, [transforming what they can do](#), how they think about their futures and how others think about them; working with service providers to ensure adolescent girls can access essential services that are suited to their needs, without judgement; and supporting youth-, girl-led and community-based organisations to work with service providers, schools and the media in their communities.

Community-level engagement takes time, sensitivity and is most effectively done peer-to-peer in safe spaces, using the language, cultural references and trust of insiders.

Many effective community-level interventions include safe spaces for reflection and discussion, led by trusted and credible facilitators and supported by positive and influential role models. They may also use public meetings to bring together community members from different age groups and positions of influence. Identifying and celebrating positive norms is important, and so is community participation from the very beginning.



“You need to build a really good relationship with community authorities, because if they don’t identify something as a problem, they won’t open it up for discussion. You need to respond to their needs, whilst also raising awareness of the impacts of child, early and forced marriage and unions [...] involving community authorities is a good way to mitigate against community backlash.” *Maricarmen Ramirez, Yo Quiero Yo*

Puedo, Mexico



2.2 ADVANCING GIRLS’ RIGHTS AND AGENCY

There is evidence that programmes that advance adolescent girls’ rights and agency – that is, their ability to choose and act on their choices – may be the most effective at reducing child marriage.¹⁹ A 2017 systematic review found them more effective than programmes prioritising schooling, economic approaches and community mobilisation,²⁰ and other studies – like that by the Nirantar Trust – recommend that approaches focused on girls’ agency are prioritised.²¹

Advancing girls’ agency means ensuring that they – in all their diversity – are at the centre of our solutions. It means involving them in the design and delivery of child marriage programmes. It means investing in their individual knowledge, skills and assets, and also in their opportunities for collective action. Engaging girls as central players means they can identify and help implement effective solutions that respond to their realities and contexts.



“We never felt like we were presented with a pre-conceived plan or draft, and we always had the support we needed. We don’t feel there are many examples in LAC where your voice as a young person is heard and really listened to. We really felt we were leaders in this space.” *Edith, a youth activist participating in the Jóvenas Latidas campaign*



Placing girls at the centre also means understanding what puts them at risk of child marriage and other forms of oppression. *Girls Not Brides* has increased its understanding of intersecting discriminations by learning from member organisations working with the girls and women who are at greatest risk or most affected by child marriage, including young [Indigenous women in Guatemala](#), [girls from Dalit communities in India](#), and [girls living with or affected by HIV in Africa](#).

Girl-centred solutions are most successful when they are comprehensive and holistic, combining work to advance girls’ rights with strong, clear safeguarding practices that prevent and respond to any abuse of girls’ rights.



GIRLS TAKE FLIGHT WITH COMPREHENSIVE, HOLISTIC SUPPORT

Girls Not Brides member organisation, the [Mariposa DR Foundation](#) in the Dominican Republic puts girl-centred approaches into practice. They offer academic, health, wellbeing, sports and economic programmes; a “mariposa” – Spanish for butterfly – might learn maths, practise yoga, collect rubbish by paddle board or use her design skills to up-cycle old sails for market. Through these activities, girls learn and support each other in a fun, safe environment decorated with inspirational women from the region – many of them Afro-Caribbean. In over a decade, the Foundation has only seen one girl become pregnant while still in their programme. This is remarkable in a country where adolescent pregnancy has historically been high, and is evidence of the Foundation’s contribution to girls’ opportunities, education, employment and quality of life.

We will only end child marriage with the sustained and active engagement of young people. Our [youth activism training programme](#) “Stand Up, Speak Out!” – co-created with youth and member organisations across the world – is a key resource for working with those most directly affected by child marriage. It builds participants’ knowledge on child marriage and promotes youth-led community-building initiatives to address the issues that impact them most.



“Across the region, it seems that a key to ending child marriage is to raise awareness of the power of youth. I have learnt a lot through this youth training from *Girls Not Brides* and my work in my community is now targeted and effective as a result. It is also important for me as a youth activist to include men and boys and engage them in our actions.” *Youth activist, Uganda*



2.3 MOBILISING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Girls are a strong force for change, but they cannot be expected to transform society alone. To end child marriage and achieve gender equality, all those with influence over girls' lives also need to be engaged: their families and communities, and those in positions of political and policy influence.

Working with boys and men

Around the world, patriarchal systems – that is, those controlled by and for men – block girls' and women's rights and agency and pressure boys and men to perform forms of masculinity based on violence and domination. We need to partner with boys and men – alongside our work with girls and women – to transform these harmful gender norms and practices, and promote healthy gender roles for all.



“We know that, in order to achieve gender justice for all, boys and men need to be part of the solution, acting as allies in our work for women’s and girls’ rights.”

Rodrigo Barraza, Global Fund for Children (Mexico and Central America)



Engaging boys and men means developing safe spaces for them to reflect on the impacts of their masculinity on themselves, their families and their communities, and to encourage them to become a part of the solution. Work is most effective when it is age- and context-sensitive, based around peer support groups, and focused on long-term transformation.

Work with boys from age five is effective because they have not yet fully internalised harmful gender norms; working with boys and young men to be “community promotors” can open new spaces to engage their families and communities;²² and work with the fathers of adolescent boys and girls and traditional and religious leaders is essential in transforming attitudes and behaviours in the wider community.^c

Working with religious and traditional leaders

Religious and traditional leaders can be important champions for change. They may speak out on particular issues – like girls' education, access to sexual and reproductive health care, child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) – expanding the impact of gender-transformative programming and promoting institutional change.

^c For more information on engaging boys and men see our [brief](#). We also recommend webinars organised around the [MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium](#)



Many religious leaders who have participated in trainings on social norms change and child marriage – organised by our member organisations [around the world](#) – are now supporting their communities to end violence against women and girls, taking a public stand and advocating amongst their peers for an end to the practice.

In response to civil society work with religious and traditional leaders, fatwas and binding resolutions have been issued against child marriage in [Indonesia](#), [West Africa](#), and Uganda. In Ethiopia, leaders of the Orthodox Church declared that they will not preside over marriages where either spouse is under 18. And in Malawi and Zambia, chiefs – like Chief Chamuka – have developed chieftdom by-laws outlawing child marriage.^d



“The reason why we involve religious and traditional leaders as champions is because for us as civil society, it is impossible to reach everywhere, but when we involve different people and stakeholders, and opinion leaders [...] then they are able to go into their communities. Working with them has turned out to be very magical.” Hope Nankunda, *Raising Teenagers Uganda*



2.4 PROVIDING SERVICES

Education

Child marriage is one of the main factors leading girls to drop out of school in many low-income countries. Keeping girls in school is one of the best ways of preventing child marriage: for every year a girls stays in secondary education, the likelihood of her marrying as a child decreases by six percentage points.²³

Under the SDGs, all children are entitled to 12 years of quality education. Secondary education is a stronger and more consistent protection against child marriage than primary school education. The effect of [girls' education](#) is intergenerational. The education of girls in one generation can delay marriage in their daughters' generation. Although relative educational mobility has risen in recent decades, the number of years a girl spends in school is still more aligned to her parents' education – especially her mothers' – than boys.^e

Education can build new generations of women and men with more egalitarian attitudes and behaviours. Quality education enables critical thinking and prepares young people to evaluate which norms are positive, and which are holding them back. When schools integrate sessions addressing issues like child marriage and gender stereotypes, they can reduce levels of gender-based violence (GBV) and improve the quality of relationships which are essential to ending child marriage.²⁴

^d

For more information on working with religious leaders see our [brief](#).

^e For more information on the links between child marriage and education, see our [brief](#).



Sexual and reproductive health and rights

As our understanding of the drivers of child marriage has grown, we have come to better understand the complex ways that child marriage links with [girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights](#) (SRHR).

Child marriage can lead to girls having sex before they are physically and emotionally ready, and when they know little about their SRHR. Child marriage is a key driver of adolescent pregnancy – which carries serious health risks – and can increase the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and experiencing GBV. In some contexts, child marriage is also closely linked to FGM/C, which is a human rights violation and is damaging to girls' physical and mental health.^f

To safely negotiate sex, adolescent girls – whether married or not – need accurate, stigma-free information on SRHR. This can be provided through comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and outreach campaigns delivered in and beyond schools, including through safe spaces and girls' clubs. CSE that explicitly addresses gender and power is five times more likely to reduce rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.²⁵

Girls should also be referred to service delivery points where they can access the health care they need, without judgement. Service providers – including medical professionals and teachers – need continuous training on the rights of adolescents to access sexual and reproductive health care, and should be able to make referrals to appropriate legal, social or child protection mechanisms. They also need training on how to interact with adolescents, including counselling and communication skills.

Legal and policy barriers that prevent adolescents from accessing sexual and reproductive health care – on the grounds of their age, sex, marital status or the number of children they have – should also be removed.

^f For more information on FGM/C see our [brief](#).



“I have lived my entire life knowing that abortion was unacceptable, especially as a religious leader. Clarifying my values in this workshop actually made me see how women needed information and services to prevent unwanted pregnancies but also to access safe abortion. I was so excited when I got trained and learnt of all these things.”

Religious leader, Athi River, Kenya



Humanitarian contexts

Child marriage exists in stable conditions, but [humanitarian crises](#) increase the inequalities that drive it – including harmful gender norms, poverty and lack of access to basic services such as education and sexual and reproductive health care – and put girls at greater risk of child marriage. The 10 countries with the highest child marriage prevalence²⁶ are currently either fragile or extremely fragile.²⁷

We have expanded our work with member organisations on good practice in preventing and responding to child marriage in humanitarian contexts. This means focusing on girls’ needs and coordinating action across all sectors – including with development actors – from the earliest stages of a crisis. Key actors include governments, UN agencies and CSOs.

Investment in basic services – including education, economic assistance, GBV prevention and youth-friendly SRHR programmes – can act as a safety net for girls and families under pressure, particularly if complemented by gender-transformative work done with their communities. Nationally-led responses – including community-based organisations working on gender equality and child rights – are key, as they can identify and respond quickly to the needs of girls and women.



GENDER EQUALITY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF ALL HUMANITARIAN ACTION

In Lebanon, [ABAAD](#) promote gender equality as an integral part of any humanitarian action. They aim to reduce the risk of GBV across all areas, including through disaster risk reduction and GBV prevention and response from pre-emergency preparedness, through response and on to recovery. They provide shelters for those who have experienced GBV and link women and girls to the services they need – including SRH and education – protecting their rights and wellbeing and ensuring no further harm, while promoting the positive transformation of gender norms.

2.5 ESTABLISHING AND IMPLEMENTING LAWS AND POLICIES

Girls Not Brides had early successes in advocating for constitutional and legal changes to end child marriage. We also supported the development and adoption of national action plans around the world. These [legal changes](#) represented a huge step forward for the movement to end child marriage. However, laws alone cannot end child marriage. So, we have shifted our focus to a more holistic, gender-transformative approach, encouraging governments to go beyond legal change to also put in place the policies and programmes that transform social norms and address the drivers of child marriage.

Any implementation of child marriage laws should have girls' rights at their core, be based in consultation with CSOs – ensuring they are accessible and useful to all stakeholders – and complement community-based work to transform the social and gender norms that drive child marriage.

» LAWS NEED TO BE ACCESSIBLE IF THEY ARE TO WORK FOR GIRLS

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage is the first of its kind. It provides a common, easy-to-apply regional framework for law- and policy-makers, service providers and civil society. For it to be effective, it needs to be properly understood by all stakeholders – including girls and women – and used in the development of national legislation and policies. *Girls Not Brides* worked with the Global Programme to develop user-friendly [videos](#) and a [guide](#) to ensure this transition from theory to practice.

Targeting collective advocacy to national governments is also key to ensuring they match their commitments with the necessary funding and human resources. Interventions that address child marriage need cross-sector planning, costing and funding in government budgets. Budget advocacy is an effective way to make these commitments a reality, as detailed on page 17.



PICTURED: Girls perform a drama in a life skills class run by Janaki Women Awareness Society in the Terai region of Nepal. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Thom Pierce

3. DELIVERING CHANGE

The pace of change needs to accelerate, and fast. That means more and better targeted funding, political will and collective action that delivers on promises – particularly those made in the SDGs – to end child marriage and achieve gender equality.

The last decade has been a time of great growth and success for the Global Partnership to End Child Marriage. From growing a vibrant, active and impactful movement around the world, to delivering tangible social and political changes that have transformed the lives of girls and women around the world, we have much to be proud of. However, with 12 million more girls marrying every year²⁸ – and even more at risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic – it is clear our work is not yet done.

To be successful and accomplish our goal of ending child marriage, as a Partnership we will:

- **Focus on our goal and deliver impact** – no girls getting married and all girls empowered, real changes in all girls’ lives, driven by an inclusive, diverse and cohesive global movement.
- **Actively harness local leadership.** This means ensuring that our work is locally-led and more funding is focused on grassroots and civil society organisations in high-prevalence countries, and that the perspectives of young people, advocates, service providers, community members and activists are directly incorporated.
- **Diversify, build and support the collective capacity of the Partnership,** learning from each other, expanding capacity, resources and implementation in National Partnerships, coalitions and member organisations.
- **Strengthen our voice and refine our approach** – ensuring they are relevant in different regions and contexts – and fearlessly demand a better future.



WE CAN ALL



1 PUT GIRLS AT THE CENTRE

Girls are active, engaged and powerful individuals who best understand the realities of their lives. To accelerate progress towards ending child marriage, girls and young people must be at the centre of finding solutions and shaping their futures.

Governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should:

- **Invest in programmes that build the life skills and confidence of girls**, including through girls' clubs, access to comprehensive sexuality education and safe spaces for girls. This will ensure that girls can shape their futures and confidently navigate social norms and other barriers.
- **Integrate girls into the design and development of programmes that aim to influence their lives**, as they know best what their needs are, the barriers they face and the support they require from schools, families, parents, communities and leaders. This will ensure that programmes are relevant, responsive to the lived experience of girls, feasible and applicable, effective, sustainable and safe.
- **Profile girls and young people in programmes, media and communications to create positive role models** and positively contribute to how they are seen in the community, and invite role models to act as mentors in their communities. This will inspire others to follow alternatives to traditional roles and realise they can defy social norms and still thrive.

2 TRANSFORM SOCIAL NORMS AND ENGAGE IN STRUCTURAL CHANGE

A world without child marriage would be a more gender-equal world; to end child marriage means transforming harmful social norms that restrict and repress girls and women and reduce their life chances. For this to be effective, social norms interventions need to take place alongside interventions that provide services, care and protection. This strategy recognises that there are multiple pathways to transform social norms – from community mobilisation to large-scale structural programming – and aims for complementarity between these different pathways.

Governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should:

- **Fund and support long-term social norms transformation** – over four years or more – with a focus on gender equality, alongside large-scale structural programmes. This will ensure that programming to change attitudes and behaviours is accompanied by access to the tools and services individuals need to exercise their rights. Multi-year funding recognises that sustainable transformation of social norms takes many years to secure.
- **Invest in social norms programming that focuses on all who influence attitudes that result in child marriage**, engaging communities and leaders, including boys and men. This will ensure that the transformation of norms around child marriage are supported by the whole community.
- **Ensure community mobilisation programming led by frontline workers from those communities** – specifically community dialogue programmes and wider mass media campaigns that address widely-held attitudes and offer alternatives to the status quo – is the basis of programming to transform social norms. This will ensure that the broad-base transformation of social norms needed to influence child marriage will be felt across the wider community.

FOCUS ON SCALE

To have a meaningful impact on the numbers of girls that marry every year, child marriage programming must be taken to scale. There must be large-scale investment in structural changes that will reach across communities and countries to prevent marriage and support married girls. This should be led by governments, with strong partnerships with – and accountability sought by – civil society, and supported by targeted development assistance and domestic resource mobilisation. These interventions must take place with simultaneous programming to influence behaviours and attitudes to ensure that the services provided are acceptable and adopted by the community.

Governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should:

- **Invest in free access to 12 years of quality education for all girls.** This should include stigma-free comprehensive sexuality education for all, with barriers related to motherhood or marriage removed and specific outreach for girls who have left school. This will ensure that girls have the skills needed to get jobs, earn a living and have a role broader than being a wife or mother.
- **Guarantee access for all girls – regardless of age or marital status – to the full range of youth-friendly health care, including sexual and reproductive health care and safe abortion.** This will enable them to safely navigate sex and avoid unintended pregnancy, have control over their bodies and choose if and when to marry or have children.
- **Ensure that policies and plans to mitigate and respond to humanitarian situations reflect the specific needs of girls and women in crisis**, including in relation to their sexual and reproductive health, access to education, increased risk of violence and child marriage. This will ensure that when disaster strikes, girls and women are not excluded or made more vulnerable to unintended pregnancy or gender-based violence.



4 SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENTS TO DRIVE CHANGE

The more of us there are, the stronger we will be. To accelerate progress towards gender equality, the movement to end child marriage needs to be diverse and inclusive, representing girl- and youth-led organisations, humanitarian actors and others. We must collectively strengthen, grow and invest in the movement to effectively advocate for an end to child marriage as part of the broader campaign for girls' and women's rights.

Governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should:

- **Increase funding for movements, collective action and individual civil society organisations, and ensure it is multiyear and flexible.** This should be for non-governmental and community-based organisations and networks, including those that are women-, girl- and youth-led, and those working on protection, gender equality, gender-based violence and adolescent girl-focused programming. This will ensure that civil society organisations can do collective advocacy, research and programming, and hold governments and other decision-makers to account for their commitments and human rights obligations.
- **Strengthen and diversify the movement to end child marriage to reach diverse communities and stakeholders, and maximise our credibility.** This should include fostering the participation of youth- and women-led organisations, and strengthening their leadership within the movement. It also means reaching out to families, parents, traditional and religious leaders, academics, UN agencies, service providers and governments, and working with them to transform social norms and ensure girls have the future they deserve. This will ensure that communities that practise child marriage are represented in the movement, and that the movement is refreshed and sustained through the inclusion of young leaders, adopts gender-transformative approaches, and works with the widest possible network of allies.
- **Invest in learning and evidence around what works to end child marriage and advance girls' rights and agency.** This means focusing on current challenges like climate crisis, rising gender-based violence and deepening inequalities. This will guide the movement to invest in the programmes and advocacy that are most effective and impactful, which respond to the current political and social context, and challenge gender norms for sustainable change.

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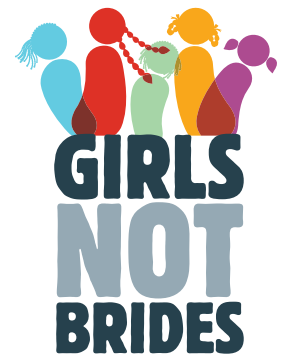
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**THE PATHWAY TO ZERO
CHILD MARRIAGES IS
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KEEP MOVING FORWARDS
UNTIL EVERY GIRL IS FREE
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DECADE OF PROGRESS

TEN YEARS OF GIRLS NOT BRIDES AND THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 1,500 civil society organisations from over 100 countries united by a commitment to work in partnership to end child marriage and enable girls to fulfil their potential.



The Global Partnership
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Seventh Floor
65 Leadenhall Street
London
EC3A 2AD
United Kingdom

☎ 0203 725 5858

📞 0207 603 7811

🌐 www.GirlsNotBrides.org

✉ info@GirlsNotBrides.org

📌 [GirlsNotBrides](https://www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides)

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