



**GIRLS NOT BRIDES**

The Global Partnership  
to End Child Marriage



**STRATEGY 2017-2020**

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# INTRODUCTION

Launched in 2011 by The Elders, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* has grown to over 700 civil society organisations in more than 85 countries,<sup>1</sup> committed to working together to end child marriage and enable girls to fulfil their potential in all aspects of their lives.

The *Girls Not Brides*' strategy represents a roadmap for the Partnership's work together. It does not seek to reflect all the work of individual *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, nor does it describe everything that needs to be done to address child marriage.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it aims to identify specific areas of work where collective action, especially by civil society, will be crucial for further progress in the next four years.

This strategy was developed based on a nine-month consultation process that engaged *Girls Not Brides* members and external stakeholders through focus groups, interviews and online surveys. Over 500 individuals (of which 80% were from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations) from over 70 countries provided detailed input throughout three rounds of consultations. The Board of Trustees formally endorsed the final strategy on behalf of the Partnership in December 2016

The strategy identifies a set of six shared goals which aim to focus our work as a Partnership and maximise our impact for the four-year period 2017-2020. It builds on the ambitious **2014-2016 *Girls Not Brides* strategy** and takes into account developments in our working environment. While we have seen significant progress in efforts to end child marriage over the past few years, the absolute numbers of child brides continue to rise every year due to population growth. It is therefore more important than ever that we work together to achieve the dramatic changes that girls need to see in their lives.

All parts of the Partnership – member organisations, National Partnerships, working groups, and the secretariat – have crucial roles to play in achieving the collective goals outlined in the strategy.

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**This strategy will guide the secretariat's own objectives and work plan over the coming four years. We hope that member organisations, National Partnerships and working groups will also use the strategy to identify opportunities for individual and collective action in their own work plans. For practical suggestions about how to use the strategy in your work, please refer to [this guide](#).**

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers as at January 2017

<sup>2</sup> The *Girls Not Brides* **Theory of Change** provides an outline of the different strategies and approaches needed to address child marriage comprehensively.

## Shifts in focus

There are a number of areas where the external environment for working on child marriage has evolved significantly since our previous strategy was developed, in part due to the hard work of *Girls Not Brides* members and partners. The new strategy recognises this change in context and focuses our next steps on ensuring that progress continues.

Our previous strategy focused on securing global and regional commitments to address child marriage. We have seen significant progress in this area. Therefore our main focus must now shift to making sure that international and regional institutions support the implementation of these commitments (**see Goal B: Global**).

When the previous strategy was developed there were very few nation-wide efforts to address child marriage, so our focus was on encouraging and highlighting national progress. Since then, several countries have adopted or started to put in place national strategies to end child marriage. Our new strategy therefore focuses more deeply on ensuring national governments in high-prevalence countries address child marriage in a comprehensive manner (**see Goal A: Governments**).

One of the main reasons underpinning the creation of *Girls Not Brides* was the recognition of the crucial role of communities in ending child marriage. They have the power to change the local contexts that influence the lives of girls. This strategy more explicitly highlights the importance of community-led approaches and the work of community-based organisations (**see Goal C: Communities**).

While the need for more funding for efforts to end child marriage was highlighted in the previous strategy, this is an area where significant work still remains to be done. In particular, the new strategy highlights the importance of dedicated resources in national and sub-national budgets across all relevant ministries, as well as increased funding for community-based organisations (**see Goal D: Funding**).

Since the development of the previous strategy, we have made significant advances in our understanding

of what a comprehensive response to addressing child marriage involves in different contexts. The development of our Theory of Change on child marriage in 2014 helped to build consensus about what is needed. This new strategy focuses more on ensuring the uptake of learnings and evidence in decision-making, as well as filling research and data gaps (**see Goal E: Learning**).

## Notes on language

Throughout the strategy, we have used the terminology '**address child marriage**,' which includes both the *prevention* of child marriage as well as the *mitigation* of the effects of child marriage (i.e. through the provision of support to girls who are already married or have been married).

The decision to reference **girls** rather than children throughout the strategy is not intended to disregard the impact of child marriage on boys. Rather, it reflects the underlying rationale for the creation of the *Girls Not Brides* Partnership: the disproportionate scale and devastating impact of child marriage on girls' rights, education, health, development, and personal relationships. Focusing on girls highlights the importance of gender inequality in shaping patterns of child marriage and the importance of addressing this. Many of the efforts to address child marriage are, however, relevant to boys as well.

We understand child marriage to include both **formal and informal unions**, in accordance with UNICEF's statistics and the indicator for the Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.3. This recognises the reality that, even in parts of the world where unions are often not formalised (including Latin America), the drivers and impact are similar to more 'official' child marriages.

We have used the terminology '**high-prevalence countries**.' For the context of this strategy, this includes countries with a high *percentage* of women 20-24 years old who were first married or in union before they were 18 years old, as well as countries with a high *absolute number* of women 20-24 years old who were first married or in union before they were 18 years old.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A list of high-prevalence countries can be found on the [Girls Not Brides website](#).

## Overarching themes

During the strategy consultations, four overarching themes emerged that are relevant to all the strategic goals. These themes have been integrated across the goals, and will also help shape the work of the secretariat.<sup>4</sup>



### Accountability

All actors must hold themselves and others accountable to their commitments and obligations related to ending child marriage. In particular, governments and other duty-bearers have a special responsibility to uphold, respect and protect the rights of girls.



### Gender equality

While drivers of child marriage include poverty, insecurity, conflict, tradition and lack of alternatives, the practice is rooted in gender inequality and the low value accorded to girls. To be effective in the long run, efforts to address child marriage must seek to address gender inequality, and ultimately strive to transform gender norms and stereotypes about the role of women and girls in families and communities.



### Engaging all relevant sectors and stakeholders

No single ministry, agency or organisation can adequately tackle all aspects of addressing child marriage. Action is needed in a number of sectors (including health, child protection, justice/rights, education, economic development, etc.) and efforts need to be coordinated across sectors. Likewise, a wide range of stakeholders have a role to play in ending child marriage. We will not succeed without the full engagement of civil society, communities, families, traditional and religious leaders, governments, donors, international organisations, boys and girls.



### Youth

We must ensure meaningful youth participation, and the engagement of affected girls and youth organisations, in the design and delivery of solutions.







# GIRLS NOT BRIDES' VISION AND MISSION

## Vision<sup>5</sup>

**A world without child marriage where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men and are able to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives.**

## Mission<sup>6</sup>

Members of *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* are committed to ending child marriage, a harmful traditional practice that affects millions of children, predominantly girls, every year. As members of *Girls Not Brides*, we are joining together to accelerate efforts to prevent child marriage, and to support girls who are or have been married, all over the world.

*Girls Not Brides* will amplify the voices of girls at risk of child marriage and defend the rights of girls to health, education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we believe that 18 should be the minimum age of marriage for boys and girls.

In working to end child marriage, we believe that social change cannot succeed without community engagement. Members of *Girls Not Brides* will work

together to enhance and strengthen efforts to end child marriage at community, local, national and global levels. Specifically, *Girls Not Brides* aims to:

- Raise awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage by encouraging open, inclusive and informed discussion at the community, local, national and international level
- Facilitate learning and coordination between organisations working to end child marriage
- Mobilise all necessary policy, financial and other support to end child marriage.

**“We will be more effective in achieving our objectives by working together than by working alone.”**



<sup>5</sup> From the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*, developed with 150 members and external experts in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Adopted in 2011 at the founding meeting of *Girls Not Brides*.



# GOAL A: GOVERNMENTS

**Governments take action to address child marriage in their countries, with the active participation of civil society and other stakeholders.**

## OUTCOMES

### A1 Governments take action to address child marriage

All governments have committed to end child marriage by 2030 in the Sustainable Development Goals, and have obligations to address child marriage under international human rights law. Governments of high-prevalence countries have a central role to play in addressing child marriage. They are the key actors who can drive transformative change in the lives of large numbers of girls.

To be effective, government action on child marriage must be holistic, multi-sectoral, girl-centred, evidence-based, and rights-based. Governments need to establish supportive legal and policy frameworks, implement programmes at scale and ensure that girls have access to

crucial services related to education, health, and justice.

Dedicated national strategies to end child marriage provide an important framework for government action. They should be created and implemented with the active participation of all relevant ministries. To be effective, these strategies must also be developed and implemented in cooperation with key stakeholders (including civil society, communities, youth, and affected girls). In countries where the needs of girls are already a national priority, integrating a focus on child marriage into existing strategies, plans and programmes may be more productive than creating a new, separate strategy.

### A2 All relevant ministries take action to address child marriage

Governments must integrate a focus on addressing child marriage into the work plans and budgets of relevant ministries and departments (including in gender, education, health, child protection, social protection,

water and sanitation, justice, and transportation) and ensure cross-governmental coordination. Sub-national and local governments also have a crucial role to play in reaching at-risk and married girls.

### A3 Civil society organisations are key partners to government efforts

It is the responsibility of governments to engage with civil society in the development and implementation of national responses to child marriage. To become effective partners, civil society organisations at all levels must work together and become involved

in these processes. They must also hold their governments accountable to their commitments. National-level coordination among civil society organisations will be critical to ensure governments make and implement commitments.



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By working together at the national level, whether through official *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships or other mechanisms for collaboration, *Girls Not Brides* members will: advocate for effective responses; ensure accountability; share lessons-learned, evidence and data; and, as appropriate, implement national strategies and programmes that complement government efforts. All parts of the Partnership will also play a role in mobilising and engaging with donors and multilaterals (including the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage) to support action by national governments.



# GOAL B: GLOBAL

The global community champions and supports efforts to address child marriage.

## OUTCOMES

### **B1** International and regional actors support implementation of commitments

Since *Girls Not Brides* was launched in 2011, remarkable progress has been made at international and regional levels in securing government commitments to address child marriage. These include Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which commits all governments to ending child marriage by 2030, as well as regional commitments at the African Union and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Governments also have significant obligations to address child marriage under international human rights law.

While the global and regional frameworks can be strengthened and supplemented, we need to ensure that governments act upon these existing commitments

and obligations. International and regional actors (including international organisations, regional mechanisms, development partners, and other global partnerships) have an important role to play at the global, regional and country levels. They must hold governments accountable to their commitments and support them to fully implement effective child marriage strategies, policies, and programmes.

There are also regions where new or additional commitments may be needed to spur action to end child marriage (such as in Latin America, which includes a number of high-prevalence countries but where the issue is not well recognised).

### **B2** Related sectors take action to address child marriage

We know that child marriage is a barrier to achieving a range of development goals, such as those related to education, justice, empowerment, health, and humanitarian aid. Therefore, international

organisations, partnerships, and initiatives that are tackling these issues need to integrate a focus on addressing child marriage into their work.

### **B3** The global community recognises child marriage as a priority issue

Ending child marriage will not happen overnight and requires ongoing action by multiple actors. The media, policy-makers and thought-leaders need to sustain and increase their attention on child marriage as a priority issue. New and influential champions from diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise can help keep

the issue on the agenda. To ensure global attention supports constructive action, the discourse around child marriage needs nuance. It needs to reflect local realities and contexts, and seek to transform gender norms and stereotypes.



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To achieve this goal, *Girls Not Brides* will call on international and regional mechanisms to hold all relevant actors accountable for commitments made, and support governments in their implementation. In some parts of the world, member organisations will work together to encourage new commitments from key regional institutions. We will engage with relevant institutions working in related sectors to help build commitment and effective links at all levels. *Girls Not Brides* members will also work to ensure that ending child marriage remains a priority issue at the international and regional levels by recruiting new champions, bringing attention to child marriage in the media, and highlighting the issue in a variety of international and regional platforms.



# GOAL C: COMMUNITIES

Efforts to engage communities, families and girls are supported and highlighted.

## OUTCOMES

### C1 Community-level efforts are supported

To end child marriage, we ultimately need a transformation of attitudes, mindsets and norms within communities and families. At-risk and affected girls must be at the centre of our efforts and engaged as agents of change. However, international, regional and national efforts are often not grounded in the realities of communities. Policy-makers and programme designers need to support community-level efforts to address child marriage.

It is important that all actors support and highlight community-led efforts by local advocates and community-based organisations who work with key stakeholders within the community, such as traditional and religious leaders, parents and families, teachers, youth, and men and boys. Local government (including police and child protection authorities) should also be supported in their efforts to address child marriage.

### C2 Community-based organisations have increased capacity

Community-based civil society organisations (grassroots organisations) have a central role to play in addressing child marriage. They have the deep experience and understanding of the local contexts in which child marriage occurs, and can ensure that the development and implementation of initiatives at the national and international levels are rooted in reality. They also have a crucial role in holding governments accountable to their commitments.

Too often, these frontline actors lack the capacity (including the tools, knowledge, funding and other resources) to be most effective in their work. Community-based organisations must be empowered and have increased capacity to lead change in their communities, working with key stakeholders, and implementing evidence-based approaches.

### C3 Community voices are valued

Despite their deep knowledge of child marriage and effective solutions in their local context, community voices and perspectives are often not heard, included or valued at the local, national and global levels. It is

important that decision-makers listen to and reflect these views, including to inform strategies, policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels.



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*Girls Not Brides* will support and encourage community-based actors, and help remove obstacles to their work. Approximately 20% of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations work exclusively at the community level, implementing programmes and initiatives, and holding officials to account. These members have a wealth of information and experience to share about promising approaches, how change happens at a community level, the specific contexts in which they work, and what will make their organisations more effective. Many national and international member organisations directly implement initiatives at the community level, often in cooperation with local civil society organisations. All parts of the Partnership have a responsibility to amplify the voices of community-based organisations with decision-makers, to support and develop their capacity, and enable them to share data, evidence and lessons-learned.



# GOAL D: FUNDING

**More sustainable funding is available from a diverse range of sources, particularly for community-based organisations.**

## OUTCOMES

### **D1 Existing and new donors increase their funding**

Significant change requires adequate, long-term, sustainable resources for effective programmes and interventions. While funding for addressing child marriage has increased in recent years, the level available is insufficient to address the problem at scale. Current donors to the field must be encouraged to continue and, if possible, increase their contributions. At the same time, new donors from private and public spheres must be engaged. Public and parliamentary engagement in current and potential donor countries will also be important, especially in light of declining aid budgets and competing priorities.

Dedicated funding for efforts to end child marriage will be crucial. However, leveraging large funding streams focused on related issues where child marriage is a barrier to progress (such as education or maternal health) can also have a huge impact. It will therefore be important for agencies, programmes and funds in related sectors to integrate a focus on ending child marriage in their programming, indicators and funding mechanisms. Aid agencies of donor governments and international NGOs should ensure that child marriage is addressed through programming and funding in all areas of work where child marriage is a barrier to progress.

### **D2 Civil society can access funding**

Civil society organisations, especially those working at the community level, play a critical role. However, they often face significant difficulties in accessing the funding they need, particularly youth organisations and those working on women's rights and gender

inequality. We need to ensure that funding is available to support high-quality programmes of community-based organisations, and that these groups have the skills and capacity to access these funds.

### **D3 Governments of high-prevalence countries allocate funding**

A sustainable, large-scale response to child marriage will also require sufficient domestic financial investments from the governments of high-prevalence countries. It is therefore critical that governmental

efforts to address child marriage are fully funded in the budgets of all relevant ministries. Resources must also be made available to support efforts to address child marriage at the district and local levels.



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*Girls Not Brides* will work to: connect members (particularly community-based organisations) to funding opportunities; advocate for new and increased funding with governments and private donors; and build the public support that makes bilateral funding possible. National Partnerships and members in high-prevalence countries will play a critical role in ensuring that government budgets across all relevant ministries include a focus on addressing child marriage. Community-based members will hold governments accountable for ensuring that funding filters down to the local level. Members will help their funders understand how child marriage is interlinked with other development and human rights priorities and objectives.



# GOAL E: LEARNING

Efforts to address child marriage are based on evidence.

## OUTCOMES

### E1 New data and evidence are generated and inform decision-making

There are still some significant research and data gaps in our understanding of child marriage, and its drivers and consequences in different contexts, including around the role of social norms and changing traditions. Both qualitative and quantitative research are needed to fill these gaps, and we need to better understand the specificities of sub-national and local contexts.

Important advances have been made in understanding what it will take to address child marriage. However, we still need more evidence about which approaches and programmes are effective, which do not work, and

how to scale-up and adapt positive examples to other contexts.

This evidence comes in many forms, including evaluated projects, lessons-learned, qualitative and quantitative research, case studies, and ongoing discussions among practitioners. We can also learn from programmes and policies in other development sectors. We need to ensure that those responsible for developing and funding policies and programmes are aware of new evidence and lessons-learned, and are using it to inform their decisions.

### E2 The collective expertise of civil society drives the global discourse

With their understanding of the realities of child marriage in different contexts, civil society organisations are uniquely placed to shape global, regional, and national discussions and decisions on child marriage.

This will help ensure that efforts to address child marriage remain focused on effective solutions, and tackle gender inequality and other underlying factors that drive child marriage.



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As a global civil society partnership, *Girls Not Brides* will not conduct research directly. Rather, we will focus on ensuring that new and existing research, evidence and lessons-learned are shared widely, within and beyond the Partnership. In particular, we will focus on solutions to address child marriage, and new insights coming from under-represented stakeholders. Members will share their experiences, learn directly from one another, and collaborate to develop a common understanding of promising approaches. With the deep collective expertise of members on child marriage, the *Girls Not Brides* Partnership will act as a thought-leader on the issue, developing materials to shape the global discourse and influence decision-making. We will also pay special attention to highlighting critical gaps in knowledge and encouraging partners to fill these gaps.



# GOAL F: PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership continues to collaborate, diversify and strengthen.

## OUTCOMES

### F1 *Girls Not Brides* members have greater impact by working together

*Girls Not Brides* members are at the forefront of efforts to end child marriage around the world. Our experience as a global partnership over the past five years has shown that we are stronger when we collaborate. Members will increase their impact by working together and with other stakeholders both on time-bound opportunities (e.g. to mark the

International Day of the Girl) and through more sustained and organised working groups (e.g. a Youth Advocacy Group). In many countries, National Partnerships provide a key organising mechanism to strengthen the national collaboration of members, and enable them to speak with one voice in interactions with their governments.

### F2 *Girls Not Brides* members have increased capacity

Critical gaps exist in the capacity of members to effectively address child marriage. In addition, many members operate in countries where civil society faces restrictions or where efforts to achieve gender equality are met with backlash. Members have indicated the need for increased capacity to conduct successful advocacy, develop and deliver effective programmes, fundraise, hold

government accountable, use data and evidence, work collaboratively, communicate with powerful messages, and integrate child marriage into the work of related sectors. Building the capacity of key parts of the membership and National Partnerships – including through learning from one another – will help ensure that all members feel empowered, engaged, and encouraged by a sense of global solidarity.

### F3 There is increased diversity in the Partnership

*Girls Not Brides* is already diverse, both in terms of where members work and the approaches they use to tackle child marriage. However, the Partnership can be further strengthened by bringing in new and diverse members,

particularly from under-represented regions, sectors, and constituencies. In particular, there are still key gaps in membership from Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, and South East/East Asia and the Pacific.

### F4 *Girls Not Brides* is inclusive and reflects the voices of those most affected

We need to continue to ensure that our governance structures remain fit-for-purpose, and that the voices of members, National Partnerships, as well as of girls

themselves, are reflected in *Girls Not Brides*' work and decision-making.



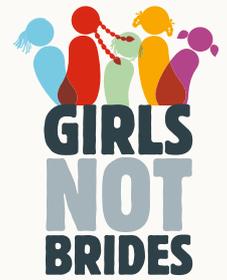
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All parts of the Partnership have a role to play in sustaining and strengthening *Girls Not Brides*. Members, National Partnerships, working groups and the secretariat will continue to: share knowledge about programmes and local, national, regional and global developments; collaborate on advocacy, programmes and other initiatives at the national, regional or international levels; spread the word about child marriage and the Partnership; and recommend other organisations for membership. All parts of the Partnership have a role to play in capacity-building, including by proactively supporting other members and sharing their own expertise.

'WE WILL BE  
MORE EFFECTIVE  
IN ACHIEVING  
OUR OBJECTIVES  
BY WORKING  
TOGETHER THAN  
BY WORKING  
ALONE.'

## STRATEGY 2017-2020

*Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership of civil society organisations from around the world committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential.



The Global Partnership  
to End Child Marriage

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