

The impact of economic empowerment on child marriage: Evidence & insights in practice



Based on the evidence, the WHO recommends implementing interventions to improve girls' economic empowerment and expand their alternatives to marriage, including:

- Financial literacy
- Access to savings
- Employment skills & prospects



Check out the evidence behind this recommendation in our [brief](#).



Why focus on economic empowerment & child marriage?

Poverty and a lack of income-generating opportunities for girls and young women drive child marriage in many contexts. Economic empowerment interventions support girls' and adolescents' ability to make and act on decisions around the control and allocation of resources. They can reduce child marriage at scale and over short time periods.

Some interventions act at the household level to reduce the financial pressures that drive child marriage. Others focus directly on adolescent girls – they can work through three pathways:



Enhance girls' knowledge, skills & health through **economic education** & life skills or vocational training.



Increase adolescent girls' **autonomy** & value in the household, making work a viable option.



Facilitate employment **opportunities** as an alternative to marriage.



Evidence-based strategies to improve economic empowerment & child marriage outcomes

1. Girl-focused interventions to build girls' skills:

- Begin interventions in early adolescence & tailor to specific drivers of child marriage & opportunity structures for older adolescent girls.
- Link livelihood & economic empowerment with support for girls' formal & informal education.
- Include ever-married & parenting girls, and those affected by conflict & crisis; consider the unpaid domestic, care & agricultural work they do, and limits to their movement & financial independence.
- Support adolescent girls' entrepreneurial skills & self-employment to avoid insecure, low-paid roles.
- Promote youth savings & loan associations, provide small grants & tailored start-up kits, and promote referrals & partnerships with livelihood opportunities.
- Use age-appropriate indicators of success beyond increased employment & income – school retention, critical awareness, self-efficacy, support networks, saving & decision-making power.

2. Gender-transformative household & community-level interventions to address the social norms that limit opportunities for girls.

- Engage communities in reflecting on & transforming the gender norms that limit girls' education, training & economic opportunities.
- Use gender analysis to identify & mitigate risks around non-traditional vocational training for girls; cash transfers & income-generating initiatives in dowry contexts; climate-related shocks & humanitarian assistance.
- Address workplace discrimination, focusing on girls who are married, parenting, LGBTQIA+, have disabilities or are displaced/refugees.
- Support displaced/refugee girls & families to navigate legal & structural barriers to education & vocational opportunities.

3. Structural-level initiatives to improve girls' & women's economic security, independence & equality

- Increase female leadership positions & visibility of economic opportunities for adolescent girls, as role models are powerful drivers of change.
- Reduce & redistribute care work through efficient infrastructure & service delivery; reward care work with secure & well-paid employment.
- Enact legislative & policy safeguards to support girls & women – like paid statutory & parental leave.
- Ensure social protection programmes include girls at risk (like orphans) & newly married adult couples, are provided to female heads of household & mitigate against shocks.
- Include education-dependent cash transfers in social protection systems, linked with gender-transformative components.
- Remove legal & structural barriers to displaced & refugee girls' accessing education & employment, including strengthened civil registration systems.
- Promote greener, equitable economic growth & invest in poverty alleviation, social justice, education and climate & crisis resilience.



Some practical tools:

- [Adolescent empowerment at scale: Successes and challenges of an evidence-based approach to young women's programming in Africa.](#)
- [The audacity to disrupt: An introduction to feminist macro-level economics.](#)
- [Youth-led labor market assessment framework and guide.](#)
- [The care-responsiveness barometer.](#)
- [How can we bring about meaningful change for women by investing differently in small enterprises?](#)
- [A toolkit on paid and unpaid care work: From 3Rs to 5rs.](#)



Working on child marriage & economic empowerment?

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