



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

CHILD MARRIAGE IN CONFLICT- AND CRISIS- AFFECTED SETTINGS

Evidence and practice

October 2024





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Key terms

“Adolescent” refers to an individual in the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from age 10 to 19 years.^a The term “adolescent girls” refers to girls at this life stage, in all their diversity. It is used in this report to make visible the unique needs and evolving capacities of this often-overlooked group.

“Child marriage” refers to all forms of child, early and forced marriage and unions – formal and informal – where at least one party is below age 18.

“Child marriage prevalence” is the percentage of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 18.

“Community/place-based” refers to place-based and community-led organisations and/or initiatives. Place-based actors can refer to a range of actors like women’s rights organisations, women-led organisations, civil society organisations and national organisations working in partnership and collaboratively in a defined geographical location with shared accountability for consensus-built outcomes and impacts. Community-led implies that the vision for change is defined by the community, with inclusive local leadership, shared decision-making and control over the initiative’s operational aspects and resources.¹

“Conflict- and crisis-affected settings” refers broadly to a range of settings, including armed conflicts, all phases of humanitarian crisis – acute, protracted or complex – or compounding crises or polycrisis composed of public health, climate crises and conflicts.

“Ever-married” refers to individuals who are married, in a union, separated, divorced or widowed.

“Gender-transformative approaches” address the root causes of gender inequality and child marriage. They do this through rights-based, comprehensive action to rebalance power, resources, systems and services at every level, so that all groups who have been marginalised because of their gender can enjoy equal status with boys and men.

“Patriarchal systems” are systems in which men hold positions of dominance and privilege over children, adolescents and women in all their diversity. This social stratification and power imbalance along gender lines may apply to social, economic, political and legal systems. Such systems perpetuate gender inequality.

Acronyms

CBPF – Country-Based Pooled Funds

CSE – Comprehensive sexuality education

GBV – Gender-based violence

INGO – International non-governmental organisation

SRHR – Sexual and reproductive health and rights

WLO – Women-led organisation

WRO – Women’s rights organisation

a. This is the definition used by the [World Health Organisation](#).



Executive summary

Executive summary

Child marriage is a global issue. It is rooted in gender inequality and affects millions of girls and women around the world. Its drivers – including poverty, social norms, insecurity and lack of education – vary by context, and are exacerbated by conflict and crisis.

Given the scale and complexity of child marriage and its consequences, a coordinated, adequately funded, community-based response from state- and non-state actors is needed across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. Commitment to ending the practice is higher than ever, while evidence on how to end it in contexts affected by conflict and fragility is nascent but growing.

What this report is, and who it is for

In this report, you will find:

- An exploration of the **causes and consequences** of child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, drawing on recent evidence.
- Examples of **promising research and practice** within and across key sectors.
- **Recommendations** to better equip local, national and international actors to prevent and respond to child marriage in these settings.
- **Practical tools** to support the implementation of evidence-based action.

This report is designed to support anyone working to prevent and respond to child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, and advocates for a fundamental shift in how we approach child marriage programming in these contexts.

It builds on previous thematic briefs and key evidence reviews around child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.^b It mainly draws on evidence and research from 2020 onwards, and on resources focused on some form or stage of conflict or crisis, although it also refers to evidence from non-conflict settings, where there is potential for learning to be applied in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.

Where relevant, and where there is not enough evidence on child marriage specifically, the report also draws on evidence relating to but not directly focused on child marriage – like the prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian settings – to highlight potential opportunities for applying this evidence in relation to child marriage prevention and response.

This evidence is supported by case studies from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations and allies from Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. These share practical examples of how practitioners and researchers have responded to the evidence and needs in different contexts. A collection of practical tools – organised by thematic area – is intended to support practitioners and researchers to take evidence-based action.

b. Previous briefs include: *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, [Child marriage in humanitarian contexts](#); *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, [Child marriage within the global humanitarian system](#), based on the scoping review by Jay, H.; The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK), 2022, [Research Spotlight: 'Child marriage in humanitarian settings' and 'challenging gender norms to end child marriage'](#); *Girls Not Brides* and UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage; The CRANK, 2023, [Evidence Review: Child marriage interventions and research from 2020 to 2022](#), prepared by Harrison, A., *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage; The CRANK, 2023, [Addressing child marriage and supporting married girls in conflict- and crisis-affected settings](#); *Girls Not Brides* and UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage; and *Girls Not Brides*, 2023, [Preventing conflict-related sexual violence in conflict is possible and requires urgent action](#).

Why focus on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

In focus: Child marriage is concentrated in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

9 OUT OF 10 COUNTRIES

with the highest child marriage prevalence are experiencing humanitarian crises.²



Child marriage prevalence is almost

2X THE GLOBAL AVERAGE

in settings experiencing some form of fragility.³



OVER 1 IN 3 GIRLS

in contexts considered fragile are married before age 18.⁴

- 1 Risk factors for child marriage increase significantly in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.** In states considered fragile, average child marriage prevalence is 35%, compared to 19% globally.⁵ This is because core drivers of child marriage and GBV more broadly – including social norms that uphold patriarchal systems and gender inequality – are exacerbated by stress and uncertainty. They are compounded by the breakdown of individual, formal and customary support systems.⁶
- 2 Adolescent girls are at increased risk of child marriage across different forms of crisis, including conflict, climate emergencies, displacement, pandemics and acute economic and food insecurity.**⁷ Where these forms of crisis overlap, or where girls face multiple intersecting forms of marginalisation – for example, refugee girls with a disability – risks of child marriage increase further, and girls are less likely to access support once married.
- 3 Child marriage is connected with many other thematic areas and rights, including gender inequality, poor educational access and outcomes, poor livelihood opportunities, limited access to health rights and services, and poor access to social protection.**⁸ Despite this interconnectedness, child marriage prevention is rarely adequately prioritised within humanitarian or crisis response systems, and the unique and specific needs of girls and adolescents who are – or have been – married (ever-married girls), pregnant and parenting are often unrecognised and unmet.

Solutions: Drawing from the evidence base

There is a nascent but growing body of evidence on what does and does not work to prevent and respond to child marriage across different contexts and sectors.



For income and economic strengthening interventions:

- **Cash-based support has the potential to significantly reduce the risks of child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, particularly if unrestricted, recurrent, and/or delivered alongside broader social and economic empowerment efforts.** Rigorous evaluations of cash-based interventions would build understanding of what works, who is best placed to receive transfers, and counter (real/perceived) risks around cash disbursements.
- **Girls value opportunities to develop their earning potential, and their sense of having employment opportunities can act as a protective factor against child marriage and early pregnancy, including in settings considered fragile.** More cross-sectoral partnerships are needed with organisations working on skills- or economic rights-focused interventions, to improve targeting of girls at risk of marriage and ever-married girls.
- **There is need to counter the “feminisation of poverty”⁹ and to engage with the structural, supply-side factors that limit girls’ and women’s opportunities and restrict them to (illegal) insecure, low-paid roles where they are put at risk of violence, abuse and conflict- and crisis-driven insecurity.**



For education and life skills interventions:

- **Supporting girls’ access to quality education – whether formal or informal, online or in person – offers significant protection against child marriage in emergency settings, especially at secondary level.** Addressing the practical barriers to attending school may be a critical and relatively straightforward step towards addressing child marriage in emergencies.
- **More research into the effectiveness of supporting girls’ schooling through cash and in-kind transfers in conflict- and crisis-affected settings is needed.** Education-tied conditional cash transfers may not be enough to sustain reductions in child marriage without additional community/place-based and/or multilevel programme components.
- **Structural barriers can drive early school leaving, even where girls and families value education.** This needs to be addressed through engagement with supply-side factors to improve access and quality in education, and through improved coordination between the education and protection sectors as part of education-focused humanitarian, development and peace nexus programming.



For interventions focused on girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and mental health:

- **SRHR interventions are most effective when paired with one or more norms-based or economic support-focused interventions.** There is growing positive evidence of flexible, tailored, creative approaches to providing SRHR services to girls in humanitarian settings.
- **Addressing taboos and awkwardness around SRHR – and sexuality specifically – is essential.** Further study is also needed on the positive potential of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to address child marriage when integrated into formal and out-of-school education interventions in humanitarian settings.
- **Further research is needed to understand the links between child marriage and mental health; this research should engage communities and individuals with direct experience of child marriage in research design.** Monitoring of girls' mental health and how this shifts by context and intervention could be built into programme monitoring.
- **There is emergent evidence on the importance of building and facilitating girls' peer networks as a way to support their overall mental health,** particularly in displacement settings.



For girl-centred intervention and empowerment approaches:

- **Safe spaces can play a critical role for girls in conflict- and crisis-affected settings – for building peer support networks and improving girls' access to services (particularly around GBV), life skills development opportunities and CSE,** and providing opportunities for humanitarian actors to better understand girls' needs, challenges and agency.
- **Ever-married girls and young mothers may benefit from having their own, separate groups and tailored activities and curricula,** in addition to the involvement of mothers-in-law within these spaces where girls feel this would be helpful.
- **Peer support-focused activities may be more effective in improving the health and empowerment of (ever-married) girls,** and more likely to be sustained if implemented as part of a multi-sectoral, rights-based, contextually grounded programme, including norms-based interventions and economic support.



For interventions to change discriminatory gender and social norms:

- **Reducing GBV – including child marriage – and transforming gender inequitable attitudes is possible in conflict-affected communities over time, despite the often heightened harmful norms in these settings.** Engaging families and whole communities – including women leaders and women-led movements – as part of a multi-component, longer-term investment approach can reduce the prevalence and desirability of child marriage.^c

c. See also, Murphy, M., Hess, T., Casey, J., and Minchey, H., [What works to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian crisis: Synthesis brief](#). While not specifically crisis-focused, [Tostan](#) (including its [Community Capacity Building Programme](#)) also offers insights into how programmes can work in effective partnership with communities to address a broad range of issues, including child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and education.

- **Further research is needed on how to engage and sustain different family members** – including husbands and partners – and to assess long-term impact, drawing on recent frameworks for how to engage boys and men without decentring the needs of girls and women.
- **Engagement with social norms in conflict- and crisis-affected settings should be based on a nuanced understanding of how these norms manifested before the crisis started**, and the need for social norms change interventions to be supported by investment in gender-transformative engagement with the structural and institutional drivers of child marriage.



For interventions focused on laws and marriage/birth registration policies:

- **Laws alone cannot end child marriage, but they are an important foundation.** Laws on child marriage should be accompanied by investment in gender-equitable public services, employment opportunities, conflict and crisis resilience and/or recovery, and the transformation of discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours.¹⁰
- **Interventions that clarify local legal, health and other registration systems, and that provide accompaniment in navigating those processes, may help to prevent child marriage and support ever-married girls and their children, particularly in displacement settings or protracted crises.** Efforts to build girls' and families' understanding of their legal rights and ability to navigate local systems and processes should be accompanied by multi-sector training on gender justice and safe implementation.
- **Girls' and women's voices and needs are underrepresented in national and international legal and policy frameworks for addressing the climate crisis.** Intentional, coordinated effort is needed to ensure girls and women are meaningfully engaged and represented in all aspects of climate-related decision-making processes, policy and legislation.



For interventions involving women's rights organisations and movements:

- **There is significant evidence on the influential role women's rights organisations (WROs) and feminist movements play in pushing for and achieving tangible progress towards gender equality.** More research is needed to understand the role played by WROs with regards to child marriage.
- **WROs and women-led organisations (WLOs) are chronically underfunded and underrepresented in development and humanitarian work.** This is despite global commitments to localisation, and a growing body of guidance, recommendations and promising practice examples on how to meaningfully engage WROs and WLOs as core humanitarian and development actors.

Recommendations: Evidence-based actions for all actors

Drawing on the evidence, we call for:

- **Urgent, coordinated action at all levels** to better understand, recognise and respond to the **needs of girls and adolescent girls** – unmarried and ever-married – to prevent and respond to child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.
- Interventions that take a **girl-centred** and **gender-transformative** approach.
- Approaches that amplify **community/place-based expertise** and the expertise of civil society organisations, frontline women's rights and feminist organisations, and child rights organisations.

Here are **six actions** for UN agencies & cluster leads, governments, donors, civil society and researchers to address child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings:

- 1 Integrate child marriage prevention and response as a priority across all actors and sectors within the humanitarian architecture.** Recognise it as a complex issue requiring change across sectors and levels. Support this with funded efforts to improve cross-sector coordination, collaboration and monitoring at all levels, with governments positioned to drive and coordinate change at the national and sub-national levels.
- 2 Address the structural and institutional barriers that impact the provision of key systems and services** – including girls' access to education and SRHR – as part of a political commitment to addressing the structural drivers of child marriage, and rights of refugees and displaced persons to access critical services.
- 3 Design, deliver and evaluate multi-sector, multi-component interventions** that recognise the huge and catalytic potential of engaging in key sectors – like education – to prevent and respond to child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.
- 4 Increase funding to and integration of girl-centred and – where possible – girl-designed interventions.** Engage at-risk and ever-married, pregnant and parenting girls and adolescents, and work in collaboration with families and communities to build support and trust on key issues, including SRHR.
- 5 Commit to multi-year funding for gender-transformative interventions and to pilot promising approaches, including robust measurement, evaluation and learning** to build the evidence base. This commitment to building the evidence base should be integrated across all child marriage interventions – including community/place-based and community-led (with appropriate adaptation) interventions – to ensure ongoing learning and appropriate scaling of promising interventions in different contexts.
- 6 Increase funding to women-led and community/place-based organisations.** Integrate these organisations as equitable partners – and as thematic and context experts and funding recipients – from the design phase of interventions and within key national and international decision-making fora.



Setting the scene

Setting the scene: Child marriage in conflict- and crisis- affected settings

Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and the intersecting, discriminatory norms that devalue girls' gender and life stage. It is driven by poverty, insecurity and lack of education, all of which are exacerbated by conflict and crisis. The growing prevalence of humanitarian challenges – protracted conflicts, extreme weather events, population displacement, rapid urbanisation, increasing inequality – is severely affecting trends towards ending child marriage. In many contexts, progress is under threat.

A complex set of factors are at play. For example, countries in the Global South – many of which already have high child marriage prevalence – are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. This puts girls at increased risk of child marriage and GBV as stresses on existing drivers increase. More frequent and devastating droughts, floods, heatwaves and hurricanes can expose families to further poverty, food and housing insecurity. Recent health-related crises, including COVID-19, have had an acute and long-lasting impact on child marriage prevalence, with school closures and increased economic stress adding new pressures.

Evidence on how to end child marriage and support ever-married girls in conflict- and crisis-affected settings is nascent, but growing. Across all forms of conflict and crisis, girls face multiple, intersecting marginalisations likely to increase the risk of child marriage. The response requires coordinated, adequately funded, community-based action from state- and non-state actors across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, in close collaboration with host communities and frontline women-led organisations.

In this section, you will find:

- Evidence of the **causes and consequences** of child marriage in different conflict- and crisis-affected settings.
-

In focus: Progress on child marriage is threatened by growing and protracted crises

✓ Progress needs to happen faster:

69 MILLION

child marriages averted over the last 25 years.¹¹



Progress needs to be

20 X FASTER

to achieve the SDGs.¹²



✓ Progress is uneven & threatened by conflict & crisis:

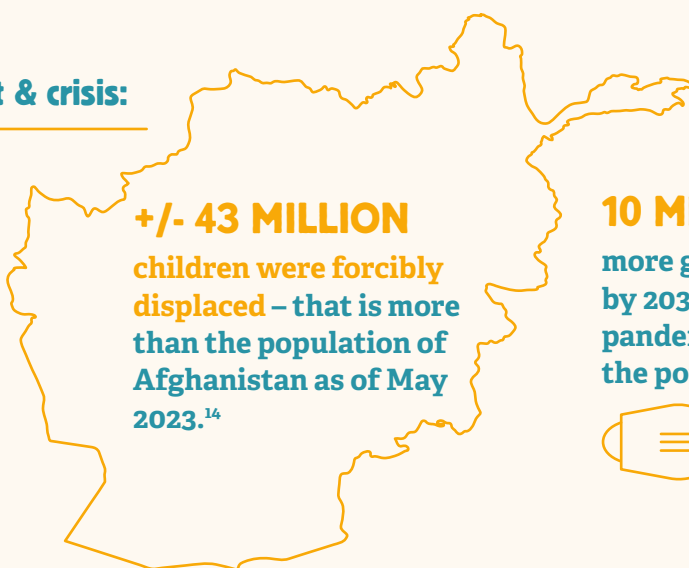
3 X MORE

marriages averted among girls from the richest households than from the poorest over 1997-2022.¹³



+/- 43 MILLION

children were forcibly displaced – that is more than the population of Afghanistan as of May 2023.¹⁴



10 MILLION

more girls expected to marry by 2030 due to the COVID-19 pandemic – that is more than the population of Hungary.¹⁵



10 X INCREASE

in conflict-related fatalities

= **7%¹⁶ INCREASE** in child marriage.



A 10% CHANGE IN RAINFALL

due to climate change

= **1%¹⁷ INCREASE** in child marriage.



More funding is needed to meet the necessary scale & urgency of response:



LESS THAN 1%

of humanitarian assistance spent on GBV in humanitarian settings.¹⁸

With the growing prevalence of protracted conflicts, extreme weather events, population displacement,¹⁹ rapid urbanisation and increasing inequality, trends towards ending child marriage are under threat.

Funding for GBV in humanitarian settings remains low, at an estimated 0.83% of overall humanitarian assistance in 2021.²⁰

Funding for child marriage interventions can also fall within protection cluster spend in humanitarian contexts. Funding for child protection has increased in recent years, but needs have increased faster, and it is not clear how much is spent on child marriage prevention and response specifically.²¹

Ending child marriage will require a fundamental shift in how national, regional and international actors approach, respond to and allocate funding around disasters and emergencies across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.^d

In conflict-affected settings, adolescent girls are at greater risk of child marriage and GBV due to intersecting discriminatory norms that devalue their gender, age and life stage.

In the face of displacement and conflict, families – and sometimes girls – can see child marriage as a way to respond to economic uncertainty, or as protection from the increased risk of violence, including in the family home. Child marriage and sexual violence is often used by armed groups to achieve military or political objectives, or as a cover for human trafficking.²²

The risks associated with child marriage globally are becoming increasingly acute as conflict and crises become more protracted and the number of people forcibly displaced grows. Over 110 million people were forcibly displaced as of May 2023. This is double the 2013 figure. Children make up 40% of those displaced.²³

Of those forcibly displaced, 76% are hosted by low- and middle-income countries, many of which already faced significant social and economic resource constraints.²⁴ In many settings, displacement is compounded with rapid urbanisation²⁵ and/or the widespread destruction of critical service-related infrastructure.²⁶ This further disrupts formal and informal systems that protect against child marriage, and weakens understanding of how best to prevent and respond to child marriage in these contexts.

d. Following on from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is intended to “ensure strong cooperation, collaboration and coordination between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts at the national level to ensure collective outcomes on the basis of joined-up, coherent, complementary and risk-informed analysis, planning and action.” See, for example, the [UNDP web pages](#).

The climate crisis disproportionately impacts countries in the Global South, many of which already have high child marriage prevalence.²⁷

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that 1.5 degrees of global heating will force millions of people into extreme poverty, most severely in countries across Africa and South Asia, two regions with the highest global prevalence of child marriage.²⁸ More frequent and devastating droughts, floods, heatwaves and hurricanes put families at risk of further poverty, food and housing insecurity, and conflict, and limit access to essential services.



In context: Increased risk of child marriage during heat events in Bangladesh

A 2022 study on the impact of extreme weather events on GBV in Bangladesh highlights how girls and women from ages 11 to 23 are at an increased risk of marrying the year of or after moderate to severe heatwaves. In heatwaves lasting over 15 days, nearly **one in four girls and women** in this age group are likely to marry, compared to just over **one in ten (13%)** in years with moderate or no heatwaves.²⁹

The evidence from Bangladesh (see “in context” box) correlates with a 2024 CEDAW Committee report, which highlights how climate change may increase child marriage prevalence through amplifying economic stress for families who turn to child marriage as a coping mechanism, and through disrupting education systems.³⁰

A 2024 scoping review on the relationship between climate and environmental crises and child marriage found a mixed picture on the relationship between the two, finding extreme weather events may increase the prevalence of child marriage in contexts with bride price practices, but decrease them in contexts where dowry payments are commonplace.³¹



Despite growing evidence on the links between extreme weather patterns and increased child marriage prevalence, comparatively little is known about this relationship as compared to other forms of crisis.³²

Recent health-related crises – including Ebola and COVID-19 – have had an acute and long-lasting impact on child marriage prevalence, and on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of married girls.³³

School closures, economic stress, service disruptions and early pregnancy all increased girls' risk of child marriage, and restricted married girls' access to services and support networks, and ability to exercise their rights.

Research conducted in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan and Palestine revealed how a majority of low- and middle-income adolescents continued to face significant barriers to returning to school and engaging with peers and support networks. They also experienced ongoing risks of verbal and physical violence due to increased levels of household stress, even after initial COVID-19 outbreaks.³⁴

While the links between child marriage and acquiring diseases like HIV/AIDS are not clear-cut, the risk factors facing adolescent girls are often the same, and not aided by these issues often being addressed separately.³⁵

Across all forms of conflict and crisis, girls facing multiple, intersecting marginalisations are likely at increased risk of child marriage, or of being excluded from key services and decision-making processes as wives or mothers.

Globally, gains made in reducing child marriage have primarily benefited girls from the richest families: from 1997 to 2022, three times more marriages were averted among girls from the richest households than those from the poorest households.³⁶

There has been limited research into the risks facing girls with disabilities in relation to child marriage, particularly in fragile settings, but recent evidence suggests in states experiencing fragility, women with disabilities are more likely to report having been married before age 18.³⁷

Almost nothing is known about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) children and adolescents around child marriage, but there is evidence that the risk of physical, sexual and emotional violence may be higher for LGBTQ women who are “masculine presenting” and therefore more visibly non-conforming to heteronormative gender roles – including the risk of family violence related to expectations of marriage.³⁸



More evidence is needed on what gender-transformative service provision and programming look like, and on the specific challenges that exist for girls with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ girls, ever-married girls, and girls facing other/multiple forms of marginalisation in different geographies and forms of emergency.

Preventing and responding to child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings will require action across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, in close collaboration with host communities and frontline women-led organisations.

Consensus is often lacking on what “empowered” is and how it is measured to reflect lived realities rather than responding to donor reporting requirements.³⁹ More meaningful integration of child marriage considerations is needed within and across core humanitarian policies, governance documents and coalitions that promote gender equality and empowerment, including the [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education](#), [Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming](#), the [Minimum Initial Service Package for Sexual and Reproductive Health](#), the [GBV Accountability Framework](#), the [Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies Roadmap](#), and the [Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action](#).⁴⁰

Greater engagement with and support to (host) communities is also needed to promote community ownership and sustained impact across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.⁴¹

Far greater meaningful engagement with, amplification of, and funding for, frontline organisations – including women’s rights organisations and women-led organisations – is needed to build local ownership over interventions that are responsive to the needs and priorities of all girls.⁴²



Evidence and practice

Evidence and practice: Promising prevention and response interventions

In this section, you will find:

- An exploration of the **links between child marriage and key sectors and themes** in conflict- and crisis-affected settings:
 - Income and economic strengthening interventions
 - Education and life skills interventions
 - Sexual and reproductive health and rights
 - Mental health
 - Girl-centred interventions and empowerment approaches
 - Interventions to change discriminatory gender and social norms
 - Interventions focused on laws and marriage/birth registration policies
 - Women's rights organisations and movements.
- Examples of **promising prevention and response practice**.
- Challenges and areas for **further research**.
- A series of **toolboxes** to support evidence-based action.

The section looks at each key sector in turn, but the relationships and synergies between and across sectors are also highlighted, and the importance of multi-sectoral, multi-level, multi-component approaches to addressing child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings are emphasised.



Income and economic strengthening interventions

Cash-based assistance is increasingly used to meet varied objectives in humanitarian settings, and is generally viewed as being supportive of recipients' agency and dignity, and of local economies.⁴³

There is significant evidence on the potential for cash transfers to alleviate several of the economic and social drivers of child marriage, through improving household economic security and increasing access to education (explored on p.26).⁴⁴

There is also evidence on the potential for economic transfers – often as part of social protection programmes – to prevent intimate partner violence (particularly when implemented in combination with social components),⁴⁵ delay adolescent girls' sexual debut and delay pregnancy.^{46,47}

Social insurance programmes^e have been shown to increase uptake of SRHR services and improve attitudes around family planning.⁴⁸

The use of cash transfers in humanitarian settings has increased, and its effectiveness – particularly in increasing education access⁴⁹ – has been demonstrated, but its use remains restricted in some settings.^f

This is often due to restrictions on the physical movement of cash, fears cash will be diverted to non-state or terrorist groups,⁵⁰ donor constraints around fundraising, and government concerns around dependency, responsible spending, and appropriation of cash by insurgents.⁵¹

The impact on GBV and child marriage of delivering cash transfers to female rather than male heads of household is unclear.

A 2020 evidence review of economic transfer programmes in development and humanitarian settings found no clear consensus on the benefits of delivering cash transfers to women versus to heads of households (who are often men) with regards to reducing GBV.⁵² A study of parental assets in Ethiopia found child marriage prevalence went down when maternal assets increased, and up when paternal assets increased.⁵³



Further study is needed on the significance of who receives transfers (mothers, fathers, families or girls themselves) in reducing child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.

e. Social insurance schemes are government-funded financial safety nets. They include unemployment insurance, national health service provision, social security, etc.

f. For example, there has been hesitancy among donors and the government around the use of cash in Syria, due to aid divergence concerns, while in Nigeria, anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism laws restrict the flow of cash despite broad government support for its use. In Somalia, by contrast, government and donors are supportive of the use of cash, which is now widespread. See, Boulinaud, M. and Ossandon, M., 2023, [*Evidence and practice review of the use of cash transfers in contexts of acute food insecurity*](#), Rome: Global Food Security Cluster, pp.3-4.

Unrestricted cash transfers can have a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of GBV survivors and girls and women at risk of GBV in displacement settings, particularly when recurrent transfers are made as part of a broader programme of social and economic support.



In context: Cash assistance in GBV case management in Colombia and Venezuela

From 2021 to 2022, UNFPA conducted a pilot programme of cash transfers for GBV survivors and adolescents and women at risk of GBV. They delivered unrestricted transfers for one or three months to Colombian and Venezuelan women affected by internal and regional conflict.⁵⁴

Cash assistance was provided as part of a broader GBV case management approach, with GBV case workers providing financial orientation and education to any GBV survivor or high-risk individual. This financial orientation support responded to requests from adolescents and women for advice on budgeting and small-scale investing, particularly migrant women from Venezuela who were unused to Colombian currency or Colombian living costs.⁵⁵

A mixed-method evaluation of the pilot revealed numerous positive impacts at endline, particularly (but not only) for recipients of recurrent (rather than one-off) transfers.

Transfer recipients reported:

- **Improved household relationships** following the transfers, particularly among recurrent cash transfer recipients (80% of recurrent versus 65% of one-off recipients).
- **Feeling safer from the risk of GBV** after receiving transfers (61%, compared with 46% before the transfers, with little variation between single/recurrent recipients).
- **Receiving GBV service referral information** (51% versus 43%). While the overall care-seeking rate (37%) was similar between the two groups at endline, significantly more **recurrent recipients sought psychosocial support** than single transfer recipients.⁵⁶

There are risks associated with economic assistance in humanitarian settings, which can be addressed.

Failure to understand the drivers of child marriage in humanitarian settings can lead to assistance increasing marriage prevalence.

In settings where services have been severely disrupted, the availability of cash may not result in improved access to those services. Delivery of financial and other aid assistance needs to be adapted to these diverse settings or used within a multi-component intervention, to reinforce and provide access to positive coping mechanisms and individual and collective agency rather than causing further harm.⁵⁷



In context: Cash assistance has different impacts depending on context

Evidence from **Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh**, in 2020 found that the displaced persons/refugee camp policy of distributing aid according to an average household size of five people led some families to use child marriage as a strategy for seeking additional food aid.⁵⁸

Research on the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage found the majority of girls interviewed in **Bangladesh, Jordan and Palestine** felt increased economic insecurity had reduced child marriage risks, due to the unaffordability of weddings.

The opposite was true in **rural Ethiopia**, where girls faced increased risks of child marriage due to economic poverty combined with the breakdown of traditional support systems.⁵⁹

In **Somalia**, delivery of unconditional cash transfers was successful in reducing child marriage in target communities, with evidence of transfers being spent on education and income generation. There were also reports of some women recipients experiencing harassment and GBV when grants were disbursed, echoing other accounts from Somalia of women feeling scared to travel to receive physical cash from disbursement points.⁶⁰



More robust evidence is needed overall to better understand the potential for cash transfers to significantly impact on child marriage in crisis settings.

Recent evidence highlights how both girls and parents in insecure settings value vocational training and skills development, particularly where traditional education is disrupted by war or displacement.

In a 2021 study, girls and parents in South Sudanese refugee settlements in Uganda and in Syrian urban refugee communities in Jordan identified the need for vocational training, in areas including tailoring, hairdressing, catering or carpentry, to improve adolescent girls' financial independence.⁶¹

This is noteworthy given girl-centred or safe space programming often focuses on girls' empowerment and links with SRHR services, with less emphasis on livelihood and skills development. It is also an important area of focus with regards to humanitarian-development nexus programming, in building girls' skill sets and employability before, during and beyond periods of crisis.

There is also evidence showing the benefits of pairing vocational training and skills development interventions with some form of cash transfer, including directly to girls – as seen for example on the EAGER programme in Sierra Leone (2019-2023).⁶²



Further exploration of the benefits of pairing livelihood/skills development and vocational training with cash transfers in crisis settings is needed.⁶³

There is evidence that girls' perceptions of future employability can impact a variety of other factors that may in turn protect against marriage.

A 2023 study in Northwest Nigeria examined the influence of different dimensions of girls' empowerment (academic self-mastery, perceived career feasibility, progressive gender norms and marriage autonomy) and family planning indicators (knowledge, desired family size) on girls' future intentions to use contraception.

The study found that half of the girls had no intention to use contraception, and only one-quarter intended to use contraception for both delaying/spacing and stopping pregnancies. The one dimension of empowerment that was associated with increased intention to use contraception was perceived career feasibility, suggesting girls were more willing to use contraception if they believed a career would provide them with financial security and status.⁶⁴

Girls' prioritisation of skills development and future employment shows the importance of engaging with supply-side factors that allow or restrict girls' access to a range of reliable, dignified, varied forms of employment⁹ – particularly in contexts where working rights are restricted for migrants and refugees.

Research among migrant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean found that while many migrant girls are engaged in formal or informal employment, they face regular exposure to situations of labour exploitation and mistreatment in work environments. While these challenges are exacerbated by girls' own lack of knowledge regarding child labour laws and their rights, addressing this issue in isolation would unlikely resolve the systemic barriers they face.⁶⁵



In context: The benefits and insecurity of a feminised garment sector workforce in Bangladesh

Girls' awareness of potential employment opportunities in an active garment sector – in which women constituted 80% of the workforce in 2020⁶⁶ – is estimated to have had a significant impact in encouraging girls to stay in school.⁶⁷ However, the closure of many garment factories due to COVID-19 and the impact in terms of lost earnings, unfair dismissals and discriminatory re-hiring practices, highlights how even a seemingly favourable job market can leave girls and women economically and socially vulnerable during times of crisis.⁶⁸

Combining vocational or skills-focused interventions with gender-transformative approaches that address the norms that restrict or enable girls' involvement in skills-focused and economic activities – recognising how these may differ for ever-married girls – may increase the impact, inclusivity and sustainability of such interventions.

In crisis settings, insecurity can directly contribute to the curtailment of married girls' social and economic agency. A 2021 study of Maasai communities in Kenya highlighted how, while women have historically enjoyed some economic autonomy and agency through being assigned an allotment of the family's cow herd, shifts in weather patterns have forced many Maasai communities to sell their livestock, so removing a key source of Maasai wives' authority and influence.⁶⁹

Skills-focused interventions in humanitarian settings may risk causing further marginalisation and harm if not appropriately tailored to the context, gender norms and girls' and women's lived experiences. Evidence from Syria and the West Bank shows how husbands and other male family members may initially support safe space programming, but restrict adolescent participation when activities are at odds with traditional gender norms.⁷⁰

A survey of grassroots feminist actors in East Africa highlights how, while home-based income generating activities should be included as part of humanitarian-based interventions targeting married girls, their implementation in isolation or in some contexts may unintentionally perpetuate harmful norms, through women not being allowed to work outside the home.⁷¹

g. It is worth noting the common feminisation of different skills and sectors in many contexts, and the extent to which this can and should be either challenged or adhered to depending on the level of/scope for engagement with restrictive norms around gender roles. See, for example, Wignall, R., Piquard, B., Joel, E., 2023, ["Upskilling girls or de-skilling patriarchy? How TVET can drive wider gender transformation and the decent work agenda in Sub-Saharan Africa"](#), *International Journal of Educational Development* 102.



Key takeaways

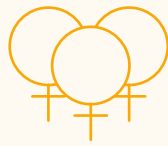
- 1 Cash-based support has the potential to significantly reduce the risks of child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, particularly if unrestricted, recurrent and/or delivered alongside broader social and economic empowerment efforts.** Such programming requires a nuanced understanding of the causes and consequences of child marriage in different contexts, including the longer-term potential of cash delivered as a one-off or over a set period. Rigorous evaluations of cash-based interventions would build understanding of what works and who is best placed to receive the transfers (including the potential for girls themselves to be recipients), and counter the real and perceived risks around cash disbursements.
- 2 There is evidence that girls value opportunities to develop their earning potential and that their sense of having employment opportunities can act as protective factors against child marriage and early pregnancy, including in fragile settings.** However, these factors are often not reflected in adolescent girls-focused programming. Where these factors are considered, the distinct circumstances and needs of ever-married girls and young mothers are often ignored. More cross-sectoral partnerships are needed with organisations working on relevant skills- or economic rights-focused interventions, to improve targeting of at-risk and ever-married girls.
- 3 There is need to engage with the structural, supply-side factors that restrict women and girls to (illegal) insecure, low-paid roles where they are vulnerable to violence and abuse, and to the insecurity created by conflict and crises.**
- 4 Countering the “feminisation of poverty”⁷² at all social levels means understanding the specific barriers and risks faced by girls and women, including in crisis and displacement settings; global recognition of how macro-economic policies have a disproportionately negative impact on girls and women; and a deeper understanding of work carried out by married girls within marriage.**



Education and life skills interventions

In focus: Education in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

72 MILLION
crisis-affected children
are out of school –
that's the population
of Thailand.⁷³



53%
of these
are girls.⁷⁴

The likelihood of a girl
marrying before age 18 is

**6 PERCENTAGE
POINTS LESS**

for every year in
secondary school.⁷⁵



Girls' education is a consistent protective factor against child marriage⁷⁶ but of the 224 million school-age children and adolescents affected by crisis, an estimated 72 million are out of school, 53% of whom are girls.⁷⁷

Secondary school attendance is particularly important in preventing child marriage, with girls 6 percentage points less likely to marry before 18 for every additional year they remain in secondary school.⁷⁸ However, in humanitarian settings, access to secondary school and transition between education cycles can be challenging.⁷⁹

The quality of education also suffers significantly in humanitarian settings, particularly in contexts already struggling with extreme poverty.⁸⁰ Girls face more barriers than boys in accessing online learning options due to the digital gender gap⁸¹ in settings where schools have closed due to conflict, COVID-19 or other forms of fragility.⁸²

Girls' education is often deprioritised in response to economic instability, and in some settings has become a direct target of religious extremists.

Examples of girls' education coming under direct attack include Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁸³

Forced marriage, forced pregnancy due to rape, and stigma associated with sexual attacks and resultant pregnancy can all further limit girls' ability to remain in or return to school in conflict-affected settings.⁸⁴ They face practical barriers and trauma associated with marriage and GBV.⁸⁵

Displaced, migrant or undocumented girls can face additional challenges to attending school in settings where national or local registration is a requirement for school attendance, and where these systems are difficult to navigate.

During COVID-19, girls were commonly expected to take on additional care work, limiting their ability to attend or return to school, and to study.⁸⁶

There is clear evidence that supporting girls' schooling through cash and in-kind transfers can be highly effective in preventing child marriage in development settings;⁸⁷ more research in humanitarian settings is needed.



In context: Positive impact of cash transfers and norm change interventions among refugees in North Lebanon

Safeguarding Adolescents through Multidisciplinary Assistance (SAMA) was piloted from 2021 to 2023, aimed at preventing child marriage through pairing conditional cash transfers with community/place-based norm change interventions in North Lebanon.⁸⁸

US\$250 cash for education was paid to 846 primarily Syrian and Palestinian refugee girls over two instalments, with an additional US\$50 paid to cover exam fees; families needed to be able to cover their basic needs outside of these payments.

Norm change interventions included community awareness sessions on topics including gender equality and child marriage, intensive training of 30 boys and men as “agents of change”, and career days and support sessions on basic numeracy, literacy and life skills for girls.

Endline results found that:

- **3% of girls** in the intervention group were married, compared with **8.8%** in the control group.
- Girls in the intervention group were **more likely to pass school exams**.
- 98% of caregivers felt the cash assistance has **positively influenced girls' performance in school, psychological wellbeing and self-confidence**.⁸⁹

See “In context” box on p. 27 for more on assessing the impact of the cash aspect of this intervention.



More research is needed to understand how cash-plus education interventions as part of a multisectoral approach can facilitate longer-term transformative change.

Evidence suggests clear benefits of cash-plus programmes tied to education outcomes in increasing girls' school attendance and reducing child marriage, but more evidence is needed on if and how they can facilitate long-term transformative change.

Grassroots feminist organisations have mixed views on whether conditional cash transfers should be a core part of humanitarian programming targeting child marriage, with only 64% of respondents in a recent survey in East Africa saying they should.⁹⁰

Concerns raised focused on their sustainability, and around whether they facilitate long-term transformative change rather than short term behavioural change.⁹¹ On the other hand, there is comparatively little evidence around what works to keep girls in school beyond cash transfers.



In context: Assessing the impact of cash transfers among refugees in North Lebanon

Assessing the comparative impact of different elements of SAMA (see “In context” box on p. 26) is challenging, as the pilot became a high-dose, high-intensity intervention as it responded to changes in the operating environment.

However, elements of success included:

- Provision of economic support through **cash for education**.
- Facilitation of girls’ access to **remedial classes** along with life **skills sessions**.
- Catalysing transformative shifts in individual and collective norms through **agents of change**, who played a central role in advocating for and driving these shifts.⁹²

This highlights the potential merits of implementing cash-plus education interventions as **part of a broader multi-level and/or multi-sectoral approach**.

Girls face considerable restrictions in accessing education in crisis settings due to harmful gender norms, but addressing barriers to education in humanitarian settings is often a priority for girls and their caregivers.



In context: Refugee girls and caregivers prioritise education and suggest cash assistance could be a solution in Uganda and Jordan.

In research conducted with married and unmarried girls and caregivers in refugee settlements in 2021, **education was reported as the highest priority solution** to prevent and respond to child marriage. Cited barriers to enrolling and keeping girls in school were largely practical, relating to the cost of school fees, uniforms and material; distance to schools; and protection concerns.

Providing girls and their caregivers with **cash assistance to overcome some of these barriers** was cited as a possible solution for promoting girls’ continued education in these settings – again highlighting the **potential of pairing education and cash-based interventions**.⁹³

In some contexts, the value girls place on education is evident in how they negotiate traditional norms and use their agency. Research among Syrian refugees in Jordan found examples of young mothers negotiating their return to school with families-in-law based on the promise that it would not impact their ability to complete household chores.⁹⁴ Understanding pre-existing attitudes towards girls’ education in the context of the broader constraints they and their families face may support programming that builds on positive norms and girls’ own desires and agency, while also supporting efforts to expand and transform girls’ options with regards to accessing their rights.

The supply-side of girls’ education can be a barrier even when demand exists; this needs to be addressed as part of education-focused humanitarian, development and peace nexus programming.

A 2021 evidence synthesis highlights settings where parents are increasingly interested in keeping girls in schools, but this aspiration is muted by the poor availability, access (physical or online) and quality of schooling, particularly at secondary level.⁹⁵

In conflict- and crisis-affected settings, removing girls from school may be an active choice made by girls and/or caregivers due to concerns over safety, rather than a devaluing of girls’ education as is often assumed. This highlights the importance of coordination between protection and education actors in humanitarian settings, and of initiatives to support quality schooling in crisis-affected settings.^h

h. For example, the World Bank has committed to investing US\$7 billion to support the delivery of education in fragile, conflict and violent settings, recognising the specific risks facing girls and the need to improve the quality and safety of education in fragile settings. See World Bank Group, 2024, [Delivering education in the midst of fragility, conflict and violence](#).



In context: Syrian refugee girls and their mothers value education but may not prioritise it in Lebanon

A 2023 evaluation of the Amenah Early Marriage Pilot Intervention among Syrian refugees in Lebanon found large differences between girls' and their mothers' educational attachment and their lived experiences. Girls displayed positive attitudes towards education, echoing their mothers – 93% of whom said the ideal level of education for a girl was university. But **despite the high value attached to education, rates of early school leaving amongst the target group were high.**

This pointed to **the role of structural constraints in shaping girls' educational outcomes**, with the shortcomings of Lebanon's education policy for refugees, combined with poverty and insecurity, leading families to prioritise girls' security over their education despite girls' and their own aspirations around education.⁹⁶



Key takeaways

- 1 Supporting girls' access to quality education – especially at secondary level – whether formal or informal, online or in person, offers significant protection against child marriage in humanitarian settings.** It is also often a priority for girls and caregivers. Addressing the practical barriers to attending school – like the cost of fees and uniforms – may be a critical and relatively straightforward step towards addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings, and should be implemented alongside broader advocacy for 12 years of free education for all children.
- 2 More research is needed into the effectiveness of supporting girls' schooling through cash and in-kind transfers in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, including displaced girls.** This should build on emergent evidence of impact in humanitarian settings when cash assistance is paired with community/place-based norm change interventions, and as part of a multi-level approach. Education-tied conditional cash transfers may not be enough to sustain reductions in child marriage without these additional programme components.
- 3 It is necessary to engage with the supply-side of education in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, recognising that the absence of affordable, publicly funded, safe, quality education can drive early school leaving even where girls and families value education.** Married, divorced or widowed girls, young mothers, pregnant girls, or girls who have been displaced, likely face heightened barriers to attending and remaining in school in humanitarian settings; these specific barriers need to be considered and addressed. Improved coordination between education and protection sectors, and meaningful engagement with (host) communities, is key to improving girls' ability to attend school safely.



Toolbox: Practical tools to support education policy and programmatic work on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

Education Cannot Wait, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), 2022, [EiE – GenKit](#). Available in English, French, Arabic and Turkish.

This resource package includes practical tools for education practitioners to promote gender-responsive programming from crisis to peace and sustainable development. It offers tools for practical and immediate use, including checklists, tipsheets and assessment templates supporting practitioners to ensure that each phase of an EiE intervention is gender-responsive.

UN Women, n.d., [IASC e-learning on gender equality in humanitarian action](#). Available in English.

This three-hour e-learning course provides introductory guidance – through information and practical examples – on the fundamentals of applying a gender-equality approach across all states of the humanitarian programming cycle, from assessment and planning to implementation and monitoring. It is intended for humanitarian actors from the UN, NGOs, government and civil society, and based on the [IASC gender handbook for humanitarian action](#).



Case Study: Improving adolescent girls' lives in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, where social, economic, and health challenges are compounded by extremist violence

The Uholo initiative

From 2020 to 2024, The Preventing Child, Early and Force Marriage in Cabo Delgado project – locally known as “Uholo-Raparigas e Jovens” – worked to improve the lives and livelihoods of 22,000 adolescent girls and young women aged 10-24 in northern Mozambique. Funded by USAID and implemented by Pathfinder International and Ophavela, the project aimed to reduce child marriage – termed “early unions” in Mozambiquan law⁹⁷ – and socioeconomic restrictions among young women who are married or in a union.

Cabo Delgado, one of Mozambique's poorest provinces, has the second highest early unions and the highest adolescent pregnancy prevalence in the country:

- **61%** of girls are in unions by age 18⁹⁸
- **18%** are in unions by age 15
- **65%** of adolescent girls aged 15-19 are pregnant or parenting⁹⁹

Since 2017, a **violent insurgency** in the province has compounded the existing social, economic and health challenges. It has disrupted health and social services, education and livelihoods, leading to displacement and increased poverty. Adolescent girls face heightened risks of GBV – including sexual violence and early union – and adolescent pregnancy.

Uholo applied a **gender-transformative approach (GTA)** to address the root causes of early union: gender inequality and girls' and women's limited socio-economic and political power. It brought together girls, young women, their families, communities, schools, health teams, judicial and law enforcement authorities and legislators to end early unions together. For more on GTA, see the Spotlight on p. 63.

How Uholo works:

Uholo's Theory of Change to prevent and respond to early unions supports two main strategies:

- 1 Supporting participatory empowerment**, education and strengthening community organisation to create social capital for sustainable social behavioural change, by facilitating adolescent girls' and young women's empowerment, and promoting favourable shifts in their own, and their household and community social norms.
- 2 Strengthening local policies and systems** to create an enabling environment where adolescent girls and young women can access health, protection and social services.

Uholo implemented a range of interventions to prevent early unions and support girls in unions in the context of conflict and crisis, including:

- **Investing in community involvement** and mobilisation through capacity enhancement, and the creation of groups of local leaders and activists as agents of change.
- **Supporting adolescent girls and young women to act**, strengthening their voice and participation in public spaces like co-management committees, school councils, radio debates and public forums.
- **Contributing to human rights and sexuality education** in schools with a package of school-based activities, including girls and boys small groups, debates, fairs and film screening activities. Most of these were conducted by trained teachers (mentor teachers) and peer educators.
- **Locally producing and screening educational films** with debates in schools and communities.
- **Involving adolescents and young people in weekly radio programmes** and establishing a youth-led radio programme built on this.

- **Reaching out-of-school adolescent girls and young women with information on SRHR**, gender equality and their rights through home visits and small group sessions.
- **Training representatives in the judicial sector** to focus on the application of GBV laws and the interpretation and application of the new child marriage and early union law.

Results and implications

Outcomes of the 4-year project include:

- **Strengthened agency of adolescent girls and young women through social and educational support and economic opportunities:**
 - **70** adolescent girls and young women were directly supported to avoid or leave early unions.
 - **54,071** were reached through home visits, increasing their knowledge on SRHR and gender equality, and encouraging or supporting them to access health, educational or protection services.
 - **6,206** participated in small group sessions to increase their knowledge on GBV, including early unions, contraception, family planning, healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, decision-making, financial literacy, and to strengthen peer support and social cohesion.
 - **1,449** girls and young women with improved opportunities for economic empowerment, while challenging gender norms. Of these:
 - **1,348** joined saving and credit groups.
 - **262** started or expanded income generating activities.
 - **101** improved their professional skills.
 - **117,761** adolescent girls and 105,718 adolescent boys involved in school-based educational activities about rights, healthy behaviours, services and equitable relationships.
- **Fostering of a community environment that supports girls' and young women's right to delay marriage, complete education and access health and economic opportunities.** This contributed to challenging inequitable gender and social norms, and lays the foundation for transformative change.
 - **8,566** community dialogues around girls' education, adolescent pregnancy, early unions, SRHR, GBV and gender inequality facilitated by community leaders. **1,601** community influencers (911 female, 690 male) engaged in specific debates and mobilised to sensitise other community members.
 - **73** radio programmes amplified these discussions to wider audiences.
- **The use of adolescent- and youth-friendly health services were increased and made more accessible.** Clinical services for GBV survivors were established or improved.
- **Laws and policies to delay marriage and unions, and promote young women's rights were implemented**, through the strengthening of institutional capacities and promotion of civil society collaboration:
 - **63** judicial representatives trained on the interpretation of [child marriage law](#) and other laws on GBV, creating a debate on their application.
 - **77** members of community courts engaged in sensitisation sessions on existing laws and their role in supporting laws.
- **Civil society coordination group** Coligação para Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros (CECAP, the *Girls Not Brides* National Partnership to End Child Marriage in Mozambique) was established and strengthened in Cabo Delgado. More on their collective GTA journey on the [Girls Not Brides website](#).

Key elements of success to consider include:

- 1 In the context of limited opportunities and violent extremism and conflict, **a rights-based approach that encouraged reflection and dialogue** with the community was essential to transform harmful gender norms.
- 2 **Addressing gender norms with girls and boys at a young age** (very young adolescents) to shift mindsets, and tailoring activities and materials to specific groups, including by age, school enrolment, marital status and parenthood.
- 3 Ensuring discussion groups are **facilitated by members of the community or school** who have **appropriate training**. Mentor teachers are particularly inspiring.
- 4 Working with **community/locally-based networks** to continue work during periods of violence.
- 5 **Recognising traditional justice systems** and engaging community courts to strengthen the protection of girls and women, and to promote a rights-based approach.
- 6 **Integrating SRHR into economic empowerment activities** to enhance adolescent girls' and young women's agency.
- 7 **Enhancing adolescent girls' and young women's participation in decision-making spaces** – like school councils and health co-management committees – to foster more gender-responsive services.





Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Discriminatory, costly, geographically inaccessible, age-inappropriate and/or exclusionary services all contribute to girls being unable or unwilling to access SRHR services.¹⁰⁰

A systematic review of the factors influencing access to and use of youth-friendly SRHR services in Africa found that harmful attitudes, low skill levels of service providers and low levels of knowledge of the services available were all significant factors influencing access to, and low use of, services.¹⁰¹

For ever-married girls, pregnant girls, young mothers and girls facing multiple intersecting forms of marginalisation, accessing SRHR services can be particularly challenging. In a study of young LGBTQIA+ people's engagement with health services during COVID-19, Plan International found that while many young LGBTQIA+ girls and women have specific SRHR needs, they often either lack access to information about what services are available, or do not feel welcome in formal health centres or broader LGBTQIA+ organisations that primarily focus on gay men.¹⁰²

In Colombia, girls affected by national or regional conflict described experiencing acute exclusion, stigmatisation and discrimination in public health, with pregnant migrant girls being unwilling to go to health centres for fear their children would be taken away.¹⁰³

SRHR interventions that overly focus on individual and community-level norms around SRHR may have limited impact due to the systemic, structural barriers that restrict girls from realising their SRHR – particularly in humanitarian contexts.

Meeting basic needs is a priority among South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. In a 2021 survey of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, adolescent girls consistently cited basic needs – including food, personal hygiene supplies, clean water and clothing – as their highest priority needs.¹⁰⁴

There is evidence that in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, norms-focused engagement is likely to be limited until basic needs are met. Efforts to meet these needs by girls and their families may perpetuate child marriage and other risk-taking behaviours – like transactional sex – that undermine SRHR.¹⁰⁵

This supports the case for integrating SRHR interventions within multi-sectoral programming that includes some element of economic or financial support, the merit of which was demonstrated in UNFPA's GBV/cash transfer programme in Colombia (discussed in the "In context" box on p. 21) and CARE's TESFA (Towards Improved Economic and Sexual Reproductive Health Outcomes for Adolescent Girls) programme in Ethiopia (discussed in the "In context" box on p. 45).

Girls often face deeply held personal and societal norms that discourage engagement with SRHR services and contraception use.

In multi-component programmes that include child marriage and SRHR components, norms around SRHR seem to be harder to shift than those around child marriage, with ageism, stigma and social taboos often playing a critical role in restricting girls' and adolescents' access to and uptake of SRHR services on otherwise successful interventions.



In context: Awkwardness can limit the impact of SRHR intervention components – an example from Kenya

The 2015-2018 Adolescent Girls' Initiative was a multi-sectoral programme that achieved sustained success in reducing the prevalence of child marriage in its target communities. It had more limited impact from the programme's health-focused activities – in part due to the awkwardness mentors felt teaching the SRHR curriculum.¹⁰⁶

Unavailability of contraception is a real challenge, particularly in humanitarian settings.¹⁰⁷ Awkwardness around discussing girls' sexuality, and attitudes, norms and customs on contraception use and broader bodily autonomy can also significantly undermine the success of SRHR interventions and limit use of contraception even when it is available.

Programmes or policies that promote abstinence-only, rather than substantively engaging on the issue of SRHR and adolescents' sexuality can place the onus solely on girls to avoid unwanted pregnancy. In some contexts, this has resulted in an increase in frequency of adolescent sexual encounters.¹⁰⁸

A 2022 study of 300 currently or ever-married women in Abuja, North Central Nigeria, showed that only 6.7% of women reported using contraceptives after marriage, and only 15.7% chose to delay their first pregnancy. This behaviour is likely due to the value placed on pregnancy after marriage, and the pressure on couples to demonstrate their fertility within a year of marriage. The failure to do so is typically blamed on the female partner.¹⁰⁹

There is a growing body of evidence on promising practice for delivering flexible, context-specific SRHR services for adolescent girls in humanitarian settings to meet, and even exceed, the minimum standards set out for SRHR in humanitarian action.

A 2021 evidence review highlights examples of promising practice for SRHR delivery, including the use of mobile SRHR clinics and camps, which typically remain in communities for up to four days and so are able to make contact with more marginalised adolescents. It discusses the provision of free transport to clinics for severe cases following the 2015 Nepal earthquake, and of adolescent-friendly service corners in SRHR camps and out-of-hours service provision by healthcare workers targeting out-of-school girls and girls engaged in sex work in Uganda.¹¹⁰

Efforts to provide technology/digital-based SRHR services and products during COVID-19 highlighted the promising potential of these approaches; however, further work is needed to ensure they include adolescents without digital access, who are likely already socially and/or economically marginalised.¹¹¹ Research conducted in 2020 in India, Malawi and Rwanda, provides insight into how adolescent girls can be directly engaged in efforts to understand and address the barriers that exist around equitable access to digitally-based SRHR efforts.¹¹²

Preliminary studies highlight the feasibility of working with community health workers and traditional birth attendants to deliver services in areas with limited access to facility-based post-rape care.¹¹³



In context: Human-centred design and community/place-based mobilisers increase adolescent engagement with SRHR services in Burkina Faso

Marie Stopes International (MSI) “La Famille Ideale” programme was piloted across eight mobile outreach teams in Burkina Faso in 2019-2020. It used human-centred design to work with young women and key influencers – including husbands and in-laws – to improve SRHR access for adolescent girls.

MSI’s community/place-based mobilisers used participatory tools to encourage support for adolescent rural mothers to access family planning. They also facilitated community dialogue around issues like girls’ education and financial security, and built male support for girls’ access to services. MSI teams then delivered a full range of free contraceptive methods at a nearby site.

The programme saw a 24% increase in adolescent visits to outreach sites during the pilot.¹¹⁴ Qualitative feedback on the project highlighted how **working through community/place-based mobilisers enabled more open conversations around family planning**. It also engaged participants in community dialogue as part of a process that supported the role women should play in family planning decision-making.¹¹⁵

There is growing evidence on the merits of providing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in and out of school, to promote a holistic, inclusive, rights-based understanding of SRHR.

A 2021 survey found that 85% of the 110 countries surveyed have policies or laws relating to sexuality education, primarily mandating its delivery at secondary – rather than primary – level. However, this does not always equate to comprehensive content or strong implementation, particularly in settings where formal education systems have been disrupted or there is protracted rollback of women’s and marginalised groups’ rights.¹¹⁶

Through the UNFPA programme “Reaching those most left behind through CSE for out-of-school young people”, implemented in Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iran and Malawi, out-of-school CSE has helped to increase awareness around SRHR, delay sexual debut and teach positive values like inclusion, equality and accountability.¹¹⁷

Appropriate CSE interventions need to be tested and implemented in diverse socio-cultural contexts, including conflict- and crisis-affected settings. A multi-sectoral approach to engaging with government actors – and holding them to account – on the delivery of CSE is also needed.¹¹⁸ Programming that supports the resilience of education systems before, during and after emergencies would help to facilitate ongoing provision of CSE during periods of crisis.¹¹⁹



Key takeaways

- 1 SRHR interventions are most effective when paired with one or more other norms-based or economic support-focused intervention.** This should recognise that girls' access to SRHR services in emergencies is limited by multiple practical, norms-based, systemic and structural factors, which may be exacerbated for ever-married or displaced girls and young mothers.
- 2 Addressing awkwardness about SRHR – and especially sexuality – is essential.** Awkwardness may be felt by girls, caregivers and community members, and by programming teams, teachers and local healthcare or other professionals. This can hinder their ability to accurately share information and offer appropriate care. Cross-sectoral collaboration – for example, between mentors and local women's health workers – may help to overcome issues around awkwardness, while also building girls' familiarity (and therefore comfort) with local service providers.
- 3 There is growing evidence on flexible, tailored, creative approaches to providing SRHR services to adolescent girls in humanitarian settings.** This includes mobile clinics, adolescent-friendly service corners, free transport, out-of-hours services and technology/digital-based SRHR services. Understanding girls' constraints is critical to designing effective interventions – girls, including married girls, young mothers and displaced girls – should be involved in the design of such interventions.
- 4 Further study is needed on the positive potential of CSE to prevent and respond to child marriage when integrated into formal and out-of-school education interventions in humanitarian settings.** This should build on growing evidence from development settings.





Case study: WOREC's SNEHA initiative delivers women-centric disaster relief across Nepal and centres youth leadership to end child marriage in disaster-affected settings

The SNEHA initiative

The SNEHA initiative was set up by The Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) in Nepal in 2008 and has since engaged in active disaster response across the country. In 2022, an earthquake affected districts in the Sudur-paschim province, resulting in loss of lives and livelihoods. In response, the SNEHA initiative – which means “love” and “affection” in Nepali – set up women-friendly spaces to provide critical services and supplies.

WOREC's overall approach **centres the needs and rights of youth advocates** in their community.



PICTURED: A session conducted by youth peer facilitators at a women-friendly space in Gaumul. Photo: WOREC

How the SNEHA works

SNEHA provides services – including psychosocial services and referrals, and food, shelter and essential supplies – through **safe spaces**. Here, girls and women can also exercise freedom of expression, experience dignity, safety, love, care and support, learn to build resilience from their own experiences, and challenge unequal power.

Young people – both girls and boys – identify issues of concern in their communities, and these issues set the agenda for advocacy with various actors. This approach to **youth leadership and community-led agenda-setting** has supported girls to strengthen their agency and self-identify as changemakers.

Youth advocates have identified child marriage as a major risk, and WOREC has held sessions with girls and boys – facilitated by youth peer facilitators – to further support efforts to end child marriage. Youth facilitators conducted **awareness raising** and worked actively to **refer child marriage cases to legal bodies** like judicial committees and the police.

Results and implications

The SNEHA and other WOREC initiatives have had significant impacts on child marriage and early pregnancies, including reduced prevalence. The story of Gita Bohara illustrates this success [name changed]:

Gita, a 17-year-old girl from Gaumul Rural Municipality, belonged to an earthquake-affected family, and her family was struggling to sustain their livelihood. During this time, Gita fell in love with a boy from the Dalit community. When Gita's parents discovered the relationship, they began to physically and mentally abuse her. In response, the couple planned to marry without telling their parents.

The parents discovered their plan and informed the police, who arrested the couple. More than 50 people were at the Area Police Office during the process, creating additional psychosocial risks and security threats for the couple.

Youth leaders referred Gita to WOREC's women-friendly spaces. Here, Gita accessed psychosocial counselling and information on the importance of education and the negative impacts of child marriage. The counsellors also provided psychosocial support to both of her parents, so they could support her as she continues her education.

Since donor funding ceased, WOREC has engaged with municipal authorities, advocating for policy formulation and implementation on child marriage and gender-based violence, and highlighting **the importance of sustaining women's safe spaces and psychosocial counselling services**.

As a result, one municipality – Gaumul, Bajura – has funded and is operating a women-friendly space, acknowledging the importance of sustainability of GBV response services in the disaster recovery phase.



Mental health

Adolescent girls face heightened and unique challenges to their mental health in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, but their mental health needs are consistently overlooked in programming.¹²⁰

Economic instability, increased risk of displacement and violence, and the hardening of restrictive gender norms can all undermine girls' mental health. The disruption of basic services and formal/informal support networks can also compound feelings of isolation and loneliness.^{121,122}

A 2022 study of displaced girls in Latin America and the Caribbean found girls experience numerous challenges as a result of their displacement, in virtually all spheres of their lives:

- **Individual** – “not having my own room”.
- **Familial** – “getting separated from family, friends and pets”.
- **School and peer-based relationships** – the complexity of adapting to a new school system, “not having any friends”.
- **Community** – “being bullied on the street”.
- **Feeling of being separated from home** – “the get-togethers and meetings that friends have at home and not being able to be there with them”.¹²³

Ever-married girls can find themselves particularly isolated in crisis-affected or displacement settings, which can have a negative impact on their mental as well as physical wellbeing.

Intimate partner violence poses a significant risk to married girls and young women.¹²⁴



In context: Poor mental health outcomes among ever-married girls displaced by conflict in South Sudan

A 2022 study on the experiences of girls displaced by conflict in South Sudan found a strong association between being married, divorced or widowed and poor mental health outcomes.

This is closely related to:

- **exclusion** from education and social networks;
- lack of **decision-making power**;
- **exploitation** and abuse.¹²⁵

There is evidence to support a variety of approaches to safeguarding girls' mental health and wellbeing in humanitarian settings, but further research and evaluation are needed.

A 2023 study by the GAGE research programme examined the experiences of young married girls in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Jordan and Lebanon. Based on an assessment of the specific and often uniquely isolating experiences of ever-married girls, the study highlighted how married and divorced girls need opportunities to spend time with peers and friends in safe spaces that also afford them access to caring adults. This was needed alongside interventions that support the building of positive relationships with husbands and mothers-in-law.¹²⁶

The importance of building and facilitating peer support networks is particularly critical in displacement settings where girls may feel isolated on numerous individual and interpersonal levels (see evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean on p. 38).

Including cash assistance as part of broader GBV case management can encourage adolescent girls and women to access psychosocial support, but may not reduce feelings of depression.



In context: Mixed results for girls' mental health in a cash assistance/GBV case management intervention in Colombia

UNFPA's cash assistance programme was implemented as part of a broader GBV case management programme. It delivered one-off or three cash transfers to reduce financial barriers and improve access to services.

It had positive results in encouraging women and adolescent girls to access psychosocial support:

- **46.7%** of all recipients received information about healthcare services through the programme.
- Of them, **92%** of one-off transfer recipients and 69% of recurrent transfer recipients accessed psychosocial support.¹²⁷

It had mixed results in reducing feelings of depression:

↓ **A reduction in occasional feelings of depression.**

- **56%** at baseline
- **39%** at endline

↑ **An increase in feelings of frequent depression.**

- **27.5%** at baseline
- **40.5%** at endline (44% one-off cash recipients, and 37% of recurrent cash recipients).



Further research is needed to understand the variants in these results, particularly given the programme's success in promoting mental health-seeking behaviour.¹²⁸

There is a need for further investment in understanding and responding to mental health in relation to child marriage.

Research conducted in 2023 involving global experts on child marriage and mental health, and survivors of child marriage in Zimbabwe made recommendations, including:

- increasing availability of general mental health support and services in complex or rural settings;
- working with older generations to influence social change;
- investing in community/place-based social interventions to promote the mental health of people married early;
- social empowerment programmes for women to help increase autonomy and self-reliance, with a view to reducing child marriage and its impact on mental health.



The study also highlighted the importance of co-produced research with the intervention community, and deeper engagement with those who have direct experience of child marriage.¹²⁹



Key takeaways

- 1 Further research is needed to understand the links between child marriage and mental health; this research should engage communities and individuals with direct experience of child marriage in research design.** Adolescent girls' mental health is consistently overlooked and deprioritised in development and humanitarian programming, despite the heightened challenges they face. Ever-married girls, pregnant girls, young mothers, girls impacted by conflict-related violence and displaced girls face unique challenges that are a cause and consequence of social isolation.
- 2 Girls' mental health may be impacted by different humanitarian response interventions in ways that are surprising, or surprisingly negative.** It may be beneficial to build monitoring of girls' mental health – and how this shifts by context and in relation to different interventions – into programme monitoring.
- 3 There is emergent evidence on the importance of building and facilitating girls' peer networks as a means of supporting their overall mental health, particularly in displacement settings.** These spaces need to be tailored to girls' specific needs, including those of ever-married girls, pregnant girls and young mothers. These spaces – and the girls using them – may also benefit from facilitating healthy relationships with adults, including mothers-in-law. **Further research is needed in this area, including on the benefits of pairing network-building activities with household-level norms-based interventions.**



Toolbox: Practical tools to support mental health policy and programmatic work on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

INEE, n.d., [*Mental health and psychosocial support in and through education in emergencies \(EiE\)*](#). Available in English. An online, self-directed course on how EiE programmes can incorporate activities to actively address distress caused by emergency situations for students and teachers in humanitarian settings.



Girl-centred interventions and empowerment approaches

Designated safe spaces in humanitarian settings can be girls' and adolescents' only opportunity to feel secure, to make choices that affect their lives, and to connect with a range of support services and networks that may have been disrupted or from which they may have been separated.¹³⁰



In context: Safe spaces “essential” to girls’ and women’s wellbeing in Syria crisis region

A 2020 UNFPA impact assessment of the Syria crisis region found that 81% of girls and women across focus countries found **accessing services through safe spaces “absolutely essential” to their wellbeing.**

Safe spaces in this region provide a range of services and activities, including GBV case management, referrals, counselling, psychosocial support, awareness raising sessions, dignity kits, recreational activities and vocational training specifically targeting adolescent girls.¹³¹

Existing girl-only spaces, established through development programming or at schools, community or health centres may provide entry points for introducing CSE and conversations around the risks of and alternatives to child marriage. This is particularly important in humanitarian settings where rapid intervention is both challenging and critical.¹³² Safe spaces may also offer girls an opportunity to connect and have fun with their peers – relevant to Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹³³

Safe spaces can create opportunities for girls to voice their needs, hopes and concerns, and for humanitarian and development actors to better understand and respond to these in a way that centres girls’ lived experiences in child marriage interventions.

Recent research emphasises the need to understand and appreciate what power girls and women have in development and humanitarian settings, and how this might shift with changes in context.

“I don’t think we pay attention to the fact that women are also negotiating power. And they use many ways to negotiate their power. And they do, they have a lot of power.”

- Humanitarian worker working with self-settled Syrian women and men in Jordan.¹³⁴

Child marriage programmes would benefit from better understanding girls’ own agency – however constrained – and decision-making processes around marriage. Better understanding girls’ and families’ own spaces and priorities for decision-making in relation to child marriage should be the starting point for interventions aiming to create greater opportunity for choice, agency, consent and autonomy around marriage.

In Niger, girls may not view delaying marriage as a desirable option. This is due to norms – and pressure – around marriage and women’s economic reliance on men, or because marriage is seen as an opportunity to escape violence in the family home. These factors are likely amplified in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.¹³⁵



Case study: Girl Shine takes a girl-centred, gender-transformative approach to strengthening girls' agency in humanitarian settings

The Girl Shine programme model

Girl Shine is a gender-based violence prevention and response intervention that seeks to support, protect and empower adolescent girls in humanitarian settings.

Implemented by the International Rescue Committee and other humanitarian actors in more than 30 countries, the programme model engages diverse adolescent girls aged 10-19, their female and male caregivers, female mentors from their community and the wider community. The Girl Shine resource package includes a Life Skills Curriculum with content on early marriage, and a focused Early Marriage Curriculum that provides adolescent girls with vital information tailored to their marital status.

Girl Shine takes a **rights-based and gender-transformative approach** that works across the socio-ecological model to

challenge harmful norms while building on girls' strengths to increase their safety, psychosocial wellbeing and power. It supports girls at risk of marriage and ever-married girls to understand their rights, mitigate risks, and strengthen their relationships with their caregivers and wider social support networks. It also engages community members in conversations about how gender equality and power sharing benefit everyone.

Underlying this is a vision for adolescent girls in humanitarian settings – in all their diversity – to be able to pursue their full potential free from violence and inequality.



PICTURED: Artwork from the Girl Shine initiative. Image: International Rescue Committee.

How Girl Shine works

The programme brings adolescent girls together in set groups in **safe spaces to engage in interactive, girl-centred life skills sessions** where they are supported to:

- **Build relationships of trust** with their female mentors and with their peers.
- **Learn about gender, power, their rights**, SRHR, and different forms of gender-based violence.
- **Practice different social and emotional skills** – including how to influence decisions – and visioning for their future.
- **Strengthen their relationships with caregivers** – including mothers-in-law – and the wider community.

As **girls strengthen their knowledge, skills and confidence**, they become better equipped to navigate the risks of child marriage and other forms of GBV, and know how to seek support from trusted people and services around them.

At the same time, the **girls' trusted caregivers are invited to participate** in a curriculum-based series of sessions for female and male groups. As they learn about the changes that girls experience during adolescence, the importance of good communication, the risks and consequences of GBV – including child marriage – and girls' rights, caregivers are better equipped to support and protect their daughters.

From the outset, the Girl Shine programme also **engages strategically with key community leaders and influencers** to build a safer and more supportive environment around the girls. These allies are essential for community acceptance, mobilisation and the sustainability of positive outcomes for girls. Community members can also participate in a four-part series of community conversations that explore girls' rights, how gender and power inequalities impact girls, and the role of community members in supporting girls.

Results and implications

Girl Shine demonstrates the value of a **girl-centred and gender-transformative** approach that builds girls' individual and collective agency – increasing their vital knowledge and skills related to their rights, health and safety, while connecting them with protective social networks and services.

In a recent round of focus group discussions with adolescent girls, their Girl Shine mentors, and their female caregivers in Ethiopia and Kenya:

- All of the groups separately emphasised how early marriage used to be common in their community but has now **reduced**.
- After several cycles of Girl Shine, many girls in the community now **understand their rights**.
- Many of these girls have shared what they learned with girls **beyond the programme**.
- Many caregivers now have an **increased understanding** of the risks of early marriage, and girls' right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Girls and their caregivers highlighted **improved communication and relationships**, and how they are now working together to make decisions.
- For girls who were out of school, participation in Girl Shine has motivated many to **enrol in school** and others highlighted that they would continue in school – something global research confirms is a key factor in delaying marriage.

Key elements of success to consider include:

- 1 **Tailored content** to ensure no girls – unmarried or ever-married – are left to navigate their circumstances alone: they know how and where to access vital services, seek support and access information that meets their needs.
- 2 Investing in **training and coaching female mentors from the community** to be mentors as a powerful way to strengthen women's leadership, as role models and advocates for girls over the long term.
- 3 **The importance of girls' solidarity with each other and with other supportive women around them as a foundation for movement-building** to strengthen social norms that delay the age of marriage and respect girls' right to make their own decisions.

Ever-married girls and adolescent mothers would benefit from having their own dedicated groups and tailored curriculum content that responds to their unique and often heightened needs.

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) Early Marriage in Crisis project includes a focus on delivering additional and separate life skills content targeting ever-married girls, including those who are married, divorced, widowed, and/or have children. Sessions are delivered in recognition that content on marriage prevention and the consequences of early marriage may be alienating and potentially harmful to married girls, and the need to discuss topics around sexual wellbeing with sensitivity.¹³⁶

Research conducted by GAGE emphasises the need for married and divorced girls to spend time with peers and friends, and caring adults in safe spaces as a way to improve their psychosocial wellbeing, voice and agency. Supporting girls to access these spaces will likely require engagement with gatekeepers, like husbands, mothers-in-law, or girls' own parents after divorce.

Interventions led by faith-based organisations may be more acceptable in conservative settings, especially if such actors are considered to be a core component within broader civil society.¹³⁷ The GAGE research also emphasises how married girls need more support from their mothers-in-law, something safe space programming may be able to support with.¹³⁸ On IRC's Early Marriage in Crisis project, significant improvements in relationships between mothers-in-law and adolescent girls were observed following the intervention, with mothers-in-law encouraging girls to engage in safe spaces to interact with girls their own age.¹³⁹

More evidence is needed on the effectiveness of safe space programming in humanitarian settings.

Rigorous evaluations of safe space and empowerment programmes in humanitarian settings are limited. Of those that exist, none show that safe spaces are effective in reducing girls' and women's experience of violence or of reducing child marriage prevalence.¹⁴⁰ Evidence suggests that safe space activities may have limited potential when implemented as standalone interventions, and that it might be beneficial to engage boys, men, families and communities to become agents of change.

An impact evaluation of the Adolescent Girls' Empowerment Program in Zambia found efforts only targeting girls were ineffective in improving education and fertility outcomes in the long-term among those who are most marginalised.¹⁴¹

Evidence gathered by Plan from the Philippines in 2022 highlights the possible benefits of engaging boys and men, families, and wider communities – including community and religious leaders – in dialogue around child marriage, and their willingness to become agents of change for preventing or delaying child marriage.¹⁴²



Further research – including evaluations of existing interventions – are needed to understand what makes safe space interventions most effective in humanitarian settings. This is important, given their potential to offer access to a wide range of social, health, and economic information and services, and the value placed on safe spaces by girls.

The extent to which girls have access to peer networks can have a huge impact on their sense of empowerment and uptake of key services that act as protectors against child marriage and early pregnancy.

Interventions to support girls should focus on listening to their self-expressed needs and offering opportunities to strengthen their support networks. This may be important to girls' mental health in displacement and non-displacement settings.



In context: Relationships among refugee girls influences their engagement with safe spaces in Lebanon

Evaluation of the Amenah project – which aimed to mitigate the drivers of early marriage in a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon from 2017 to 2018 – found that girls' engagement with the programme's safe spaces was **dependent on the quality of their relationship with other girls in the programme**. The evaluation also suggested that, while displacement may have amplified girls' sense of social isolation, peer support may also be important to girls in non-displaced settings.¹⁴³



Pregnant and parenting adolescent girls' resilience relies on support networks in South Sudan

A 2022 study into adolescent mothers' and pregnant adolescent girls' resilience and educational continuity in COVID-19-affected South Sudan highlighted how adolescent girls faced increased challenges during the pandemic. It found that their **resilience in humanitarian contexts largely depends on having better access to familial, community and peer support networks**.¹⁴⁴

Incorporating peer support-focused activities within broader multi-sectoral rights-based programming that is contextually grounded may be beneficial.¹⁴⁵



In context: Combining reproductive health and financial savings-focused interventions in Ethiopia

CARE's TESFA programme worked with 5,000 married adolescent girls in Ethiopia from 2010 to 2013. It did this through a combination of reproductive health and financial savings-focused interventions. At the endline, participants reported improvements across health and empowerment outcomes. Four years post-TESFA, 88% of groups continued to meet without assistance from CARE, with new groups formed including girls not involved in the original programme.¹⁴⁶

Success factors included:

- The strength of **solidarity and safety** created within the peer groups – based on peer-facilitated reflective dialogues rather than peer-based learning as is more common.
- A **culturally relevant curriculum**, developed in consultation with Ethiopian female health workers.
- The transition of TESFA's Village Savings and Loan Association model to the **traditional Ethiopian equb model** for saving and borrowing.
- The **holistic approach to community engagement**, through the formation of "Social Analysis and Action" groups involving village elders, religious leaders, community health workers, mothers-in-law, and – critically – husbands.
- A **critical mass of community/place-based women** who were able to challenge harmful norms – including the acceptability of child marriage – with greater community acceptance and less individual risk. This may have spill-over effects on the acceptability of marriage for future generations in a way that is driven by girls.¹⁴⁷

Girls in many settings use social media and mobile technology to build and maintain peer support networks, and to access critical information around security and service provision; this is an opportunity and a risk with regards to child marriage and girls' empowerment programming.

Research conducted by HIAS and UNICEF amongst displaced girls in Latin America and the Caribbean found girls spend a large amount of time connected to social networks – primarily Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube. They use social media for four purposes: maintaining bonds with family and friendship networks in their country of origin; entertainment and fun; studying and doing homework; and as an alternative source of information to the family, community and educational institutions.¹⁴⁸

In a survey of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations in 2021, respondents also highlighted the use of mobile phones – and particularly messaging applications like WhatsApp – to share information and raise alerts of GBV and child marriage.¹⁴⁹

The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage's 2023 review of technology-based interventions to address child marriage and FGM/C highlights the benefits of using or incorporating different forms of technology within child marriage-focused programming.¹⁵⁰ However, the UNICEF/HIAS research also highlighted significant risks to girls' safety and wellbeing as a result of their social media use, including a limited understanding of online safety and data protection, exposure to sexting and sexually explicit content without consent, exposure to blackmail and extortion, and in some cases reliance on partners or relatives for digital access in a way that opens them up to controlling behaviours and abuse.¹⁵¹



Key takeaways

- 1 More research and evidence is needed on the effectiveness of safe space programming in humanitarian settings, including for different types of girls and if/when paired with other kinds of intervention.** There is evidence to suggest safe spaces have the potential to play a critical role in conflict and crises – for building girls' peer support networks, providing access to services (particularly around GBV), life skills development opportunities and CSE, and for providing opportunities for humanitarian actors to better understand girls' needs, challenges and agency. **More evidence is needed on their potential to reduce and/or respond to child marriage.**
- 2 Ever-married girls and young mothers may benefit from having their own, separate groups and tailored activities and curricula.** This could be in addition to the involvement of mothers-in-law within these spaces, where girls feel this would be helpful. Engagement with family-level restrictive norms may be an important pairing for these interventions.
- 3 Peer support-focused activities may be more effective in improving the health and agency of (ever-married) girls and more likely to be sustained if implemented as part of a multi-sectoral, rights-based, contextually grounded programme,** including both norms-based interventions and economic support. Humanitarian actors should recognise the prevalence of social media and online technology as ways for girls to maintain peer support networks in emergency settings, and be cognisant of its benefits and potential risks.





Case study: The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal study – Using a gender and intersectional lens to support evidence-based, gender-transformative programming

GAGE

GAGE is the largest longitudinal study focused on adolescents in the Global South. It follows 20,000 adolescents (from 2016 to 2026) in six low- and middle-income country contexts, including geographies affected by conflict and forced displacement:

- **Jordan and Lebanon**, which host large refugee populations affected by the Palestinian and Syrian crises living in camp and host community settings;
- Cox's Bazar in **Bangladesh**, which hosts 1 million Rohingya refugees;
- **Ethiopia** which has experienced large-scale conflict – including in Afar, Amhara and Tigray – and has a large population of internally displaced persons.



PICTURED: A 20-year-old woman who married at 14 and owns a restaurant in Afar, Ethiopia. Photo: Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024.

How GAGE works

GAGE research has a strong focus on the **adolescents who have been most marginalised**, including those married before age 18. It tracks the experiences of about **1,000 married girls** using surveys, in-depth qualitative and participatory research methods.

GAGE aims to support **evidence-informed programming and policy** to prevent child marriage and support adolescent girls and young women married before age 18. It does this through engagements with key stakeholders across programmes, policy, research and donors at the national and global level.

GAGE uses a **gender and intersectional lens** in its analyses, and sees this as a pivotal first step in supporting gender-transformative programming.

Results and implications

- 1 GAGE research highlights the need for **multisectoral approaches** that provide critical services that protect against child marriage and support married girls, alongside interventions that address the gender norms that perpetuate child marriage.

For example, research in conflict-affected communities in Afar, Ethiopia, showed that adolescent girls were at **greater risk of child marriage and early childbearing** after conflict, due to strong family, clan and community pressures to replace lost family members. Responding to this evidence, the [UNFPA- UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#) extended programmatic support in affected districts to work with communities to **address harmful gender norms and practices**, and including **support and referrals for married girls** to appropriate health, education, psychosocial and integrated GBV services.

- 2 Applying a **gender and intersectional lens** to the GAGE research has contributed to our understanding of which groups of girls and young women are excluded from child marriage interventions.

For example, the recent longitudinal evaluation of the “Makani integrated service centres for children

and adolescents in Jordan” programme highlighted that **married adolescents are often overlooked in programming for adolescents and youth.**

As a result of research-based recommendations from this evaluation, UNICEF **scaled up the Makani integrated service centres** for children and adolescents programme to Lebanon. They also **introduced a gender pilot to support programming that includes married girls.** The pilot includes a gender-transformative element in the Makani skills-building curriculum and works with key community influencers to address gender norms, including child marriage and GBV.

- 3 Greater investments are needed in tailored programming for married adolescents** rather than assuming – incorrectly – that they could participate in regular empowerment programming for adolescents.
- 4 Greater outreach with husbands and in-laws** is needed to support married adolescents’ participation. Providing childcare or – as a minimum – infant/child-friendly meeting spaces also supports their participation.
- 5 Programming needs to be expanded and intensified as part of post-conflict recovery interventions,** as risks of child marriage as a coping mechanism are likely to be elevated in such settings.

Find out more

Presler-Marshall, E., Jones, N., Alheiwidi, S., Youssef, S., Abu Hamad, B., Bani Odeh, K., Baird, S., Oakley, E., Guglielmi, S. and Małachowska, A., 2020, [*Through their eyes: exploring the complex drivers of child marriage in humanitarian contexts*](#). Report. London: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence.



Toolbox: Practical tools to support girl-centred policy and programmatic work on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

International Rescue Committee, 2023, [Girl Shine: Early marriage curriculum for married/unmarried girls and their parents](#). Available in Arabic, English and French.

Girl Shine is a programme model and resource package that seeks to support, protect and ensure girls in humanitarian settings can make and act on their decisions. It supports them to build skills and knowledge on GBV and how to seek support services. It can be used in multiple humanitarian settings and phases of emergency response. It includes practitioner guidance, curricula for adolescent girls and caregivers, and training manuals. Additional content is designed to comprehensively address delaying marriage and responding to the unique needs of married girls.

Norwegian Church Aid, 2023, [ENGAGE – Enhancing Girl's Agency and Gender Equality: Lifeskills and group curriculum for girls, boys, parents, teachers, religious and community leaders](#). Available in English.

ENGAGE aims to support adolescent girls, mobilise families and communities, and improve the capacity of frontline workers to prevent and respond to child marriage within existing GBV programming in humanitarian settings. It does this through prevention/community outreach, response/service delivery and capacity enhancement. This toolkit includes an implementation guide; curricula for sessions with adolescent girls and boys, caregivers, teachers, religious leaders, community members; and training tools for those implementing the ENGAGE programme.

Plan International, 2020, [Adolescent programming toolkit: Guidance and tools for adolescent programming and girls' empowerment in crisis settings](#). Available in English, French and Spanish.

This toolkit was developed to support frontline teams to work with and for adolescents in emergencies and protracted crises. It includes a Theory of Change to support adolescents in crisis settings; a programmatic framework; and a step-by-step guide for programming with and for adolescents, with key considerations for reaching and supporting adolescent girls.

International Rescue Committee and International Medical Corps, 2019, [Women and girls' safe spaces: A toolkit for advancing women's and girls' empowerment in humanitarian settings](#). Available in English.

This toolkit was developed to support girls' and women's sense of self and empowerment by providing a blueprint for safe space programming. It includes 38 tools and nine databases with step-by-step instructions and guidance on how to apply feminist principles, approaches and strategies in practice, within an accountable, girl- and women-led process.



Interventions to change discriminatory gender and social norms

For adolescent girls to exercise voice and choice to access the key services they are entitled to, they also require freedom from the norms that undermine their potential and status.

Deeply entrenched norms around the role of girls and women in society can limit girls' access to education, health care and livelihood opportunities, and put them at risk when they step outside these roles. In conflict- and crisis-affected settings – where harmful norms often become more pronounced and rigid – they can pose as much of a risk to girls' safety as insecurity itself.

Research with displaced communities in 2021 found that violence in the home has as real an impact on the decision to marry as violence caused by conflict and displacement, even though the latter has received more focus.¹⁵²

There is evidence that reducing GBV and transforming gender inequitable attitudes is possible in conflict-affected communities, including through engaging families and whole communities (including host communities) and through adopting a multi-component approach.

A 2022 evidence review by the What Works to Prevent GBV programme examined the effectiveness of different social norm change approaches to addressing GBV – including child marriage and FGM/C – in settings experiencing fragility. It found that community/place-based approaches which prioritise community mobilisation and action are promising in addressing multiple forms of violence. This includes working with faith leaders and through community dialogues, often delivered through a peer-led methodology by trained community members.¹⁵³



In context: A multi-component social norms programme reduced the preference for and prevalence of child marriage in Somalia

The four-year multi-component Challenging Harmful Attitudes and Norms for Gender Equality and Empowerment in Somalia (CHANGES) project focused on shifting norms around and reducing the prevalence of harmful practices including child marriage and FGM/C, and included social and behavioural change interventions, activities focused on girls' empowerment and the formation of village and lending associations to strengthen women's financial independence.

Robust evaluation found that significantly-involved community members changed their minds about the desirability of child marriage. **Those reporting a preference for child marriage declined by 25% in intervention communities** during the first two years of implementation.¹⁵⁴ The prevalence of child marriage also declined slightly – more so in places where CHANGES engaged more participants.¹⁵⁵

Engaging and sustaining involvement from families and communities is not always straightforward, and more research is needed to understand key factors for success.



In context: Engaging parents in programming with Syrian refugees in Lebanon

In the Amenah project, efforts to engage fathers in the intervention ultimately proved unsuccessful, due to competing economic priorities and the perception that mothers were responsible for their daughters.

Mothers' engagement was variable and affected by household-level factors and the support available through the programme – for example, childcare was provided in mothers' sessions, but transport costs were not.

Conversely, the involvement of female Syrian caseworkers in the programme, who shared the same socioeconomic background and displacement experience as the girls and their families, was seen as critical for building trust with girls' parents. This also came with challenges, as caseworkers faced the same social, economic, legal and gender-based hardships faced by all Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Evaluation of the project highlighted the **need for deeper understanding of how to reinforce programme content for parents while also sustaining their engagement in settings with numerous competing priorities.**¹⁵⁶

Engaging boys and men – as husbands, family members, gatekeepers and within communities – is likely critical to shifting gender norms, but should be approached in a way that does not decentre or devalue girls' needs or voices.

Research conducted in Djibouti, Egypt, Yemen and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq highlighted how across all contexts, fathers, male relatives and the groom-to-be were most involved in decision-making around child marriage. While recommendations for how they might be engaged differed by context, the research recommended humanitarian actors engage men across planning and implementation activities to ensure girls have a supportive and protective environment whether within or outside of marriage.¹⁵⁷

A survey of grassroots feminist actors in East Africa similarly echoed the importance of intentionally activating the support of boys and men as key allies in work to address child marriage.¹⁵⁸

The ALIGN Platform's 2021 conceptual framework for norms change sets out the pathway through which norms can shift, including the specific "patriarchal brakes" that can block efforts to create change. This framework may be helpful in visualising when and at what stages to engage boys and men as part of girl-centred programming.¹⁵⁹

There are limitations and risks of overly focusing on social norms, which are often misunderstood.

Recent analysis of humanitarian narratives around gender norm change in displacement settings brings to light the assumptions, terms, stories and frameworks that shape beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and decision-making among humanitarian actors. It highlights how tradition, religion and culture are often framed negatively by humanitarian actors, without appreciation for how norms manifested in communities (positively or negatively) before displacement. It notes how humanitarian actors tend to assume gender equality-focused interventions are starting from a baseline of zero, and that more progressive values around equality always need to be brought in from the outside.¹⁶⁰ This tendency can mean the rationale behind child marriage and other behaviours may be misunderstood, and opportunities for supporting community-owned change are missed.¹⁶¹

Overly-focusing on norms – and placing the onus on individuals and communities to change – can also risk overlooking the structural and institutional drivers of child marriage and related behaviours.

A 2022 study into pregnant and parenting adolescent girls' resilience and educational continuity in COVID-19-affected South Sudan drew on lessons from the Ebola response in West Africa, highlighting similarities across both contexts. The report notes how, despite evidence of structural drivers of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy – like girls' increased exposure to men and widespread school closures in highly disrupted villages resulting in an 11% rise in pregnancies outside marriage – research downplayed these drivers and instead focused on sensitisation campaigns, thereby centring girls' behaviours and placing the burden of adolescent pregnancy on girls.¹⁶² Subsequent sensitisation campaigns then focused on stabilising power dynamics, rather than seeking to shift them, with donors and policymakers failing to engage with the evidence-based structural drivers at play.

Similarly, in research conducted among refugees in Tigray, Ethiopia, despite communities citing lack of money and limited availability of services as reasons for not accessing SRHR services, researchers listed tradition and religion as barriers to access.¹⁶³

A 2022 study on coping strategies for conflict, climate and displacement in northern Mozambique emphasised this point, noting how “by celebrating individual agency and ability, narratives of resilience and self-reliance can also be problematic, particularly when they downplay underlying structures and inequalities, and shift the responsibility for coping and adapting onto displaced people themselves”.¹⁶⁴



Key takeaways

- 1 There is evidence that reducing GBV – including child marriage – and transforming gender inequitable attitudes is possible in conflict-affected communities over time,** despite the fact that harmful norms are often heightened in these settings. Engaging families and whole communities (including women leaders and women-led movements) as part of a multi-component, longer-term investment approach can reduce the desirability and prevalence of child marriage.ⁱ
- 2 Engaging husbands and families as part of a gradual, sustained, whole-community approach is not straightforward; further research is needed on how to engage and sustain different family members and to assess long term impact.** This could potentially draw on recent frameworks for how to engage boys and men without decentring the needs of girls and women.
- 3 Engagement with social norms in conflict and crisis should be based on a nuanced understanding of how these norms manifested before the crisis.** It should also be informed by the need for social norms change interventions to be supported by investment in gender-transformative engagement with the structural and institutional drivers of child marriage.

i. While not specifically crisis-focused, [Tostan](#) (including its [Community Capacity Building Programme](#)) offers insights into how programmes can work in effective partnership with local communities to address a broad range of issues, including child marriage, FGM/C and education.



Case study: ABAAD's Marriage Is Not a Game uses an animated video to alert girls in Lebanon to the risks of early marriage

The Marriage is Not a Game initiative

Marriage Is Not a Game is an awareness-raising initiative that communicates the risks associated with child marriage to girls and their communities in crisis-affected regions of Lebanon. It was developed by the non-governmental organisation ABAAD – Resource Center for Gender Equality, in collaboration with UNICEF. They developed key messages together, and UNICEF conducted testing and focus group discussions with community members to feed into the process.

ABAAD integrates the protection and best interests of girls into all its interventions, ensuring they are **gender-transformative and rights-based**.

The risk of child marriage in Lebanon is growing due to **ongoing crises** – including a crippling economic crisis – with devastating impact on the provision of public services, including education.



Pictured: The Marriage is Not a Game initiative

How Marriage Is Not a Game works

Marriage Is Not a Game, originally launched in 2014, uses an [animated video](#) – together with a complementary brochure – to show the immediate and longer-term **impacts of child marriage**. The video highlights how child marriage deprives girls of their education, limits their options for keeping themselves and their children safe – including during pregnancy – and prevents them from accessing decent work in adulthood. It contrasts this with better outcomes for those who marry after age 18, and their children

This initiative is part of ABAAD's broader GBV prevention and response strategy, which includes [community-based activities](#) and direct service provision for members of host and refugee communities. Through these services, they **meet girls and women's immediate needs, link with protection and support services, and create space for them to build connections and resilience**.

Results and implications

Marriage Is Not a Game has made a lasting impact by raising awareness of the risks of early marriage and promoting the rights of girls in communities that experience intersecting vulnerabilities. Its messages contribute to the ongoing dialogue around child marriage in Lebanon and the region.

- ABAAD's broader GBV prevention and response strategy reached over **28,500** rights holders – that is, individuals with entitlements in relation to duty-bearers, including those at risk of GBV, child protection issues and gender inequalities – through direct services in 2023. Of these, **16%** were under age 18.
- Prevention sessions covering issues like GBV and child marriage have reached over **12,400** people.
- Case management services supported **2,321** girls and women in 2023. **Child marriage accounted for 16% of the reported GBV cases.**

Key elements of success to consider include:

1 The need for long-term, contextually-tailored and holistic approaches that:

- Address the **immediate and root causes of GBV**, combining awareness-raising with direct support services.
- Intentionally supporting the populations who have been **most marginalised**, especially in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.
- Ensure communities are **aware of the risks** of child marriage and are committed to protecting girls' rights.

2 The integration of community feedback and partnerships to ensure initiatives are culturally sensitive and effective, including:

- The widespread use of these tools in regions with **acute needs**, like Syria and Yemen.
- Intentionally **reaching out to parents** – especially mothers – as key figures in prevention efforts
- Combining the programme with other interventions, like working with **religious leaders** and integrating the **fatherhood programme** to create broader impact in prevention and disclosure.



Toolbox: Practical tools to support gender and social norms policy and programmatic work on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2021, [*Transcending norms: Gender-transformative approaches to women's and girls' safe spaces in humanitarian settings*](#). Available in English.

This resource provides practical technical guidance for UNFPA, community/place-based organisations and other GBV agencies operating safe spaces regionally and globally. It is intended to enhance the gender transformative potential of safe space programming and activities based on contextual knowledge and understanding. It also includes recommendations for donors to ensure GTA in the safe spaces they fund.



Interventions focused on laws and marriage/birth registration policies

Legislation can impact child marriage prevalence¹⁶⁵ and many grassroots feminist actors agree that a lack of implementation of child marriage laws and policies acts as a barrier to preventing child marriage.¹⁶⁶ However, loopholes, traditional or religious alternatives and exceptions (for example, for parental consent) continue to allow girls to marry below the legal age.¹⁶⁷

Evidence on the relationship between child marriage laws and the onset of crisis is limited.¹⁶⁸ However, in emergency settings, disruption of law enforcement can allow child marriages to take place under the radar or increase informal forms of marriage – like traditional or religious marriages – which do not require legal registration.



In context: Child marriage increased among Rohingya populations displaced in Bangladesh, where national marriage laws were not announced or enforced

A 2020 study on displaced Rohingya populations found that the prevalence of **child marriage and polygamy initially increased** when refugees arrived in Bangladesh, as they were no longer subject to the laws that had prohibited these practices in Rakhine State. Marriages were conducted in informal camp settings by religious authorities, without interference from camp authorities. Once legal jurisdiction was established and laws were being enforced by camp authorities, prevalence of child marriage declined.¹⁶⁹



Further investigation is needed into the impact of child marriage laws on prevalence in humanitarian settings, as what studies we do have show mixed results that are highly context dependent.¹⁷⁰

The degree to which displaced communities are – or are not – integrated into existing legal, health and other national systems, and to which they understand their rights within those systems, can have a significant impact on child marriage, on girls' overall risk factors or wellbeing, and on access to justice.

In contexts with high rates of migration and displacement, the relationship between the law and child marriage can become particularly opaque. Research conducted amongst migrant, displaced and refugee girls in Latin America and the Caribbean found most girls lack knowledge about their rights. Mistrust in public institutions is so widespread that most are unlikely or unable to report violations in any setting. This is also the case when girls experience violence or abuse, with many girls being particularly distrusting of the police as a result of their experiences during migration.¹⁷¹

Research conducted by Save the Children with young refugees in the Middle East and North Africa found that a key challenge for enforcing existing child marriage laws was that most people – including adolescents and their families – were not aware the laws existed.¹⁷²



In context: Working with the Sharia court to promote knowledge of girls' rights in Jordan

In **Jordan**, a UNHCR-based pilot is working with the **Sharia court** to help girls to understand their **rights** as a means of delaying marriage and supporting married girls – for example, to build understanding that a girl can state her right to education within a marriage contract under Islamic law.¹⁷³

A related but underexplored area of research is how differences between marriage laws in different contexts can impact the prevalence of marriage and the treatment of married girls. For example, the lower legal age of marriage in Bangladesh led to an increase in child marriages amongst refugees from Rakhine State. Meanwhile, a 2023 German case involving a girl legally married at 14 in Syria highlighted the limitations of Germany's law, which is intended to invalidate marriages under the age of 16, even if enacted outside of Germany.¹⁷⁴

Documentation of births and marriages is important from an accountability perspective. It elevates individual cases to a systemic level where justice systems can be held to account for allowing violations to take place, in addition to allowing survivors to access the services to which they are entitled.¹⁷⁵

In Egypt, refugees from Syria have faced long and complex processes for renewing their residency, during which time their children have been unable to enrol in school. This has placed children and adolescents at greater risk of child marriage which, while illegal in Egypt, often takes place through informal religious ceremonies. This in turn has knock-on effects for children born under these circumstances, who face difficulties obtaining birth certificates and consequently in accessing education in the future.¹⁷⁶

Conflict and crisis can severely disrupt legal registration processes for long-term residents or citizens, as well as for refugees and internally displaced persons. UNICEF's 2023 "Civil registration in humanitarian contexts" [guidelines](#) provide operational guidance and recommendations for improving the resilience of systems and services to ensure ongoing, permanent and universal registration of births and deaths in conflict and crisis settings.¹⁷⁷

Multi-sector-led training on gender justice and safe implementation of marriage laws – for key government officials in the judiciary, for law enforcement officers, and for religious leaders – is needed to ensure relevant legislation is used to address cultures of acceptance around child marriage.¹⁷⁸

This was highlighted by feminist actors in East Africa. Effective communication of and engagement around these laws targeting communities and girls – particularly in camp settings and those with high levels of displacement – is likely also necessary to maximise the potential of legislation as a protector against child marriage.

The prevalence and impact of gender-blind or discriminatory laws that limit girls' and women's voice and involvement in addressing climate change is also of note.

Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during natural disasters, yet girls and women are typically denied a role in addressing climate change, and 60% of long-term low-emission development strategies are gender-blind.¹⁷⁹ A UNFPA analysis of 2020-21 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) submissions^j found that of 119 submissions, only Vietnam referenced child marriage.¹⁸⁰

The impact of environmental crises on worsening known drivers of child marriage is increasingly well established,¹⁸¹ and the regions with the highest current prevalence of child marriage – West, Central, East and Southern Africa and South Asia – are also forecast to be most severely impacted by global heating.¹⁸² Girls and women must be meaningfully represented in policymaking processes and resultant frameworks around climate change preparedness. This is critical to developing prevention, adaptation and mitigation strategies that are designed to prevent and respond to child marriage in the face of the climate crisis.



Key takeaways

- 1 Laws alone cannot end child marriage, but they are an important foundation.** Laws on child marriage should be accompanied by investment in gender-equitable public services, employment opportunities, conflict and crisis resilience and/or recovery, and the transformation of discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours.¹⁸³
- 2 Interventions to clarify local legal, health and other registration systems – and to provide accompaniment in navigating those processes – may help to prevent child marriage and support ever-married girls and their children.** This is particularly important in displacement settings, or in protracted crises where there is sustained disruption of these systems.
- 3 Efforts to build girls' and families' understanding of their legal rights and ability to navigate local systems and processes are important, and should be accompanied by multi-sector training on gender justice and safe implementation –** including of marriage laws – for officials in the judiciary, law enforcement, and other key cultural and religious institutions.
- 4 Girls and women's voices and needs are currently underrepresented in national and international legal and policy frameworks for addressing the climate crisis.** This is despite the disproportionate impact of climate change on girls and women, including increased risk of child marriage. Coordinated effort is needed to ensure girls and women are meaningfully engaged and represented in all aspects of climate-related decision-making processes and resultant policy and legislation.

j. NDCs are a key national climate policy document, agreed to as part of the 2016 Paris Agreement. NDCs set out how individual countries will work to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The first round of NDCs were submitted in the time period around 2020-21 and will be submitted again in 2025.



Women's rights organisations and movements

Women's rights and women-led organisations (WROs/WLOs) play a critical role in preventing and responding to gender-based violence and addressing gender inequality before, during and after crises.

They are typically first responders to GBV in their communities, and there is evidence that countries with strong feminist movements often have more comprehensive policies on violence against women and girls than those with weaker or non-existent movements.^{184,185}

"[A feminist approach] moves beyond a limited agenda for localisation that instrumentalises the expertise and reach of national and sub-national organisations for programme delivery, to a transformative agenda that meets WROs/WLOs where they are and champions equitable partnership models [emphasis added]".

- International Rescue Committee¹⁸⁶



Less is known about the role of WROs specifically in relation to child marriage prevention and response.

Despite increasingly vocal recognition of the importance of WROs/WLOs by development and humanitarian actors, they are still chronically underfunded and excluded from key decision-making spaces across the development and humanitarian spheres.

In focus: Funding for WROs/WLOs



90.7% OF WROs/WLOs fear their organisation is at risk due to a lack of institutional or core funding.¹⁸⁷

99% of development aid and foundation grants **do not directly reach WROs/WLOs.**¹⁸⁸



In 2021, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs allocated:



of its total Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) to WROs/WLOs.



distributed to other national and sub-national organisations.¹⁸⁹

Despite new funding commitments, WROs/WLOs only get:

0.13%

of total Official Development Assistance.

0.4%

of all gender-related aid.¹⁹⁰



The lack of funding available to WROs and WLOs indicates a wider imbalance of power between international organisations and national and sub-national organisations, and the devaluing of feminist leadership in humanitarian and development practice.

WROs and WLOs – where funded – are typically engaged as implementing partners or context experts, with little influence over programme strategy or flexibility to pursue their own priorities.¹⁹¹ This is a critical missed opportunity, given their unique position in understanding and addressing GBV and broader issues of gender inequality before, during and after conflict and crisis.¹⁹²

There is a growing body of guidance, recommendations and promising practice examples on how to meaningfully engage WROs and WLOs as central actors in humanitarian, development and nexus programming.

IRC has identified several factors for developing and sustaining partnerships between international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and WROs/WLOs, relating to trust and accountability, capacity enhancement, risk and compliance, and funding.¹⁹³ In a 2022 learning brief, IRC details the Child and Adolescent Survivors Initiative (CASI) learning programme as an example of positive INGO-WRO partnering. CASI was implemented from 2020 to 2022 to enhance the technical capacity and leadership of child protection and GBV actors in Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. In total, it engaged 75 child protection and GBV supervisors and managers who went on to train 137 caseworkers, community/place-based organisations and community leaders.

The CASI learning programme also enhanced the institutional capacity of six women-led and child-focused organisations. Each received a sub-award of US\$30,000, alongside training and support in monitoring and evaluation, safeguarding and financial reporting. These organisations used the funds to offer Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse training to caseworkers, community/place-based organisations, and other service providers, and to provide case management services to nearly 1,800 children over three months.¹⁹⁴

Guidance is also available on how to overcome the barriers that restrict WROs' access to humanitarian and development funding.

IRC has outlined recommendations for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), INGOs, donors and the GBV Area of Responsibility. These recommendations cover practical steps towards increasing WRO representation and influence in key CBPF-related decision-making processes. They include:

- **Reform of CBPF criteria that prohibits successful WRO/WLO applications.**
- **Support to WROs to develop UN-required operational policies.**
- **Delivery of 25% of CBPF GBV allocations to WROs/WLOs, in line with localisation commitments.**
- **Delivery of flexible funding.**
- **The scale-up of funding to WRO-friendly feminist funds.¹⁹⁵**

Steps towards increasing CBPF funding access to WROs have already been taken by the Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ukraine Humanitarian Funds.¹⁹⁶

In focus: Promising practice examples for increasing WROs'/WLOs' access to funding

A 2022 report by AWID, Mama Cash and Count Me In! showcases a number of promising practice examples for donors to work with or adapt their own funding mechanisms to effectively deliver funding for WROs/WLOs, including:

- UN Women's [Fund for Gender Equality's](#) allocation of **30% of grant costs to programme management and 7% to administrative costs**.¹⁹⁷
- [Amplify Change's](#) specific targeting of marginalised groups and more controversial services, including safe abortion and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people.
- [FRIDA's](#) participatory feminist grant-making model supports the resourcing of young girls, women, trans and intersex youth to create lasting transformative change.
- The [Equality Fund's](#) consultation with over **1,000 activists from 45 countries** as part of its initial "design and build" phase.¹⁹⁸
- The [Girls First Fund](#) is a donor collaborative supported by philanthropic organisations and individuals to champion community-led efforts to address child marriage. They provide funding, mentoring, capacity enhancement and accompaniment to national and local organisations who access financial assistance and work on child marriage prevention and response.



Key takeaways

- 1** **There is significant evidence showing the influential role WROs and feminist movements can play in pushing for and achieving tangible progress towards gender equality**, and in providing expertise and continuity at transitions into and out of conflict and crisis. More research is needed to understand the role played by WROs with regards to child marriage specifically.
- 2** **WROs and WLOs remain chronically underfunded and underrepresented in development and humanitarian work**, despite global commitments to localisation. This reflects a widespread power imbalance between international and community/place-based actors, and a devaluing of feminist leadership.
- 3** **There is a growing body of guidance, recommendations and promising practice examples on how to meaningfully engage WROs and WLOs as core actors** in humanitarian, development and peace nexus programming, and on how to overcome barriers that restrict WROs' access to funding.



Toolbox: Practical tools to support work with WROs in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

International Rescue Committee, 2023, [Why Wait? How the humanitarian system can better fund women-Led and women's rights organisations](#). Available in English, with executive summaries in Dari, French, Pashto and Ukrainian.

This report provides analysis and insights from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ukraine to show the systemic barriers to – and opportunities for – WROs/WLOs accessing humanitarian funding. The recommendations highlight changes that can be made at the operational and policy level, so policymakers can drive reform of the multilateral system they fund, helping them realise their commitments to localisation, feminist approaches and aid effectiveness.



Case study: Integrating the response to child marriage in humanitarian settings – Engaging feminist civil society actors to end child marriage in East Africa

The IRCMHS approach

The Integrating the response to child marriage in humanitarian settings (IRCMHS) initiative set out to enhance coordination and collaboration in the response to child marriage in crisis- and conflict-affected settings, strengthening the voice and position of – essential but often-overlooked – feminist, women-led and women's rights organisations and actors in this space.

The IRCMHS is coordinated by the Women's Refugee Commission in partnership with Rozaria Memorial Trust and King's College London, and began in 2021.

The IRCMHS worked with **80 community/place-based civil society organisations across East Africa** to identify key aspects of programming that impact on health outcomes for adolescent girls, and that promote gender equality in humanitarian action.

The initiative's approach centred on **strong dialogue and collaboration** between coordinating and wider consortium partners. Every feminist and women-led organisation involved in the initiative also considered **gender-transformative approaches** to be essential to promote systemic change and prevent child marriage. Such approaches invest in the "wholeness of a girl or young woman's life" by facilitating gender equality in all spaces, and at all levels. Their implementation requires collaboration and joint work across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.



PICTURED: The image created for the "Feminist vision for ending child marriage in East Africa" Road Map. Credit: Women's Refugee Commission, Rozaria Memorial Trust and King's College London.

How the IRCMHS works

Programming responses during emergencies and protracted crises often **do not have enough evidence** to fully respond to the needs of adolescent girls in all their diversity, including ever-married girls. They also often do not prioritise enhancing the capacities of community/place-based actors to respond to contextual drivers of child marriage before and during crisis.

The IRCMHS initiative used an initial scoping review and **participatory action research** – with feminist, women-led and women's rights organisations – to explore enablers and barriers to engagement across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and across sectors in child marriage programming.

Together, they used online workshops, Delphi surveys and key informant interviews to **draw consensus, identify gaps and develop evidence-based advocacy** to support effective, integrated child marriage programming among crisis-affected populations in East Africa.

A **Nhanga meeting** – or safe space for intergenerational mentorship and advocacy – with adolescent girls and key policymakers, civil society actors and African Union Commission officials provided a platform to break down institutional and relational power hierarchies. Participants used emotions and storytelling to reflect on the findings from the research and discuss essential elements of coordination and collaboration to end child marriage.

Results and implications

The research process resulted in the co-creation of a measurable, actionable five-year [Road Map](#) – A Feminist Vision for Ending Child Marriage in Eastern Africa. This was created to enhance collaboration with – and leadership of – community/place-based feminist and women's rights organisations in disaster planning, management and response through five key outcomes and related action areas:

- 1 Feminist and women's rights actors are well trained, well resourced, and well positioned to transform practice and policies** that drive humanitarian preparedness and response through local to regional spaces.
- 2 High quality, evidence-based gender-transformative services and programmes are implemented in each phase of an emergency** by place-based actors that are responsive to the needs and priorities of girls in all their diversity.
- 3 Intra- and inter-governmental mechanisms that govern disaster prevention and response are strengthened to improve functioning and coordination** of national systems critical for women and girls, including social protection, health, education and justice.
- 4 Justice systems are strengthened through transparent processes** to support girls and their families.
- 5 Funding is available for child marriage prevention and response for each phase of an emergency** and in a manner that prioritises localised capacity strengthening and implementation.

The Road Map is a powerful tool for driving change and fostering accountability. It invites governments, donors, international and non-governmental organisations, national civil society, and the private sector to **endorse community/place-based feminist leadership** to prevent child marriage and support those already affected by it in humanitarian action.

Key elements of success to consider from the initiative so far include:

- 1 Strong dialogue** and coordination between partners.
- 2 All partners reflecting** on the initiative's research and their own experiences to co-create a **change agenda** that promotes collaboration across sectors and among practitioners and policymakers (in this case, the Road Map Initiative).
- 3 Using participatory processes to:**
 - Build a place-based and contextualised **evidence base**.
 - Understand areas of **consensus** among feminist and women-led organisations on what supports/hinders effective, integrated child marriage programming.
- 4 Working directly with adolescent girls and their families** and promoting family-centred approaches.
- 5 Including government representatives**, given their influence on policy and practice.

Further information and resources from this initiative are housed in the “Child marriage in humanitarian settings: Integrating the response to child marriage” [Resource Hub](#).





Spotlight: Gender- transformative approaches

Spotlight: Gender-transformative approaches to child marriage programming in conflict- and crisis-affected settings – Evidence and practice

In focus: What are gender-transformative approaches?

Gender-transformative approaches (GTA) are programmes and interventions that identify and address gendered imbalances of power from the individual to the structural level. They are intentional about rebalancing power and redistributing resources towards people who have been historically marginalised, excluded and discriminated against because of their gender.

GTAs promote gender equality by:

- 1 **Fostering critical examination of power**, inequalities and gender roles, norms and dynamics.
- 2 **Recognising and strengthening positive norms** that support equality and foster an environment where girls, women and other marginalised groups can occupy positions of social and political influence.
- 3 **Addressing power imbalances** among persons of different genders, and promoting the relative position of girls, women and marginalised groups.
- 4 **Transforming the underlying social structures**, policies and broadly-held social norms that perpetuate and legitimise gender inequalities.¹⁹⁹

In this spotlight, we explore some of the evidence on GTA to child marriage programming and interventions. You will find examples of promising practice and areas where GTA can be strengthened across intervention areas:

- Girl-centred interventions: Safe spaces
- Income and economic strengthening interventions
- Education interventions
- Interventions to change discriminatory social and gender norms (including work with WROs and WLOs)

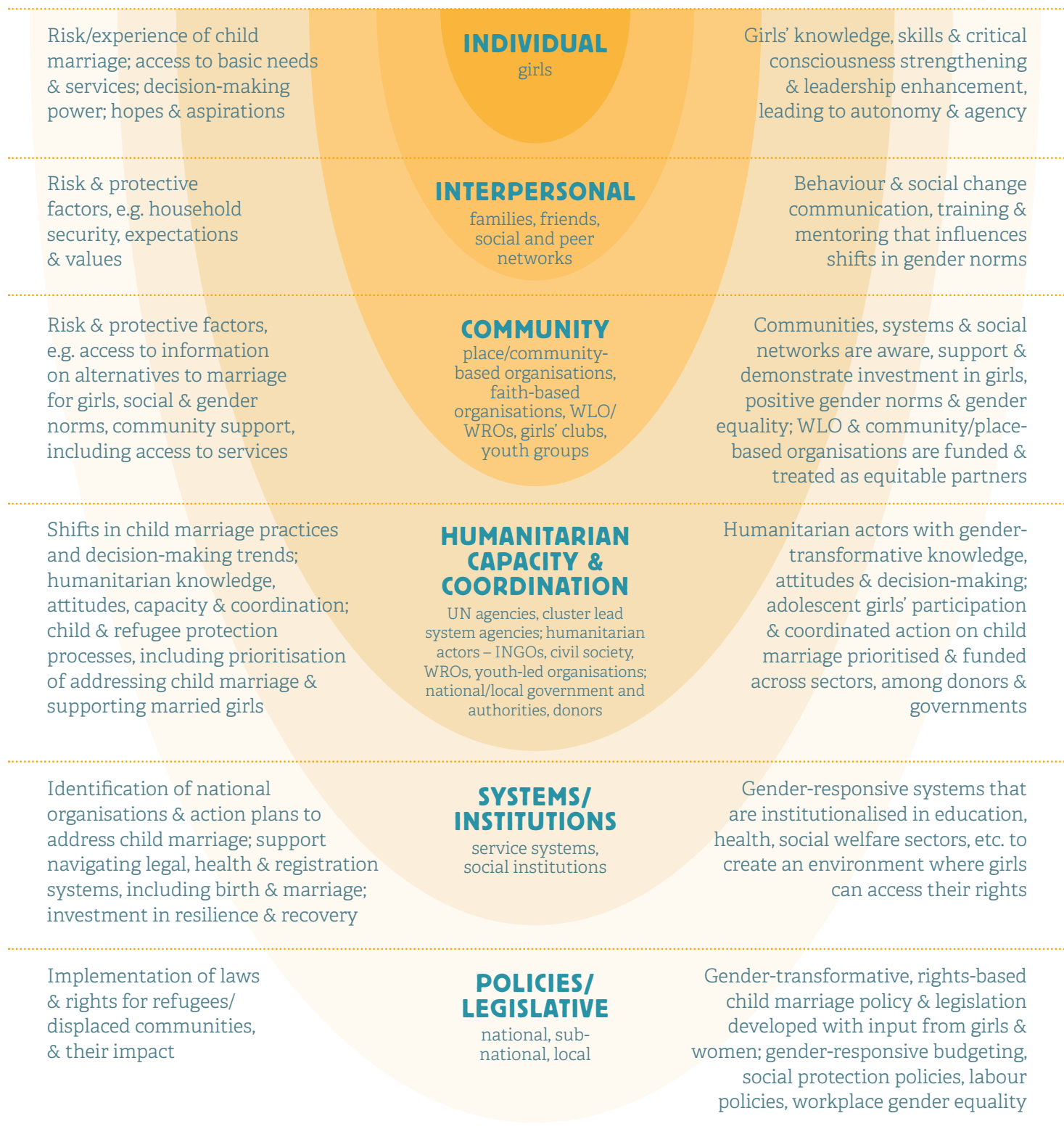
Shifting unequal power relations requires a combination of rights-based interventions that engage multiple sectors (multi-sectoral interventions), with collaboration and coordination from actors at all levels (across the socio-ecological model).²⁰⁰ Such **multi-sectoral interventions are key to delivering transformative results in the lives of girls and women over time and across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus.**

Below is a socio-ecological model that shows the key considerations and actions needed at each level to take a GTA to addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings. It is adapted from a GTA model developed by [UNICEF](#), and a humanitarian-specific model developed by [Plan International and UNHCR](#).

A socio-ecological model for gender-transformative child marriage programming in humanitarian settings

What we need to know about child marriage

What GTA looks like



Source: Adapted from UNICEF, n.d., [Technical note on gender-transformative approaches in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#); and Plan International and UNHCR, 2023, [Toolkit: Context analysis on child marriage in crises and forced displacement settings](#).

For more practical details on what we need to know about child marriage at each level of the socio-ecological model in displacement settings, see the table on p. 8 of the Plan International and UNHCR [toolkit](#).



Girl-centred interventions: Safe spaces

Safe spaces have long been an integral component across girl-centred and empowerment interventions (See section on girl-centred and empowerment interventions pp. 41-9), particularly in GBV response programming. They are used to engage girls and women across all phases of humanitarian action, and are often considered lifesaving by girls and women.

Safe spaces can play a critical role in supporting girls to **build peer support networks and access services**, particularly around GBV and SRHR. Girls' access to peer networks can have a huge impact on their sense of agency and uptake of key services that protect against child marriage and early pregnancy.

As part of a GTA, safe spaces should also include components that provide **life skills development opportunities**, work to improve **familial and other relationships**, and to **address restrictive gender inequalities and norms**. They should mitigate against reproducing stereotypes and potential harmful gender norms in vocational training, skills building and livelihood activities for girls and women (see p. 22).²⁰¹

Importantly, safe spaces can also provide opportunities for humanitarian actors to better **understand girls' needs and challenges**, understand and **appreciate what power girls have** in these settings, and respond to these in a way that centres girls' lived experiences and mitigates potential backlash. All-community approaches that engage boys and men alongside girls, women and gender non-conforming people is key to building community support for interventions that promote girls' rights and participation.



Case study: Girl Shine

Girl Shine takes a rights-based and gender-transformative approach that works across the socio-ecological model to challenge harmful norms while building on girls' strengths to increase their safety, psychosocial wellbeing and power.

See full case study on pp. 42-3.

The evidence shows that safe spaces interventions typically seek to catalyse change across the first three levels of the socio-ecological model – the individual, interpersonal and community levels. However, they may have limited impact unless they also **foster intentional, sustained investment and partnerships that address the systemic, structural barriers that limit girls' access to services and put them at risk of child marriage, especially in humanitarian settings**.²⁰² These barriers are exacerbated for ever-married, pregnant, parenting and displaced girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and those living with disabilities.

Safe spaces interventions may have greater impact when linked with interventions at the service provision, policies and legislative levels to improve the supply of essential services – like SRHR, education and survivor-centred GBV support – and ensure girls are able and willing to access them.²⁰³

Recommendations for implementing organisations include:

- **Work with safe spaces intervention teams** to enhance their knowledge of global standards^k and GTA, supporting them to reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs.
- **Explore partnerships to integrate or link with SRHR, norms-based or economic support-focused interventions** that build girls' and women's access to services and opportunities, sharing information and building support through community engagement and outreach activities.
- **Work with girls and women** in all their diversity to regularly assess their needs and to select and adapt appropriate activities.
- **Advocate for predictable, long-term and flexible funding** to respond to girls' and women's evolving needs and changing contexts, recognising safe spaces as a core protection, empowerment and gender-transformative intervention.

The UNFPA [Transcending norms](#) technical guidance includes more detailed recommendations and practical tools for those operating girls' and women's safe space programming in humanitarian settings.

k. See the selection of global minimum standards on GBV, child protection, SRH and education in the toolbox on pp. 72-75.



More implementation research is needed into the effectiveness of safe space interventions in humanitarian settings. This is important, given their potential to offer access to a wide range of social, health and economic information and services, and the value placed on safe spaces by girls.



Income and economic strengthening interventions

Evidence shows there is **not enough emphasis on livelihood and skills development** within girl-centred and safe space programming, which often focus on girls' empowerment and links with SRHR services. Girls' access to employment opportunities can influence their decisions – and therefore be protective – around marriage and use of contraception.²⁰⁴ Building girls' skillsets and employability before, during and after crisis is particularly important for development-humanitarian-peace nexus programming.

Promising GTA practice includes **combining skills-focused and income generating interventions with context- and socio-culturally-informed GTA to identify and transform the norms that devalue and restrict girls' participation** in such interventions, and their economic opportunities more generally. This includes addressing the inequitable division of care, restrictions on girls' mobility and gender-stereotyped employment opportunities.

Cash-based interventions – as a core part of humanitarian programming focused on child marriage – can **help mitigate the risk of child marriage as an economic strategy**, and help girls stay in school or training.²⁰⁵

As evidence across this report suggests **“cash plus” interventions** that pair cash with other interventions across multiple sectors – like education, income generation or skills-based training, service provision and social norms change – also have the potential to support girls at risk of child marriage and ever-married girls to exercise their rights across life stages and the development-humanitarian-peace nexus.

For example, evidence from the **Arab States region** suggests that pairing cash transfers with community/place-based norms change interventions can help **overcome some of the practical barriers to education** – like cost of school fees, uniforms and materials – faced by girls in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.²⁰⁶

Working with agents of change in the community can also play a central role in **advocating and driving transformative shifts in individual and collective norms** among refugees.²⁰⁷

Individual and community-level interventions can help, but **girls – especially those who are displaced, refugees, married, pregnant or parenting – also face systemic/structural barriers to accessing quality education and economic opportunities**. These barriers include requirements for national or local registration to access school, the digital gender gap, restricted working rights for migrants and refugees, macro-economic policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on girls and women, and the unequal division and undervaluing of care work.²⁰⁸ Community/place-based actors, WROs and WLOs are well-placed to identify and address these barriers, but commitment and collaboration is also needed from governments, UN agencies and donors to act across sectors, at all levels. See more on p. 69.



Case study: ABAAD

ABAAD's approach integrates the protection and best interests of girls into all its interventions, ensuring they are gender-transformative and rights-based. The sustained relevance of the Marriage Is Not a Game intervention **highlights the need for long-term, contextually tailored interventions that address both the immediate and root causes of GBV**, and support populations in situations of vulnerability, especially in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.

See full case study on pp. 53-4.



More research is needed to understand how “cash-plus” education interventions – implemented as part of a multi-sectoral approach – can facilitate longer-term transformative change.



Education interventions

Education – particularly secondary education – is one of the strongest protections against child marriage. It also offers married adolescent girls and mothers opportunities to access essential psychosocial, physical and cognitive support. **Education has the potential to be a critical pathway to gender equality.**

In focus: What is gender-transformative education?

Gender-transformative education seeks to use all parts of an education system – from policies to pedagogies and community engagement – to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices. It does this by **challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.**²⁰⁹

When good quality education is available to all and sensitive to conflict and gender factors, it has the potential to be transformative and a key element in building sustainable peace. It can break cycles of conflict and violence, redefine gender norms, and promote respect and reconciliation.²¹⁰

Even in contexts where girls and families value education – indicating positive gender and social norms – **early school leaving due to structural barriers is a challenge.** To support girls' right to education, significantly decrease child marriage and unlock education's gender-transformative potential means focusing on schools *and* on systems and policies – that is, the supply side of education – in humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming.

For example, there is evidence that young Syrian mothers in refugee settings in **Jordan** are negotiating with their families-in-law to return to school under the understanding it will not impact their household chores.²¹¹ This highlights the value young mothers place on education, and the importance of interventions to **build on positive norms and girls' own desires, while also transforming discriminatory gender norms** like the gendered unequal division of care and domestic responsibilities, and the systemic failure to recognise the value of care.

Promising practice for gender-transformative education that addresses structural barriers to quality education in conflict- and crisis-affected settings include multi-component and well-coordinated programming that:

- **Addresses gaps within the education system that compound and perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation.** This includes proactive outreach and support for ever-married, pregnant, parenting and displaced girls, and girls affected by protracted absenteeism; and offering opportunities for them to build connections through peer networks and safe spaces.
- **Closes the implementation gap between education policy and practice.** This means addressing regulations that limit the right to education for non-citizens; failures under domestic law to provide a safe learning environment; exclusion of refugee parents from parents' councils; and supporting the transition to a new learning environment, including remedial and language support with life skills elements.
- **Improves coordination between education and protection sectors, and meaningfully engages with (host) communities.** This means involving and supporting community advocates – especially boys and men – and using a variety of arts, cultural and other contextually-appropriate media and references to critically reassess gender and social norms; using data-driven targeting, tailored sessions and inter-generational forums; and recruiting, training and compensating teachers, advocates and facilitators from the community.



Interventions to change discriminatory gender and social norms

Evidence from conflict- and crisis-affected contexts suggests that **community/place-based and multi-component approaches** that a) engage families and whole communities, including host communities, and b) prioritise community mobilisation and action, are promising in addressing GBV and transforming gender-inequitable attitudes.

Working with **faith leaders** and **community dialogues** – delivered through a peer-led methodology by trained community members – are promising practices.²¹² Engaging **boys and men** – as husbands, family members, gatekeepers and within communities – is likely critical to shifting gender norms but should be approached in a way that does not de-centre or devalue girls' needs or voices.

WROs/WLOs are typically first responders to GBV in their communities, and play a critical role in preventing and responding to GBV and addressing gender inequality before, during and after crises. There is also evidence that countries with strong feminist movements often have more comprehensive policies on violence against women and girls than those with weaker or non-existent movements.²¹³ **These organisations are well-positioned to identify the practical and systemic/structural limitations girls face in accessing their rights.** GTA should increase space for them to identify, engage with and transform the systems that maintain inequality, and to hold national governments, international organisations and policymakers to account.

There is a growing body of guidance, recommendations and promising practice examples on how to meaningfully engage WROs and WLOs as central actors in humanitarian, development and nexus programming. However, the **lack of funding available to WROs and WLOs indicates a wider imbalance of power** between international organisations and national and sub-national organisations, and the devaluing of feminist leadership in humanitarian and development practice.



Case study: GTA in the Integrating the response to child marriage in humanitarian settings initiative in East Africa

Every feminist and women-led actor involved in the initiative considered that **GTAs were essential to promote systemic change and prevent child marriage.** This represented the highest degree of consensus across the whole study.

GTAs go beyond preventing child marriage and invest in the “wholeness of a girl or young woman's life” by facilitating gender equality in all spaces, and at all levels. Promoting positive gender relationships enables girls to exercise and own their rights, and to create long-lasting change that increases other girls' agency within the community.

See full case study on pp. 61-2.

Overly focusing on norms – and placing the responsibility on individuals and communities to change – can also risk overlooking the **structural and institutional drivers of child marriage** and related behaviours. In addition to individual and community-level work, commitment is also needed from decision-makers – including governments and donors – to address child marriage across all sectors at all levels.

For example, researchers in Tigray, Ethiopia, recorded tradition and religion as limiting access to SRHR services, despite refugees reporting money and services as barriers.²¹⁴ A 2022 study on coping strategies for conflict, climate and displacement in northern Mozambique emphasised this point, noting how “by celebrating individual agency and ability, narratives of resilience and self-reliance can also be problematic, particularly when they downplay underlying structures and inequalities, and shift the responsibility for coping and adapting onto displaced people themselves”.²¹⁵



Case study: Improving adolescent girls' lives in the context of extremist violence in northern Mozambique

Uholo applied a socio-ecological and gender-transformative approach to address the root causes of early union in Cabo Delgado: gender inequality and girls' and women's limited socio-economic and political power. It worked with girls, young women, their families, communities, schools, health teams, judicial and law enforcement authorities and legislators to end early unions together.

Elements of success to transform gender norms included:

- A rights-based approach that encouraged **reflection and dialogue with the community**.
- Addressing gender norms with **young girls and boys**.
- Enhancing adolescent girls' and young women's **participation in decision-making spaces**.

See full case study on pp. 31-3.

“As part of a GTA, it is important to shift power to girls and women within programming. GTA also requires commitment from – and collaboration with – all sectors involved in addressing child marriage at all levels. Collaboration and joint working across sectors and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is essential to increase the use of GTA and secure the rights and agency of girls, young women and young mothers at scale”

Dr Aisha Hutchinson, King's College London, as part of the Integrating the response to child marriage in humanitarian settings initiative.¹

1. See related resources in the Women's Refugee Commission [library](#).



Toolbox



Toolbox: Practical tools to support policy and programmatic work on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

Education

Education Cannot Wait, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), 2022, [EiE – GenKit](#). Available in English, French, Arabic and Turkish.

This resource package includes practical tools for education practitioners to promote gender-responsive programming from crisis to peace and sustainable development. It offers tools for practical and immediate use, including checklists, tipsheets and assessment templates supporting practitioners to ensure that each phase of an EiE intervention is gender-responsive.

UN Women, n.d., [IASC e-learning on gender equality in humanitarian action](#). Available in English.

This three-hour e-learning course provides introductory guidance – through information and practical examples – on the fundamentals of applying a gender-equality approach across all sates of the humanitarian programming cycle, from assessment and planning to implementation and monitoring. It is intended for humanitarian actors from the UN, NGOs, government and civil society, and based on the [IASC gender handbook for humanitarian action](#).

Mental health

INEE, n.d., [Mental health and psychosocial support in and through education in emergencies \(EiE\)](#). Available in English.

An online, self-directed course on how EiE programmes can incorporate activities to actively address distress caused by emergency situations for students and teachers in humanitarian settings.

Girl-centred programming

International Rescue Committee, 2023, [Girl Shine: Early marriage curriculum for married/unmarried girls and their parents](#). Available in Arabic, English and French.

Girl Shine is a programme model and resource package that seeks to support, protect and ensure girls in humanitarian settings can make and act on their decisions. It supports them to build skills and knowledge on GBV and how to seek support services. It can be used in multiple humanitarian settings and phases of emergency response. It includes practitioner guidance, curricula for adolescent girls and caregivers,

and training manuals. Additional content is designed to comprehensively address delaying marriage and responding to the unique needs of married girls.

Norwegian Church Aid, 2023, [ENGAGE – Enhancing Girl's Agency and Gender Equality: Lifeskills and group curriculum for girls, boys, parents, teachers, religious and community leaders](#). Available in English.

ENGAGE aims to support adolescent girls, mobilise families and communities, and improve the capacity of frontline workers to prevent and respond to child marriage within existing GBV programming in humanitarian settings. It does this through prevention/community outreach, response/service delivery and capacity enhancement. This toolkit includes an implementation guide; curricula for sessions with adolescent girls and boys, caregivers, teachers, religious leaders, community members; and training tools for those implementing the ENGAGE programme.

Plan International, 2020, [Adolescent programming toolkit: Guidance and tools for adolescent programming and girls' empowerment in crisis settings](#). Available in English, French and Spanish.

This toolkit was developed to support frontline teams to work with and for adolescents in emergencies and protracted crises. It includes a Theory of Change to support adolescents in crisis settings; a programmatic framework; and a step-by-step guide for programming with and for adolescents, with key considerations for reaching and supporting adolescent girls.

International Rescue Committee and International Medical Corps, 2019, [Women and girls' safe spaces: A toolkit for advancing women's and girls' empowerment in humanitarian settings](#). Available in English.

This toolkit was developed to support girls' and women's sense of self and empowerment by providing a blueprint for safe space programming. It includes 38 tools and nine databases with step-by-step instructions and guidance on how to apply feminist principles, approaches and strategies in practice, within an accountable, girl- and women-led process.

Gender and social norms

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 2021, [Transcending norms: Gender-transformative approaches to women's and girls' safe spaces in humanitarian settings](#). Available in English.

This resource provides practical technical guidance for UNFPA, community/place-based organisations and other GBV agencies operating safe spaces regionally and globally. It is intended to enhance the gender transformative potential of safe space programming and activities based on contextual knowledge and understanding. It also includes recommendations for donors to ensure GTA in the safe spaces they fund.

WROs

International Rescue Committee, 2023, [Why Wait? How the humanitarian system can better fund women-led and women's rights organisations](#). Available in English, with executive summaries in Dari, French, Pashto and Ukrainian.

This report provides analysis and insights from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ukraine to show the systemic barriers to – and opportunities for – WROs/WLOs accessing humanitarian funding. The recommendations highlight changes that can be made at the operational and policy level, so policymakers can drive reform of the multilateral system they fund, helping them realise their commitments to localisation, feminist approaches and aid effectiveness.

Child marriage: Technical guidance and context analysis and needs assessment

Al Hweidi, S., Jones, N., Malachowska, A., Pincock, K., Presler-Marshall, E., and Youssef, S., 2022, [Addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings: Technical guide for staff and partners of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#). Available in English, French and Spanish.

Guidance for UNFPA and UNICEF country offices on how to prepare for and respond to child marriage in humanitarian settings. It recognises current humanitarian architecture strategies and development context responses, and identifies how to improve synergies between actions taken in different settings, including at the humanitarian-development nexus.

Plan International and UNHCR, 2024, [Toolkit: Context analysis on child marriage in crisis and forced displacement settings](#). Available in English (Arabic and French forthcoming)

Guidance and practical tools to help plan, collect and analyse data about child marriage with adolescent girls and their communities. Can be used as a standalone study or integrated into broader child protection in emergencies, GBV Rapid Gender Analysis or multi-sectoral needs assessments.

Child marriage and case management

Plan International and UNHCR, 2024, [Learning paper & staff checklists: Improving how we handle cases of child marriage in case management for refugee and forcibly displaced populations](#). Available in Arabic, English and French.

Resources – including a technical learning paper, brief and checklists for those undertaking case management – documenting experiences and lessons learned from cases of child marriage in refugee and mixed displacement settings in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Niger. They aim to improve the quality of child protection and GBV services for girls at risk of child marriage and ever-married girls, drawing attention to the issue and advocating for the strengthening of case management systems to better identify, support and protect girls who are forcibly displaced and in need of case management services.

Terre des Hommes and Kings College London, 2021, [Child marriage in the MENA region – Child marriage case management guideline](#). Available in English.

This document includes specific elements from Terre des Hommes and Kings College London research findings and existing child protection and GBV case management guidance, tailoring them to respond to child marriage. It uses the voices of Syrian refugee girls from research in Jordan and Lebanon, and should be reviewed and adapted if used in other contexts.

Minimum standards

UNFPA, 2019, [The Inter-agency minimum standards for gender-based violence in emergencies programming](#). Available in Arabic, Burmese, English, French, Korean, Portuguese and Spanish.

These 16 minimum standards define what agencies working on specialised GBV programming need to achieve to prevent and respond to GBV and deliver multisectoral services. They establish a common understanding of what constitutes minimum prevention and response programming in emergencies. They are universal and relevant for all emergency contexts.

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2019, [Minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian action](#). Available in English and French.

These minimum standards were developed to support child protection work in humanitarian settings by establishing common principles, strengthening coordination, improving the quality of programming and accountability, defining the professional field of child protection in humanitarian action, synthesising promising practice, and strengthening advocacy around risks, needs and responses.

UNFPA and the Inter-agency Working Group for Reproductive Health in Crisis, 2020, [Minimum initial service package for SRH in crisis situations](#). Available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish.

A series of crucial, lifesaving activities to respond to the SRH needs of affected populations at the onset of a humanitarian crisis. It is intended to ensure responsibility for implementation; prevent and respond to sexual violence, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; prevent excess maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, and unintended pregnancies; and plan for comprehensive SRH services.

INEE, 2024, [Minimum standards for education: Preparedness, response, recovery](#). Available in English.

This pack contains 19 standards, each of which includes key actions and guidance notes. It is intended to improve the quality of educational preparedness, response and recovery; to increase access to safe and relevant learning opportunities; and to ensure those who provide these services are held accountable.

Research

Johns Hopkins University, UNFPA, UNICEF, 2021, [A practitioner's guide to the ethical conduct of research on child marriage in humanitarian settings](#). Available in English.

This guide offers practitioners a framework for decision-making considering whether and how to conduct research on child marriage in humanitarian settings. It focuses on the ethical conduct of research among female and male adolescents and young people (aged 10-24) who are at risk of or have experienced child marriage and are living in challenging, low-resource and often insecure environments.

Pincock, K., Verhoeven, D., Jones, N., and Isimbi, R., 2023, [“They say it was her fault... This is not true!” Vignettes with adolescent girls to collectively address norms about sexual violence](#). Available in English.

This article discusses the piloting of vignette research tools in focus group discussions with adolescent girls aged 15-19 in Rwanda. It reflects on the opportunities of this method for expanding girls' understanding of the norms that enable sexual violence, and the context-specific ways they can respond.

Al Heiwidi, S., Jones, N., Małachowska, A., Pincock, K., Presler-Marshall, E., and Youssef, S., 2022, [Participatory research with adolescents and youth in the Middle East: A toolkit to explore how social, economic, environmental and political crises shape young people's well-being](#), Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence. Available in English.

A collection of participatory research tools that have been piloted and used by the GAGE programme in Jordan and Lebanon to explore how young people's lives are shaped by economic, social, environmental and political crises. It includes an overview of the literature on key principles and approaches; an introductory session on conducting participatory research sessions with young people and on conducting participatory photography; and a step-by-step guide to six key tools



Recommendations

Recommendations

UN agencies and cluster leads

- 1 Take urgent action to integrate child marriage into the humanitarian architecture as part of a comprehensive approach targeting unmarried and ever-married girls. This means integrating child marriage into humanitarian assessments and programming – including within the Child Protection and GBV Areas of Responsibility – and as an identified issue within all other humanitarian clusters.**
 - **Integrate child marriage prevention and response** in Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian/Refugee Response Plans and Humanitarian Country Team protection strategies.
 - **Ensure a collaborative and coordinated approach between sectors** in relation to child marriage, including effective collaboration between the GBV and Child Protection sub-clusters on prevention and response, including case management.
 - **Ensure adolescent girls are considered and consulted** in each cluster's work from the outset.
 - **Incorporate a child marriage focus into data collection tools** across humanitarian sub-sectors. For example, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between livelihood strategies/ food security and child marriage through incorporating a child marriage focus into food insecurity planning and interventions.
 - **Draw on existing secondary research and data** where possible, to avoid only basing child marriage-related response activities on ahistorical “rapid” gender assessments.
- 2 Position and prioritise child marriage prevention and response within key sectoral clusters, strategies and planning. This should include the Food Security and Livelihood cluster, Global Protection cluster, Inter-agency Working Group on SRHR, and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies.**
 - **Promote the design, delivery and rigorous monitoring of child marriage-related interventions within sectoral clusters** as a critical part of addressing broader GBV within emergencies, and as part of recovery. Promote monitoring of where particular girls are at risk of being married or entering a union.
 - **Ensure cluster leads are clear on the rationale for including a child marriage focus** within their remit, and have access to the technical resources needed to support this work.
 - **Develop preparedness plans that explicitly address SRHR needs** during the onset of humanitarian crises and keep this as a priority throughout all phases of emergency response, in line with [Minimum Initial Service Package](#).
- 3 Increase funding, funding access and the meaningful representation and involvement of WROs and WLOs within – and at all levels of – key humanitarian decision-making spaces, beyond their current position as context experts or implementing partners.**
 - **Increase WRO funding delivered through Country-Based Pooled Funds** in line with other localisation targets and progress (including [Grand Bargain Workstream 2](#)), and position WROs as strategic partners uniquely placed to design and deliver locally owned, sustainable, gender-transformative approaches to addressing GBV before, during and after emergencies.
 - **Use existing WRO-developed guidance** to minimise the administrative burdens on WROs and WLOs applying for and receiving funding.

4 **Commit to funding quality evidence and data collection on child marriage, including causes and consequences, and a focus on what does and does not work for child marriage prevention and response.**

- **Include budgeted provisions for survivor-centred, ethical data collection and monitoring** (e.g., [Murad Code](#), [GBVIMS](#), [Primero](#)) to track the effectiveness of humanitarian and peace nexus initiatives.
- **Where possible, support inclusive and participatory research methods** to ensure girls' voices are heard through data collection processes.

Governments

1 **Recognise child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings as a complex issue requiring multifaceted change – and therefore engagement, planning, funding and monitoring – at all levels, with governments at national and sub-national levels critically positioned to drive and coordinate change at these levels.**

- **Commit to collecting accurate data** on and systematically monitoring trends in child marriage in relation to instability.
- **Adopt clear, sustainable national and sub-national strategies for addressing child marriage**, including among refugees, internally displaced persons and other marginalised groups.
- **Ensure strategies align with National Action Plans on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women Peace and Security agenda**, which should include budgeted provisions for addressing conflict-related sexual violence and child marriage.
- **Include budgeted provisions for survivor-centred, ethical data collection and monitoring.**
- **Build strategies for addressing child marriage into disaster preparedness and recovery strategies**, and sector-specific strategies, particularly in key sectors like education and health.
- **Consider that child marriage** – alongside SRHR, harmful practices, GBV and other gender-related priority issues – **is critical to climate-related mitigation and adaptation**, and reflect this in key national strategies, including Nationally Determined Contributions.

2 **Recognise and engage with the structural and institutional dynamics that impact the supply-side of key systems and services – including the quality and accessibility of SRHR and education – as part of an overall political commitment to systematically address child marriage across all sectors and agendas.**

- **Address the limitations of interventions that focus only on demand-side factors** or that fail to address structural drivers of child marriage and related behaviours, and rights of refugees to access critical services.
- **Work in collaboration with UN agencies, donors and civil society** to reduce the burden on girls and conflict-affected communities to be responsible for driving change on the prevention of and response to child marriage.
- **Ensure efforts to address structural and institutional dynamics support and are reflected in relevant national commitments**, including National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 and the wider Women Peace and Security agenda, and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies' Minimum Standards for Education.

3 Ensure adequate systems, legal frameworks and targeted funding – adjusted for the magnitude of the crisis – are in place at the national and sub-national level to prevent, investigate, document, report and address impunity for child marriage, and to support ongoing legal registration of births, deaths and marriages.

- **Invest in and work with civil society, local government, and UN agencies to deliver accompanying training** for key security and justice actors – including on child marriage laws, humanitarian principles and the rights of displaced communities – to ensure the safety, psychological and physical wellbeing of survivors of child marriage both in and after conflict and crisis.
- **Ensure support is made available to protect the rights of married girls in crisis settings** and to facilitate the ongoing legal registration of births and marriages, including for displaced individuals.

4 For host governments, work with UNHCR, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to identify and respond to the legal and administrative challenges displaced girls and families face that may perpetuate child marriage or restrict married girls' or young mothers' access to legal, social and economic support and resources.

- **Simplify potentially complex or non-inclusive systems** for birth and marriage registration and gaining the right to work, and provide information on relevant processes and support systems in multiple languages.

5 Look at opportunities to include CSE within national curricula or other appropriate national or local education and outreach systems, as part of a broader approach to delivery on SRHR.

- **Work with research institutions, civil society organisations and relevant service providers to track the impact** of these efforts in different settings, including on adolescent health and development of life skills.

Donors

1 Invest in multi-sectoral, multi-component, multi-year approaches through strengthening coordination and meaningful partnership with different sub-national, national and international, and state and non-state actors that span the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

- **Build in funding for rigorous, feminist, participatory programme monitoring and evaluation** to track the impact of and relationship between different components.
- **Take opportunities to test emergent evidence** around potentially necessary or enabling components of multi-component programming as potential factors for success. For example, reducing the practical barriers to accessing education, the evidence around needs or norms-based intervention pairings, or the value of investing in training and coaching for community/place-based individuals or organisations.
- **Invest in, collaborate with and amplify the work of networks, organisations and initiatives focused on relevant sectors and themes**, including through facilitating joint conversations with child rights' and women's rights movements – for example, [Education Cannot Wait](#), [No Lost Generation](#), and the [Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies](#).
- **Institutional donors should track the percentage of humanitarian funds that directly targets child marriage** or related programming as a means of monitoring increased funding.

2 Invest in girl-centred and gender-transformative interventions, engaging at-risk and ever-married girls in the design and evaluation of interventions.

- **Provide multi-year funding** that enables longer programme cycles and consecutive cohorts to strengthen engagement with, and reach of, more adolescent girls, and to build trust over time with communities and strengthen momentum towards change.
- **Provide funding that supports scale-up** but does not compromise fidelity or adherence to girls' own design or to the quality of the programme or risk doing more harm to girls.

3 View programmes as an opportunity to build the evidence base on what interventions work to prevent and respond to child marriage, and to better document girls' lived experiences in emergency settings.

- **Work with relevant actors** – including community-place based actors, UN agencies and research institutes – **to generate and ensure programmes are based on robust and reliable evidence** (contextual and intervention-based) and contribute to the evidence base through rigorous learning and evaluation.
- **Ensure programmes include a mid- and post-completion evaluation** with attention to specific components and approaches, and with funding to bring key actors and partners together to collectively learn from effective strategies, assess sustainability and potential for scale, and for inclusive dissemination of this included in overall budgeting.
- **Fund girl-led research and meaningful partnership with feminist researchers and research partners from the Global South.**

4 Recognise, publicly acknowledge and challenge the national and global systems that perpetuate girls' and women's economic and climate-related precarity. Recognise gender-equitable systems as a protective factor against child marriage and important factor in effective humanitarian, development and peace nexus programming.

- **Work with national governments to embed adolescent girls' and women's empowerment and gender-transformative approaches** into emerging (climate) crisis prevention and response efforts, including around green growth, eco-tourism, carbon emission reduction or renewable energies.
- **Work with government partners to reflect these approaches in the Nationally Determined Contributions.** Recognise this as necessary to genuinely and sustainably achieving the aims of multiple global commitments, including the [Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action](#), the [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\) Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment](#) and the [Paris Agreement](#).

5 Look for opportunities to explicitly highlight and fund programming and research to address child marriage as a necessary component of delivering on international commitments, agendas and resolutions, and to bridging the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

- Include a focus on the [Women, Peace and Security agenda](#); the [Grand Bargain](#) (including Workstream 2 – increased funding to national and local/community/place-based actors); Education Cannot Wait; and [No Lost Generation](#).
- **Donors should work to make this funding as flexible and time-sensitive as possible**, recognising the common need for INGOs, national and local/community/place-based civil society organisations to respond and react rapidly in humanitarian settings.

6 Increase funding to community/place-based women-led and women's/child's rights organisations, and to programming with gender equality as its main focus as part of the overall delivery of 0.7% of Gross National Income to official development assistance spend, responding to the fact that this funding declined significantly from 2020 to 2021.²¹⁶

- **Draw on guidance from relevant women-led organisations** on how to design and deliver funding in a way that best supports their work (including through longer-term and unrestricted funding).

7 Increase funding to interventions that protect and support adolescent girls' mental health, and to research that contributes to the evidence base of how best to safeguard girls' mental health in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.

- **Recognise how mental health needs may vary depending on context and girls' own situations**, including the often-heightened needs of ever-married girls, young mothers, or girls who have experienced (conflict-related) violence. Recognise also how concerns over girls' mental health can drive parents to support marriage as a perceived protective measure.
- **Work with women-led, community/place-based actors who are best positioned to understand girls' experiences and the societal pressures they face** in the design and delivery of mental health-focused interventions.

Civil society (international, national, community/place-based)

1 Build inclusivity and accessibility into the fabric of programming – including around information sharing, physical/virtual activities, team composition and training – to ensure safe participation for all and that programmes do not mirror everyday stigma and discrimination faced by marginalised groups.

- **Take opportunities to meaningfully collaborate with and amplify the expertise of by-and-for and community/place-based organisations** to support inclusive design and implementation, and collect appropriately disaggregated data, for example using the [Washington Group Questions](#).

2 Design and implement flexible, responsive programmes based on a nuanced, context-specific understanding of gender norms, tradition and culture.

- **Draw on secondary evidence and literature and expertise from community/place-based actors** wherever possible, as opposed to relying solely on rapid gender assessments that are unlikely to capture the heterogeneous, intersectional ways in which norms shift and manifest before, during and after emergencies.
- **Recognise the critical role community/place-based actors can play in contextualising and adapting proven and promising methodologies from elsewhere to their context.** This should support programming that recognises how girls, families and communities negotiate agency and power in emergencies, and considers the risks facing girls beyond high-profile issues – for example, the risk of intimate partner violence or domestic violence, as well as conflict-related sexual violence.

3 Engage girls, families and communities in the design and delivery of gender-transformative programmes and grant-making processes.

- **Facilitate workshops or training programmes for community/place-based leaders and stakeholders** to strengthen community/place-based prevention and response mechanisms.

- **Evaluate what approaches work to engage and sustain engagement** from different stakeholders, and to improve girls' access to spaces and services.
- **Ensure girls can input into the design of programming** wherever possible, to ensure interventions like safe spaces do not mirror the constraints they face in everyday life.
- **Recognise the value of – and invest in – ensuring women have the opportunity and are supported to take on leadership, mentoring or advocacy roles** on child marriage and related programming. This includes younger women who adolescent girls may identify with.
- **Use existing guidance and evidence to ensure interventions engage boys, men and communities** in a way that does not de-centre the needs or voices of girls.

4 **INGOs should commit to meaningful engagement with WROs, WLOs and other community/place-based organisations in development, humanitarian and nexus programming.**

- **Adopt agreed ways of working with these organisations** that prioritise mutual respect and learning, equal access to funding, shared voice and platforming, and development of longer-term relationships.
- **Make space for and support the centring of national or community/place-based organisations** where they are better placed to respond to certain issues within a given context, recognising this as core to delivering on international commitments on the localisation of humanitarian aid.
- **Continue to advocate for the meaningful inclusion and funding of community/place-based actors** across development, humanitarian and nexus policy and programming relating to child marriage and GBV more broadly, recognising their unique and critical position as first responders before, during and after emergencies and in line with global commitments to localisation and decolonising aid.

5 **Prioritise establishing safe spaces for adolescent girls in crisis settings, with a specific focus on fostering and supporting peer networks for girls, and recognising the specific and often heightened needs of ever-married girls, pregnant girls and young mothers.**

- **Recognise the potential for older adolescents and young women who are embedded in focus communities to act as role models for younger girls and peers.**
- **Engage and invest in training and coaching for older adolescents and young women** when they are included as peer educators within an intervention (as caseworkers, healthcare providers, outreach offices, etc.). Recognise and respond to the constraints they also face.
- **Design and deliver interventions that provide tailored support to ever-married girls, pregnant girls and young mothers.** Recognise their unique and often heightened educational, mental health and SRHR, and economic needs in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.
- Where possible, interventions focused on ever-married girls, pregnant girls and/or young mothers should **combine activities solely focused on these girls with efforts to build their relationships with broader peer networks** and – where relevant – mothers-in-law.

6 **Work with national governments, humanitarian actors and civil society partners to develop and hold governments to account on simplifying and demystifying key legislative and policy processes relating to child marriage in emergencies, including camp settings. This includes birth and marriage registration, and processes for accessing key services such as healthcare and education.**

- **Ensure these processes are accessible to displaced, migrant and refugee communities**, including those who speak different languages.

- **Advocate for accompanying training and norms-focused interventions for key service providers** to support the provision of safe, accessible, equitable, age-appropriate services for adolescent girls, including married girls.
- **Work with other civil society organisations to hold governments to account** on their responsibilities and commitments in relation to child marriage.

7 **Recognise the growing role of social media and digital technology as a potential prevention and response tool, and a risk factor with regards to child marriage.**

- **Factor this into programming as something to test and pilot**, and a dynamic to manage with girls and their husbands, parents and caregivers.

Research

1 **Support rigorous, ethical, applied research to develop the evidence base around how different types and phases of a crisis affect child marriage and what works to prevent and respond to it in these settings, and share learning to promote evidence-based action.**

- **Focus research on different forms of conflict and crisis** – including through longitudinal studies – and on **what works** to prevent child marriage before a crisis and how to continue to prevent child marriage and respond to the needs of married girls in contexts transitioning out of crisis.
- **Situate all research and evaluations alongside what we already know**, so it is clear how the evidence base is being advanced, drawing on the questions for implementation research set out in the [UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme Phase II Research Strategy](#).

2 **Invest in research to better understand how (the risk of) child marriage impacts girls facing multiple or extreme forms of marginalisation, including girls with disabilities; LGBTQIA+ individuals; girls affected by extreme poverty; girls who are migrants, refugees or displaced; or ever-married girls or young mothers across these groups.**

- **Engage with feminist WROs and other grassroots organisations** to build on their understanding and experience of what does and does not work to support marginalised girls and to centre their lived experiences.
- **Work with girls (where possible) to develop girl-led research**, and/or to engage girls in research methodology development, data gathering and evaluation processes.

3 **Collaborate with donors and programmers to support the design, monitoring and evaluation of child marriage interventions in crisis-affected settings, including after programme closure.**

- **Include a specific focus on better understanding the merits of different kinds of intervention** when implemented as part of a multi-component or multi-sectoral programme.

4 **Where relevant, include a focus on child marriage in research relating to other areas of crisis prevention and response.**

- **This should include a focus on comprehensive sexuality education, gender-transformative service provision, and broader social norm change approaches around gender equality and social inclusion.**

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Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of over 1,400 civil society organisations from more than 100 countries committed to ending child marriage and ensuring girls can fulfil their potential.



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