



Frequently asked questions on the law and child marriage

This set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) aims to provide clear, concise and comprehensive answers to common queries regarding child marriage,^a the legal age of marriage and sexual consent, and girls' rights. The FAQs cover topics including the international and national legal standards governing child marriage and girls' rights, the rights and protections afforded to individuals under these laws, and the impact of laws on the lives of girls, adolescents and young women in all their diversity.

Alongside the *Girls Not Brides* brief and position paper on "[The impact of the law on child marriage and girls' rights](#)", these FAQs should support you to understand and navigate the legal landscape surrounding child marriage.

Question

Response

Is there a global standard for the minimum age of marriage? What is it?

There is no international human rights convention specifying a legal minimum age for marriage. The focus of international treaties has been on **full and free consent** as essential for legal marriage.

Since the early 1990s international human rights bodies – like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child – have issued **general comments** on this topic, agreeing 18 years as the legal minimum age of marriage. These comments provide authoritative interpretation of the treaty standards and act as guides for governments to comply with their international human rights obligations. In some states the comments have been passed into national law.

 For more details, see pp. 7-9 in the [full report](#) on the impact of the law on child marriage and girls' rights.

To find out which international conventions your country has ratified, see the UN Treaty Body [database](#).

Is there a global standard for minimum age of sexual consent?


There is **no international guidance** on what the legal age for sexual consent should be. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has commented on this most. [General Comment 20](#) makes clear that countries should consider setting a minimum age for sexual consent, but does not suggest what that age should be (para. 40).

The same Comment also recommends states adopt different approaches that take account of young people's **evolving capacities** – that is, the way they gradually develop the ability to take responsibility for their own actions and decisions – as central to

^a "Child marriage" refers to all forms of child, early and forced marriage where at least one party is below age 18.

children's status as rights-holders independent from their parents, and to ensure the realisation of **child and adolescent rights**.


It also calls on states to **avoid criminalisation** of adolescents of similar ages for "factually consensual and non-exploitative sexual activity" (para. 40).

 For more details, see pp. 7-9 in the [full report](#).

Are there regional standards for the minimum age of marriage?

What are they?

Several regional human rights or inter-governmental bodies have also addressed child marriage.

 For more details on regional frameworks law, see p. 9 of the [full report](#).

Africa

The [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) – ratified by 50 states – prohibits child marriage and sets the minimum age of marriage at 18.

The [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) (the Maputo Protocol), stipulates 18 as the minimum age of marriage and calls on states to ensure **equality** between women and men in marriage.

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) has also developed a [Model Law](#) on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage, which is a **template** for states in the sub-region to develop and/or strengthen laws that comply with international human rights standards.

Asia

The [Kathmandu Call to Action to End Child Marriage in South Asia](#) calls on governments in the region to set the minimum age of marriage at 18. The Preamble to the Call recognises the children's rights principles of **best interests** and **evolving capacities**.

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

The [American Convention on Human Rights](#) does not stipulate a minimum age of marriage, leaving this to States Parties. The Convention establishes **consent** as fundamental to marriage.


The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Convention of Belém do Pará, does not address minimum age of marriage. However, the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) in its [Hemispheric Report on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions](#) (2021) recommends that States Parties implement comprehensive legislative reforms – with a multisectoral perspective

that includes adolescents as subjects of rights – to address the structural causes of child marriage.

Most countries in LAC set the minimum age of marriage as 18, but many have legal **exceptions** that allow for marriage at a younger age with parental or judicial consent. Despite legal reform, child marriage **prevalence has barely changed** in the region – a sign that laws are not enough to address the social norms and realities underlying the practice.

Informal unions are common among adolescents in LAC. In most countries, the law does not address these unions, which are framed as a **private issue** rather than a social one linked with structural inequalities.


Across the region, laws do not recognise adolescents' evolving capacities, leading to a lack of bodily autonomy and agency.

 Find out more about child marriage laws in LAC in our region-specific [brief](#).

Europe

Child marriage is addressed by the [European Convention on Human Rights](#). [Article 12](#) guarantees the right to marry for individuals of marriageable age, placing the responsibility of determining the marriageable age on Member States.

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)) is the first legally binding regional instrument to formulate a definition of forced marriage. It also provides a "blueprint for developing laws and policies on forced marriages" beyond the Council of Europe membership. It includes comprehensive provisions for protecting victims and prosecuting offenders, recognising forced marriage as a "serious violation of the human rights of women and girls and a major obstacle to the achievement of equality between women and men." [Article 37](#) mandates the criminalisation of two distinct intentional acts: forcing an adult or child into marriage and luring them abroad for the same purpose.

 For more details, see [The standards of the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO's jurisprudence on forced marriage: a contribution towards achieving a comprehensive response to child sexual exploitation](#).

What are the opportunities to influence international legislation, including the potential roll-back on gender rights?

At the global level, key stakeholders with influence include **United Nations (UN) agencies** and **UN Special Procedures**, including:

- UNFPA and UNICEF, who are responsible for the [Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#);
- [UN Women](#);

- the [UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls](#).

States' implementation of international human rights treaties is reviewed regularly by **UN human rights mechanisms**. Civil society organisations can intervene in these processes with observations and recommendations. The *Girls Not Brides* step-by-step [toolkit](#) is designed to support civil society organisations to engage with four of these mechanisms:

- the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#);
- the [Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#);
- the [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#);
- the [Universal Periodic Review](#).

Civil society groups who are active and influential globally – and of which *Girls Not Brides* is a member – include:

- the [Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law](#);
- the [Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions and Sexuality Working Group](#).


Where can I find the minimum age of marriage law for a country?

The *Girls Not Brides* child marriage [atlas](#) includes details on the minimum legal age legal standards around child marriage for over 200 countries.

Some countries have specific **child marriage laws**, while others have provisions related to the age of marriage in their family, civil and/or criminal codes. To fully understand how marriage law operates, **other statutes** may also be relevant, including age of majority laws; criminal laws relating to kidnapping, sexual offences, and/or trafficking; customary and/or religious laws; child protection laws; and constitutional laws.

In common law countries, there may also be **case law** – that is, decisions made in courts of law – that need to be considered alongside statutory law to fully understand how the minimum age for marriage is interpreted and implemented.

In many countries, statutory, customary and religious law provisions are **not harmonised**, meaning that there are various age thresholds.

-  The “Legal terminology” section in the [full report](#) (pp. 6-7) gives examples of the different types of laws across contexts.


Are there any laws that overrule national laws around child marriage?

At the national level, which law applies depends on the relationship between customary, religious and national systems of law. Sometimes, constitutional law addresses these relationships.

At the international and regional levels, human rights agreements – like UN conventions or African Union treaties – contain relevant provisions, which are **legally binding** for all States that ratified them. Because of customary international law, some provisions are binding even for States that have not ratified them.

By becoming parties to international human rights treaties, States assume legal obligations and duties to **respect** (not interfere or limit), **protect** (from abuses) and **fulfil** (take positive action to facilitate) human rights. They also commit to establishing compatible domestic measures and legislation.

Some countries' constitutions explicitly state that ratified international human rights treaties take precedence over national law when there is a legal conflict.

 To find out which international conventions your country has ratified, see the UN Treaty Body [database](#).

What does it mean when a law has an exception? Why do laws have exceptions?

In some contexts, marriage under the specified minimum age may be legal if certain conditions are fulfilled; these conditions are known as “exceptions”. For example, in a country where 18 is the minimum age of marriage, girls may be able to marry at age 16 with the **permission of a parent or judge**. In other contexts, girls who are **pregnant** may be allowed to marry under the legal minimum age.

The reasons for these exceptions differ by context. Sometimes, they may reflect **social norms** around pregnancy outside of marriage or parental decision-making power. To understand this, you may need to look at the legal debates had at the time the law was made.

Is being an accomplice in a child marriage punishable by law?

It depends on the context. It is important to fully understand the **range of acts** (i.e. behaviours) that are punishable by law, and their exact **definitions** or interpretations within the legal system to **accurately communicate** about the law at the community level.


In some contexts, those who **perform a marriage** for someone under the legal age face criminal sanctions; this might include religious, customary or state officials. In other contexts, **promoting or permitting** such a marriage can be punished; this might apply to parents, guardians or other adults in the community.

How easy/difficult is it for girls to access justice through the legal system?

The existence of a law is not the same as access to justice. Access to justice and effective remedies depends on context, with many possible formal and informal barriers for children and adolescents.


In some countries, there are **formal limitations in law** that obstruct girls' rights. For example, girls under the age of majority may not be able to enter the legal system without the support of an adult, which is problematic if all the adults in a girl's life support their marriage and/or face legal repercussions for having performed, promoted or permitted a child marriage to happen.

Some countries distinguish between marriages that can be found "**void ab initio**" (or "from the beginning") as if they never existed – including child marriages and marriages involving trafficking – and marriages that are "**voidable**" and which make those leaving the marriage eligible for maintenance or social protection.

 More information on voidable and void ab initio marriages on pp. 18-20 of the [full report](#).

In many communities with high child marriage prevalence, **informal non-statutory justice systems** – like community elders or traditional courts – often handle disputes and legal matters based on customary law rather than national or international laws. Organisations like Equality Now and FEMNET emphasise the need to engage and dialogue with **traditional and religious guardians** of social norms to transform these informal systems, alongside comprehensive strategies to support the implementation of laws.

Common challenges to girls' accessing justice include: cost (e.g. lawyers' and court fees); complicated application processes (compounded by language barriers and levels of literacy, especially for migrants/refugees); slowness of judicial processes (adding to costs); discriminatory attitudes of law enforcement officers; and the social stigma in reporting forthcoming underage marriages (compounded by failure to guarantee anonymity to those reporting).

 For more information on access to justice, see p. 26 of the [full report](#), and the Committee on the Rights of the Child's (draft) General Comment on [Children's rights to access to justice and effective remedies](#).

Where can I get help for a child marriage case?

This depends on the context. There may be government institutions and/or civil society organisations that can help. In some places, there is a dedicated **government ombudsperson** or a national **human rights institution** whose mandate covers child marriage and who coordinates between different state institutions – including education, law enforcement, health and legal systems – to ensure the law is enforced.


In others, there are **designated government officials** at the sub-national level who can support families or girls facing forced marriage. **Child protection** mechanisms and **police officers** may also be a first point of contact.

In some countries, there are **hotlines/helplines** available for those experiencing gender-based violence, and sometimes specifically for forced marriage. Civil society organisations that can advise on individual cases – including legal representation and aid – may also exist at the community, sub-national or national level; some have online platforms for seeking advice.

Do age of marriage laws work to reduce child marriage prevalence? How is this impacted by laws on age of sexual consent?


There is **limited evidence** on how child marriage and sexual consent laws respect, protect and fulfil girls' rights, and how they do not. What evidence does exist shows age of marriage laws have **mixed results**, often only working for specific groups within a society and/or over the **short term**. They can also have **negative consequences** for those with the fewest alternatives.

Government statistics often only include registered marriages – and not informal unions – under the legal age, providing an **incomplete picture** at the national and sub-national level. For example, in Mexico, when formal marriage under 18 was banned, informal unions increased by a similar amount.

 See the highlight box on p. 13 of the [full report](#).

Sexual consent and marriage laws often interact in cases involving child marriage with **negative consequences**, but this varies by context. In India and Nepal, for example, child marriage and sexual consent laws have contributed to a rise in **self-initiated marriages** among adolescents below the legal minimum age, as they seek to validate their relationships in restrictive contexts.


Age-restrictive marriage and sexual consent laws can block adolescents' **access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services**, as they face stigmatisation and poor treatment, and in some cases are refused services by medical professionals who fear legal reprisals. Girls in rural and Indigenous communities – who face additional distance, language and cultural barriers – are disproportionately affected.

 See the [full report](#) for examples from Guatemala, India and Nepal.

Implementation of the law varies between contexts. **Common challenges** include limited legal awareness among the population; barriers to access to the legal system, including financial and administrative barriers; a lack of training for marriage registry officials about the provisions of the law; lack of anonymity or confidentiality; non-autonomous judicial systems; and social norms around marriage and sexuality that are stronger than legal norms.

More **monitoring and research** are needed to fully understand how laws are implemented and the impact this has on the prevalence of child marriage and unions, and on girls' rights and access to justice in each context. Such studies need to take a broad view to understand

where improvements are needed to support girls' rights; this could be in legal reform, training for law enforcement officers, legal sensitisation, funding for legal aid and support packages for girls who leave marriages.

 See FAQ on "***Should we support the introduction of bans on child marriage in national Criminal Codes?***" for more on the negative consequences of criminalisation.


See FAQ on "***How easy/difficult is it for girls to access justice through the legal system?***" for more on how the law works for those who need it most.

Are laws enough to end child marriage?

No. Having a legal minimum age of marriage of 18 without exceptions can be an important **part** of a government's approach to ending child marriage and promoting gender equality. Laws are important instruments in **setting societal values**, **measuring progress** on human rights, **ensuring investment** in girls' rights, and **promoting access to justice** for girls who experience rights violations.

But the law is not the only factor influencing if, when and who a girl marries, and laws are implemented differently across contexts. Often, **social norms** around marriage and sexuality are stronger than legal norms. Lack of access to quality **education** and economic **alternatives**, and **insecurity** and high levels of **gender-based violence** also drive child marriage, even when it is illegal.

Consent, choice, agency and autonomy are essential for gender equality and social justice, and laws are only one – if important – element in **a comprehensive, gender-transformative and context-sensitive approach** to respect, protect and fulfil human rights for all. Such an approach should include interventions to promote girls' health, education and employment; alleviate poverty; transform discriminatory attitudes and norms; and counteract systematic oppression.


 See our "[Why it happens](#)" pages for more information on the drivers of child marriage.

See FAQ "***What is needed for laws to be effective in ending child marriage?***" for more on what effective lawmaking looks like.

Should we still advocate for changes to age of marriage laws?

Yes. While the limited evidence available suggests that laws alone cannot end child marriage, and that poorly written laws may have some negative consequences, good laws can be an important **part of the solution**.

Before making legislative change, advocates, lawmakers and governments need to **understand why adolescents marry and enter unions**, and try to address this holistically, including with laws that promote girls' rights and opportunities, and address any violations.

 See FAQ “*What is needed for laws to be effective in ending child marriage?*” for more on what effective lawmaking looks like.

See FAQ on “*Should we support the introduction of bans on child marriage in national Criminal Codes?*” for more on the negative consequences of criminalisation.

Should we support the introduction of bans on child marriage in national Criminal Codes?

It depends on context. This is a complex question, and important for ensuring laws and approaches to justice have the intended effect, and **do no harm** to girls and other groups who have been marginalised and a) who are most at risk of choice-free marriage and unions, b) most in need of legal protection, and c) most need affirmative action to expand their opportunities and choices.

The Human Rights Council’s [third resolution](#) on child, early and forced marriage (adopted in 2019) recommends that States ensure that all initiatives to draft, amend and implement criminal laws addressing child, early and forced marriage are part of a **comprehensive approach** and coupled with **protection measures and services** for those who are at risk of – or have already experienced – child, early and/or forced marriage.

For example, in England and Wales the passing of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act of 2022 criminalises any marriage under age 18 with or without the use of force. This change to the law was celebrated by many activists, including child marriage survivors. Although there is room for improvement in terms of support and services, this legal change can be said to be operating as part of a comprehensive approach. This is highlighted by the change to the legal age of marriage being facilitated by the 2015 changes to the [Education and Skills Act](#) which increased to 18 the minimum age to leave education or training.

In other contexts, there is evidence Criminal approaches can have a **negative impact** on girls and women. Activists, advocates and researchers caution against their use as a one-size-fits-all remedy for health, social justice or gender inequality objectives without complementary action to also address the **structural drivers** of those inequalities. We can learn from decades of evidence around movements seeking to decriminalise abortion and HIV.

Punitive approaches can further discriminate against and stigmatise adolescents – who often lack financial autonomy and for whom familial ties, standing and communal reputation are often paramount – and other groups who are already marginalised or at risk, like Indigenous communities.

Evidence in the “Impacts of CEFMU and sexual consent laws on girls’ agency and rights” section in the [full report](#) shows that criminalisation may drive child marriages under the legal age **underground** so that parents and other adults involved avoid fines or imprisonment. Girls in

this situation may face difficult decisions about seeking support or accessing services – including justice where they experience forced marriage or violence – knowing that this could have legal implications for their family members.

How the law is applied needs to be informed by **analysis of the context** in which laws operate, such as whether there is a well-functioning legal and protection system, gender-equitable public services, employment and social inclusion. How the law is applied also needs to be informed by a **gendered analysis of the power dynamics** that lead to different types of marriage – including arranged, self-initiated, elopement and informal unions.

Further research is needed to understand the breadth of approaches to criminalisation, their impact on girls, their families and communities, and the extent to which criminalisation blocks girls from accessing the remedies that the laws intend to facilitate.


What is needed for laws to be effective in ending child marriage?

Legal reform needs to create an **ecosystem** of harmonised and **well-resourced** laws, policies, investments and interventions that promote **gender equality** and girls' **human rights**. Such an ecosystem should ensure everyone can enjoy the same status, opportunities and security. It should work for girls and women – in all their diversity – to be socially, economically and politically independent and free to make informed decisions about their own marriage, relationships, bodies and futures.

What works differs according to context, but the evidence suggests:

1. Laws and definitions – for example, what is meant by “child” – need to be **harmonised** to avoid confusion that can be a barrier to implementation, work across sectors and movements, and promote girls' access to services, including justice and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
2. Child marriage laws need to recognise and integrate adolescents' **evolving capacities**, focusing on capacity alongside age to balance protection with promotion of autonomy and agency.
3. Age of marriage laws are more effective when implemented **alongside other laws** and policies that address the **structural drivers** and **create alternatives** to child marriage, influence adolescent and family decision-making and expand access to gender-equitable services for all girls, including those who are – or have been – married, pregnant or parenting, or who are affected by conflict or crisis. Essential **services** include:
 - birth and marriage registration;
 - 12 years' free, quality education;

- mandatory, stigma-free comprehensive sexuality education;
 - poverty alleviation;
 - social protection (including context-sensitive cash transfers);
 - economic opportunities;
 - sexual and reproductive health and rights;
 - justice (including for gender-based violence);
 - an increased role of girls and women in conflict prevention and resolution, through use of UN Security Council [Resolution 1325](#) and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
4. **Multisectoral and multi-level approaches** are needed to build and maintain the necessary political will and technical capacity to address child marriage and secure girls' rights at scale. This means promoting intentional, coordinated collaboration across government departments, international agencies, community leaders and civil society organisations (with a focus on women- and youth-led organisations); and identifying, training and funding those responsible to implement clear strategies, including in humanitarian contexts.
 5. Laws and their impact need to be **continuously evaluated** to ensure they have the intended outcomes, to identify effective (combinations of) interventions and to ensure the legal system works for those who need it.

 More details on this evidence were shared in the Child Marriage Research to Action Network's [research meeting](#) on child marriage prevention laws.

Should the law differentiate between different types of marriages and unions? How?

Yes. A minimum legal age of marriage is still considered important, but the available evidence – especially from [Latin America and the Caribbean](#), where most countries' legal frameworks make informal unions invisible – highlights the challenges with treating all types of marriages and unions under age 18 the same.


Advocates and activists in some contexts are beginning to call for **differentiated approaches** to the application of the law depending on, for example, type of marriage/union – including arranged, self-initiated or elopement – the age of the minor and the age difference in the couple.

In some contexts, girls as young as 9 or 10 continue to marry; in others, there is a rise in the number of self-initiated marriages and unions between consenting adolescents.

In marriages and unions where only **one party** – usually the girl – is below the legal minimum age, the **minor's age** and the **age difference**


are highly significant for the balance of power and decision-making leading up to and within the marriage or union.

In marriages and unions where **both parties** are under the legal minimum age of marriage, and where both express **consent**, the power dynamics and how the law is applied may need to be different. This reasoning has informed legal changes to sexual consent laws in some countries – like Costa Rica – which define maximum age differentials to protect against exploitation and abuse *and* recognise the ways capacities to consent to sex evolve during adolescence.

 See our [brief](#) on the impact of laws in Latin America and the Caribbean for more details on the Costa Rica example.

Further research, convening and strategising is needed to ensure the law is applied in a way that balances protection from exploitation with support for adolescents' progressive autonomy. Complementary policies, services, programmes and investments are also needed for marriage or union to be a **positive choice**.

For evidence-informed arguments for differentiated legal responses, see the [lessons shared](#) by Partners for Law in Development. Civil society in Mexico has also mobilised against [the criminalisation of underage unions](#) – including between consenting adolescents – and is advocating for legislative measures that focus on guaranteeing and protecting the rights of adolescents, the best interests of the child and progressive autonomy in the exercise of their rights.

 See p. 20 of the [full report](#) for more examples of differentiated approaches.


What are the legal parameters where a marriage or union below the legal minimum age involves an imbalance or abuse of power?

Consent – and the absence of coercion – is a human right in the relationship between two people before, during and after marriage or union. Before the minimum age of marriage became the focus for legal reform, international human rights agreements dating back to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights focused on free and full consent of spouses as the defining condition for marriage. The 2023 Human Rights Council's [sixth Resolution](#) on child marriage reaffirms the centrality in international human rights law of full, free and informed consent.

Because consent is a difficult concept to define, **age is often used as a proxy**, and 18 has emerged as the standard to provide clarity on who can and cannot consent to marriage. However, a marriage where both parties are 18 or over does not automatically mean it is consensual or equal, or that people under 18 cannot give true, informed consent to marriage or union. Some studies – and the [Joint General Recommendation](#) no. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and No.18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – show **girls and adolescents are at a**


higher risk of not being able to express their full and free consent to marriage or union.

Male-dominated power structures and the perpetuation of **domination and inequality** on the basis of sex, gender, age and other intersecting factors – like ethnicity, caste, disability, sexual orientation or citizenship – are drivers of child marriage and other harmful practices. These can only be ended through legal reform that addresses these systemic and **structural drivers** as part of a holistic, rights-based framework.

 See the [Joint General Recommendation](#) no. 31 of the CEDAW and No.18 of the CRC.

What are the legal parameters to accompany or establish if a sexual relationship below the legal minimum age involves an imbalance or abuse of power?

“Romeo and Juliet laws” try to protect adolescents from asymmetries of power in sexual relationships, while recognising that capacities to consent to sex evolve during adolescence. Where at least one party in a sexual partnership is below the age of consent, such laws set **acceptable age differentials**; when the age difference between sexual partners is above this limit, consent is nullified.

 See our [brief](#) on the impact of laws in Latin America and the Caribbean for an example from Costa Rica, where the maximum age difference is five years for someone aged 13-15, and seven years for someone aged 16-17.

A key recommendation in the [Istanbul Convention](#) and other international and regional human rights frameworks is to be aware of **power imbalances** and the **safeguards** needed to fully respect the rights, needs and safety of **survivors** of sexual violence, including forced marriage.

Some countries have moved away from requiring survivors to **prove the use of force**, threats or lack of consent, instead shifting responsibility to the alleged perpetrator to **demonstrate awareness of consent** given.

There is, however, evidence that courts, legal and law enforcement processes – through their behaviours and systemic sexual and racial discrimination – can **reinforce asymmetries of power** as experienced by survivors. In cases of sexual violence – including forced marriage – **victim-blaming** attitudes fuelled by negative gender norms and prejudices can lead to assumptions that survivors consented to sex, or that these offences should remain in the **family or private domain** (see p. 129 in this Council of Europe [mid-term review](#)).

 See also the FAQ “*Is there a global standard for minimum age of sexual consent?*”

Should we advocate to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for an amendment to

More **evidence** and discussion are needed before developing a strategy for amending the international human rights framework on sexual consent. Criminalising adolescent sexuality and/or raising the

incorporate an age of sexual consent? How should we do this?

age of sexual consent does not reflect the reality of adolescents, who are largely sexually active before age 18.

As a movement, we can learn from the impacts of minimum age laws and criminalisation around marriage, abortion and HIV. We should consider the possible **unintended negative consequences** of setting a standard minimum age of sexual consent, like stigmatisation of adolescents and restricted access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services.

In the meantime, we can support the incorporation of “**adolescence**” as a legal category, and advocate for adolescents’ **evolving capacities** – as a positive and enabling process – to be at the core of any legal reform.

How can I support national revisions of legal frameworks?

In many contexts, there are coalitions of civil society organisations – including *Girls Not Brides* [National Partnerships and coalitions](#) – that engage in policy and legal advocacy on issues related to child marriage, gender equality and human rights. You can connect with them on our website, or through our [member directory](#).