

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE: AN INFORMATION SHEET

In June 2017, the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women released groundbreaking results from a major three-year research study on the global costs of child marriage.<sup>1</sup> The study found that child marriage is not only a human rights violation having a major impact on the wellbeing of girls, it also has major negative impacts

for households and national economies. This brief highlights key messages from the study that are important for helping policymakers, finance ministers and governments to understand how ending child marriage can save money and alleviate poverty. Additional information can be found at [www.costsofchildmarriage.org](http://www.costsofchildmarriage.org)

### The economic impact of child marriage is huge, not just for girls and their families but for nations

- Child marriage is costing the world trillions of dollars, money that could be spent instead on tackling the causes of child marriage: gender inequality; schooling for girls; poverty reduction, etc.
- The study estimates the cumulative costs of child marriage between 2014 and 2030 are above **\$5 trillion globally**.

**The largest economic costs of child marriage are those related to fertility and population growth, child health and nutrition, and education and earnings. Why?**

### Child marriage increases fertility and population growth, increasing costs of basic services

- Girls married as children are more likely to start childbearing early and have **more children over their lifetimes** than women who marry after age 18. The study found that child marriage increases total fertility for women by between 17 and 26%.
- **Higher fertility means larger families with less money** available to care for each member. This poses particular challenges for poor households, where the majority of the world's child brides live.
- For national economies, higher fertility rates mean that **governments must provide more basic services**, such as education and health care, to keep up with growing numbers of children and youth over time.

<sup>1</sup>The three-year research project that led to the findings looked at existing and newly collected data. The quantitative analysis focused mainly on data for 15 core countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Republic of Congo, Uganda and Zambia. The main sources were Demographic and Health Studies (DHS), Living Standards Measurement Studies (LSMS) and national surveys. For some topics where solid data existed, additional countries were also included. For several topics, global estimates were estimated based on both actual data and extrapolations. New quantitative data were collected from Ethiopia and Niger, and new qualitative data were collected from Ethiopia, Nepal and Niger.

## Ending child marriage and early childbirth would reduce population growth substantially, increasing GDP per capita

- **Ending child marriage could contribute to national welfare gains that add up to over \$500 billion** *per year* globally by the year 2030, solely from the benefits of lower population growth.
- In Niger, ending child marriage and early childbearing would slow the country's population growth by more than 5% by the year 2030. This, in turn, would relieve pressure on the country's budget, with potential **welfare gains of up to \$1.7 billion** *per year* by the year 2030.
- Similarly, **Nepal would gain up to \$1 billion** *per year*, and **Ethiopia up to \$4.8 billion**, just as a result of lower fertility.
- **Savings from the public education budgets of 18 countries could total up to \$17 billion** *per year* by 2030.



## Child marriage brides are more likely to have children early, increasing health risks for newborns

- **Adolescent birth rates are highest where child marriage is common: 95%** of the world's births to adolescents occur in developing countries. **90% of these adolescent births are to girls already married or in a union.**<sup>2</sup>
- **Children born to adolescent mothers face greater health and nutrition risks** than children of adult mothers.
- The **costs of child morbidity, mortality and stunting are huge** for girls and their families, and are significant for countries' economic welfare as well.

**Ending child marriage would only result in small reductions in national rates of under-five mortality and stunting (because only a small proportion of children are born to girls who married before 18), but would result in significant improvements to the health of those children affected.**

**Ending child marriage would result in benefits of up to \$98 billion per year** by 2030 as a result of reducing under-five mortality and childhood stunting among children born to girls under 18.

## Child brides are less likely to complete their education, reducing future earnings and productivity

- **Child brides are less likely to complete their education** than girls who remain unmarried.
  - The study estimates that girls married very young are up to **24% less likely** to complete secondary school than girls who marry at or above age 18.
  - Even girls who marry at 17 are **nearly 5% less likely** to complete secondary school.
- **Lower educational attainment contributes to** higher rates of intimate partner violence, lower knowledge of HIV/AIDS and, most significantly in terms of national economic losses, **reduced labour force earnings.**
- The study found that because child brides are less educated and have greater household and childcare responsibilities, their **earnings are far lower than girls who marry later.**
  - Child marriage contributes **to losses in earnings of around 9%** (average across 15 countries) for women who married as children. Annual losses in earnings across 15 countries are approx. **\$26 billion.**
- This loss of education and earnings associated with child marriage also contributes to an **intergenerational cycle of poverty.** The study finds that child marriage **lowers the educational prospects of the children of child brides**, which leads to additional economic costs over time.

**Ending child marriage could help governments to increase national earnings and productivity.**

- By ending child marriage, **Burkina Faso could create \$179 million per year** in increased earnings and productivity.
- Due to its larger population and the role of women in the economy, **Bangladesh could create an additional \$4.8 billion, and Nigeria an additional \$7.6 billion in increased earnings and productivity.**

<sup>2</sup>UNFPA, *Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy*, State of World Population, 2013.

# Ending child marriage could lead to huge economic gains

**The combined impacts of child marriage on earnings and productivity, private and public expenditures, and non-monetary and social costs are huge.**

- In Niger, the country with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, ending child marriage could generate **annual benefits of up to \$1.7 billion** in additional welfare from lower population growth, \$327 million in savings from the education budget, \$34 million through reduced infant mortality, and \$8 million through reduced child stunting. That adds up to over **\$2 billion in benefits in one year** – huge for a country whose total annual budget is around \$3 billion.

**By ending child marriage and ensuring that adolescents have access to the education, information and services they need, fertility rates would decrease, educational attainment and productivity would increase, and countries could make significant advances to alleviate poverty and reap tremendous benefits from economic growth.**

## **What needs to be done to end child marriage?**

See *Girls Not Brides* **Theory of Change**.



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Seventh Floor  
65 Leadenhall Street  
London  
EC3A 2AD  
United Kingdom

☎ 0203 725 5858

📞 0207 603 7811

🌐 [www.GirlsNotBrides.org](http://www.GirlsNotBrides.org)

✉ [info@GirlsNotBrides.org](mailto:info@GirlsNotBrides.org)

🐦 [GirlsNotBrides](https://twitter.com/GirlsNotBrides)

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

***Girls Not Brides* is global partnership made up of more than 1000 civil society organisations from over 95 countries, committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their full potential.**