

GIRLS NOT BRIDES STRATEGY

2017 – 2020

Draft for consultation



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1. Cover note

This draft strategy was developed by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat with the input of members and other stakeholders in the broader movement to end child marriage. We want to thank everyone who has contributed into the strategy development process so far. Please see the [accompanying report](#) on the consultations for more detail about the consultation process and findings.

We welcome feedback from *Girls Not Brides* members and stakeholders on this draft strategy.

Your feedback in this final round of consultation will help us to further refine the strategy. In December, the *Girls Not Brides* Board of Trustees will review and adopt the strategy on behalf of the Partnership.

Please send us your feedback via this feedback form no later than Sunday 13 November 2016: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/7WP57QV

The secretariat will be hosting webinars for *Girls Not Brides* members where this draft will be presented and explained, and where members will be able to ask questions before sending their feedback. These webinars will take place on:

- Thursday 27 October (at 9am GMT) – in English
- Thursday 27 October (at 2pm GMT) – in French
- Tuesday 1 November (at 3pm GMT) – in English

Members can sign up for these webinars by emailing info@GirlsNotBrides.org

If you are not available at these times, please keep an eye out on the [website](#) where we will share recordings of these webinars shortly after they have taken place.

Please read the FAQs on the [website](#) for more information about the consultation.

2. Introduction

Launched in 2011 by The Elders, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* has grown to over 600 civil society organisations in more than 80 countries, committed to working together to end child marriage and enable girls to fulfil their potential.

Girls Not Brides' strategy represents a roadmap for the Partnership's work together. It does not seek to reflect all the work of individual *Girls Not Brides* members, nor does it attempt to identify everything that needs to be done to address child marriage, which is reflected in the [Theory of Change](#). Rather, it aims to identify specific areas where collective action, especially within civil society, will be crucial for progress in the next four years.

The strategy puts forward a set of six shared goals for the next four years (2017-2020) to focus our work as a Partnership and to maximise our impact. It builds on the ambitious previous *Girls Not Brides Strategy 2014-2016*, taking into account progress and changes in the external world. While we have seen significant progress in efforts to end child marriage over the past few years, the absolute numbers of child brides continue to rise every year. To achieve the dramatic change we want to see in the lives of girls, it is imperative that we accelerate our collective action.

All parts of the Partnership – members, national partnerships, working groups – have crucial roles to play in achieving our collective goals as outlined in the strategy.

Following a final round of consultation with members, and adoption of the strategy by the Board of Trustees in December, the secretariat will be developing its own objectives and workplan. We hope that member organisations, national partnerships and working groups will also use the strategy to identify opportunities for individual and collective action in their own workplans.

Key changes

There are a number of areas where the world has evolved significantly since our previous strategy was developed, in part due to the hard work of *Girls Not Brides* members and partners. The new strategy aims to build on this evolution and focus on what needs to happen next.

A significant goal in our previous strategy was to secure commitments from intergovernmental fora to work on child marriage. With multiple significant global and regional commitments in place today, our focus now must shift towards sustaining an international and regional environment that supports their implementation at the national and community levels. We also need to expand action to under-represented regions and sectors.

When the previous strategy was developed, our focus was on encouraging and highlighting national progress. Since then, several countries have started to put in place national strategies to end child marriage, and we have a growing understanding of the comprehensive efforts that are necessary in a range of national contexts. This new strategy reflects this evolution, and focuses on the role of national governments in countries with high rates of child marriage.

One of the main reasons underpinning the creation of *Girls Not Brides* was the recognition of the crucial role of organisations working with local communities. We understand that the lives of girls will only improve with a change in their local context. This strategy more explicitly highlights the importance of

community-level organisations, reflecting a recurring theme in the consultations that the global movement must do more to ensure that these actors are better equipped to address child marriage.

While the need for more funding for efforts to end child marriage was highlighted in the previous strategy, this is an area where significant work still remains. In particular, the new strategy highlights the importance of resources from national governments, as well as from related sectors (e.g. education).

Since the development of the previous strategy, we have made significant advances in understanding what a comprehensive response to child marriage involves in different contexts, including through the development of the [Theory of Change on child marriage](#) in 2014. This new strategy focuses more on ensuring the uptake of learnings and evidence in decision-making, as well as filling learning gaps.

Overarching themes

During the strategy consultations, four overarching themes emerged that are relevant to all the proposed strategic goals. These themes have been integrated across the goals, and will also help shape the work of the secretariat. Please see the [accompanying report](#) on the consultations for more detail on these themes.

- **Accountability:** All actors must hold themselves and others accountable to commitments and obligations.
- **Gender equality:** As the underlying cause of child marriage, gender inequality must be addressed in all interventions, and programmes and policies must be gender-responsive.
- **Engaging all relevant actors and sectors:** Efforts to address child marriage must be integrated into the work of a variety of sectors (e.g., education, justice, health) at all levels, and interventions must be multi-sectoral to succeed. Likewise, a wide range of actors have a role to play in ending child marriage. We will not succeed without the full engagement of civil society, communities, families, traditional and religious leaders, governments, donors, international organisations, youth and affected girls.
- **Youth:** We must ensure meaningful youth participation, and call for affected girls and youth organisations to be engaged in the design and delivery of solutions.

Girls Not Brides Vision

A world without child marriage where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men and are able to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives.¹

Girls Not Brides Mission

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

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

In working to end child marriage, we believe that social change cannot succeed without community engagement. Members of *Girls Not Brides* will work together to enhance and strengthen efforts to end child marriage at community, local, national and global levels. Specifically, *Girls Not Brides* aims to:

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

We will be more effective in achieving our objectives by working together than by working alone.²

¹ From the *Girls Not Brides Theory of Change*, developed with 150 members and external experts in 2014.

² Adopted in 2011 at the founding meeting of *Girls Not Brides*.

3. *Girls Not Brides* Strategy 2017-2020

Goal A: Governments

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

OUTCOMES:

- Governments adopt, implement and monitor high quality national strategies, programmes and policies to achieve Target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Governments integrate a focus on ending child marriage into the workplans and budgets of relevant ministries and departments, and ensure cross-government coordination.
- Civil society organisations at all levels are working together and engaged as key partners in the development and implementation of national responses, and are able to hold their governments accountable to their commitments.
- Donor governments, multilateral organisations and other agencies leverage their influence to hold governments accountable and support them to develop and fully implement strategies, programmes and policies.

Governments of countries with high rates of child marriage have a central role to play in ending the practice. They have specific obligations to ensure girls' rights are respected and that their needs are addressed. They are also the key actors who can drive change in the lives of large numbers of girls. Therefore, governments need to establish legal and policy frameworks, implement programmes at-scale and ensure that girls have access to crucial services related to education, health and justice.

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

To be effective, government action on child marriage must be holistic, multi-sectoral, girl-centred, evidence-based and rights-based. It is critical that all interventions are fully funded within national budgets across the different ministries. Making sure sub-national and local governments take action is also critical to reaching at-risk and married girls.

For *Girls Not Brides*, national-level coordination among civil society organisations will be critical to ensure governments make and implement commitments. By working together at the national level, through official national partnerships or other mechanisms for collaboration, civil society will: advocate for effective responses; ensure accountability; share lessons learned, evidence and data; and, as appropriate, implement national strategies and programmes that complement government efforts. The Partnership will also play a role in mobilising donors and multilaterals (including the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage) to support national governments.

Goal B: Global

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

OUTCOMES:

- International and regional bodies call for and enable the implementation of human rights obligations and government commitments on child marriage, and make new commitments where needed.
- International institutions, partnerships, initiatives and organisations working in related sectors integrate a focus on child marriage in their work.
- Media, policy-makers and thought-leaders increasingly recognise child marriage as a priority issue.
- New influential champions from diverse spheres join the global movement in order to take action.

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

While these global and regional frameworks can be strengthened and supplemented, we believe that over the coming four years we need to ensure that these commitments are acted upon by governments. International and regional actors (including international organisations, regional mechanisms, development partners, other global partnerships) have an important role to play in supporting governments to implement their commitments, as well as in holding governments accountable. There are also regions where new or additional commitments may be needed to spur action to end child marriage, such as in Latin America.

To achieve this goal, *Girls Not Brides* members will take collective action and call on international and regional mechanisms to be accountable for commitments made, and support governments in implementation. In some parts of the world, members will work together to encourage new commitments from key regional institutions.

We know that child marriage is a barrier to achieving a range of development goals, such as those related to education, justice, empowerment, health and humanitarian aid. Therefore, it will also be important for international organisations and institutions that are tackling these issues to integrate a focus on addressing child marriage in their work. As a Partnership, we will engage with these institutions to help build commitment and effective linkages at all levels.

Ending child marriage requires multi-faceted action, and it will not happen overnight. We will therefore need to ensure that ending child marriage remains a priority issue on international and regional agendas. *Girls Not Brides* members will bring attention to child marriage in a variety of international and regional fora. We aim to sustain the global discourse on child marriage and promote a more nuanced narrative that reflects our evolving understanding of the issue in a gender-transformative, context-specific manner.

Goal C: Communities

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

OUTCOMES:

- Policy-makers and programme designers support community-level efforts to end child marriage and address the needs of married girls.
- Grassroots organisations are empowered, have increased capacity, and are working with affected and at-risk girls, traditional and religious leaders, parents, teachers, youth, men and boys, and other stakeholders to implement evidence-based approaches.
- Community voices and perspectives are heard, included and valued at local, national and global levels.

Ultimately, change requires a transformation of attitudes, mindsets and norms within communities and families. How that change happens depends on each local context. We need to support and highlight community-led efforts by local leaders and community-based organisations which work with key stakeholders within the community, such as traditional and religious leaders, parents and families, teachers, youth, and men and boys. At-risk and affected girls must be at the centre of efforts within communities, engaged as agents of change themselves. Local government (including police and child protection authorities) should be supported to address child marriage.

Community-based civil society organisations play a central role. They have the deep experience and understanding of the local contexts in which child marriage occurs, and can ensure that the development and implementation of initiatives at the national and international levels are rooted in reality. They also have a crucial role in holding governments accountable to their commitments. Yet, all too often, international, regional and national efforts are not grounded in the realities of communities, and these frontline actors lack the capacity – including the tools, knowledge, funding and other resources – to be most effective in their work.

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

Goal D: Funding

More sustainable funding for effective approaches is available from a diverse range of sources, particularly for grassroots organisations.

OUTCOMES:

- Existing and new donors increase the funding available for efforts to end child marriage.
- Civil society organisations, especially those working at the community level, are able to access funding to implement effective programmes to end child marriage and support married girls.
- National and sub-national governments in countries with high rates of child marriage allocate appropriate funding to interventions to end child marriage.
- Related sectors integrate a focus on ending child marriage in their programming, budgets and indicators.

Significant change requires adequate, long-term, sustainable resourcing for effective programmes and interventions. While funding for addressing child marriage has increased in recent years, the level available is not nearly enough to address the problem at-scale. Organisations working on women's rights and gender inequality, and community-based organisations, face particular difficulties in accessing the funding they need.

Current donors to the field must be encouraged to continue and, if possible, increase their contributions. At the same time, new donors from the private and public spheres must be engaged. Public and parliamentary engagement in current and potential donor countries will be important, especially in light of declining aid budgets and competing crises and priorities. A sustainable, large-scale response to child marriage will also require domestic financial commitments from governments with high rates of child marriage.

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

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

Goal E: Learning

Efforts to end child marriage are informed by evidence and lessons learned.

OUTCOMES:

- Lessons learned and evidence on different strategies to end child marriage and support married girls are documented, shared widely across different contexts, and used to inform programming, policy-making and grant-making.
- Gaps in research and data about child marriage are filled.
- Collective expertise on child marriage generated by *Girls Not Brides* is widely used to inform decision-making.

An effective response to child marriage requires a greater understanding of what it will take to end the practice, including in the sensitive areas related to changing traditions and social norms. There are still significant research and data gaps which need to be filled through qualitative and quantitative research, including at a sub-national level. We know that a range of strategies will be necessary to end child marriage. However, we need much more evidence and lessons learned – through formal evaluations as well as case studies and ongoing discussions – on which programmes and approaches work, which do not work, and how to scale-up and adapt positive examples in other contexts.

We know that tackling child marriage will require action from a range of sectors. We need to better understand what a comprehensive and holistic response needs to include, how to integrate work across sectors and draw on lessons and evidence from related efforts. Also, we need to ensure that the people responsible for developing and funding policies and programmes are aware of new evidence and lessons learned, and are using it to inform their decisions.

As a global partnership, *Girls Not Brides* will not conduct research directly. Rather, we will focus on ensuring that new and existing research, evidence and lessons learned are shared widely, particularly on the solutions to child marriage and on insights emerging from non-traditional sources. Members of *Girls Not Brides* will learn directly from one another, and develop a shared understanding of promising approaches. With the deep collective expertise of members on child marriage, *Girls Not Brides* will act as a thought-leader on the issue, developing materials to shape the global discourse and influence decision-making. We will also pay special attention to highlighting critical gaps in knowledge and encouraging partners to fill these gaps.

Goal F: Partnership

The Partnership continues to collaborate, diversify and strengthen.

OUTCOMES:

- *Girls Not Brides* members have greater impact through joint action and through collaboration with other stakeholders.
- *Girls Not Brides* members have increased capacity to end child marriage.
- The *Girls Not Brides* Partnership is further strengthened by the inclusion of new and diverse members, particularly from under-represented regions, sectors and constituencies.
- The governance and structures of the Partnership are inclusive and fit-for-purpose, and ensure that *Girls Not Brides'* work reflects the voices of those most affected by child marriage.

Girls Not Brides members are at the forefront of efforts to end child marriage around the world. As the only global partnership focusing on child marriage, we need to continue to ensure that our members are able to increase their impact by working together, sharing knowledge and experiences, and comparing updates about local and national developments.

Progress towards all the strategic goals will require members to work together, both through collaborations that respond to specific opportunities (e.g. for International Day of the Girl) and more sustained and organised working groups (e.g. a Youth Advocacy Group). In many countries, national partnerships provide a key organising mechanism to strengthen the national collaboration of members, and enable them to speak with one voice in interactions with their governments.

However, critical gaps exist in the capacity of members. Members have indicated the need for increased capacity to conduct successful advocacy, develop and deliver effective programmes, fundraise, hold government accountable, use data and evidence, work collaboratively, communicate with powerful messages, and integrate child marriage into sectoral responses. All this occurs against a backdrop where, in many countries, civil society faces restrictions and where efforts to achieve gender equality are met with backlash. Building the capacity of key parts of the membership, especially members in countries with the highest rates of child marriage, is an important task that all members of the Partnership will work together to achieve. *Girls Not Brides* will continue to explore new opportunities and communications tools to foster collaboration, learning and capacity-building between its members. These efforts will help ensure that all members feel empowered, engaged, and encouraged by a sense of global solidarity.

While the Partnership is already diverse geographically and in terms of different approaches, key gaps remain to be filled in specific regions, including Latin America, Middle East and North Africa and South East/East Asia and the Pacific.

We also need to continue to ensure that our governance structures remain fit-for-purpose, and that the voices of members, national partnerships, as well as of girls themselves, are reflected in decision-making.