



IMPACT REPORT

2020



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage

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This report is dedicated to the activists and friends of the movement to end child marriage who have lost their lives to COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. They continue to inspire and drive us towards a world without child marriage, where all girls and women can reach their full their potential.

Illustrations by [Marcela Quiroz](#)



FOREWORD FROM THE CEO

As I look back at 2020, I feel a mix of pride, privilege and pain. Pride in all we have been able to achieve as a global partnership to end child marriage, privilege to have worked with such a powerful movement of activists and allies around the world, and pain as I have seen how devastating the COVID-19 pandemic has been.

At the start of the year, we made a commitment to deepen our work and redouble our efforts to make a world without child marriage a reality. With the guidance of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, partners, donors and allies, we reframed our strategy and embarked on a Pathway to Zero Child Marriages.

However, with the onset of COVID-19, we realised 2020 would not allow for business as usual; it quickly became a time of great uncertainty. But through this uncertainty

one thing remained clear – the work of *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* was needed now more than ever. The realisation that COVID-19 threatened the gains we have delivered over the last decade fuelled our resolve.

Throughout the year, we have seen how pandemic-related restrictions – including lockdowns, school closures, job losses and poverty – are harming women and girls. Although we have been geographically apart, we listened to *Girls Not Brides* member organisations and allies, heard their stories of hurt and hope, and focused our efforts at the country level to make sure that the girls most at risk will not be left behind when the pandemic passes.

We brought the world closer to our work by launching a new Member Advisory Committee and by diversifying our Board

of Trustees to be more representative of where we work. This kept us connected to our members, whose counsel during this time has been invaluable.

Recognising the need to accelerate efforts and respond to this new context, we updated our Partnership Strategy, which sets out a comprehensive framework for the Pathway to Zero; the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat priorities stem from this and frame our contribution to the movement.

In 2020 we also expanded our work with young people. As leaders and as future – and current – parents, we believe that young people have the power to end child marriage in their lifetimes. In February, I was personally moved by a group of 36 young women in Rajasthan, all of whom are leading local campaigns to end child marriage. They embodied what it means

to be part of *Girls Not Brides*: brave, bold and inspiring others to join them in their collective work.

As we move into 2021, we will continue to reach out to each other, as we cannot end child marriage alone. We will work to strengthen our global movement, find new allies and continue on our journey to a world where each and every girl is able to live her dreams. I invite you to join us as we continue to build the global movement to end child marriage so that together we can get to zero.

Thank you,

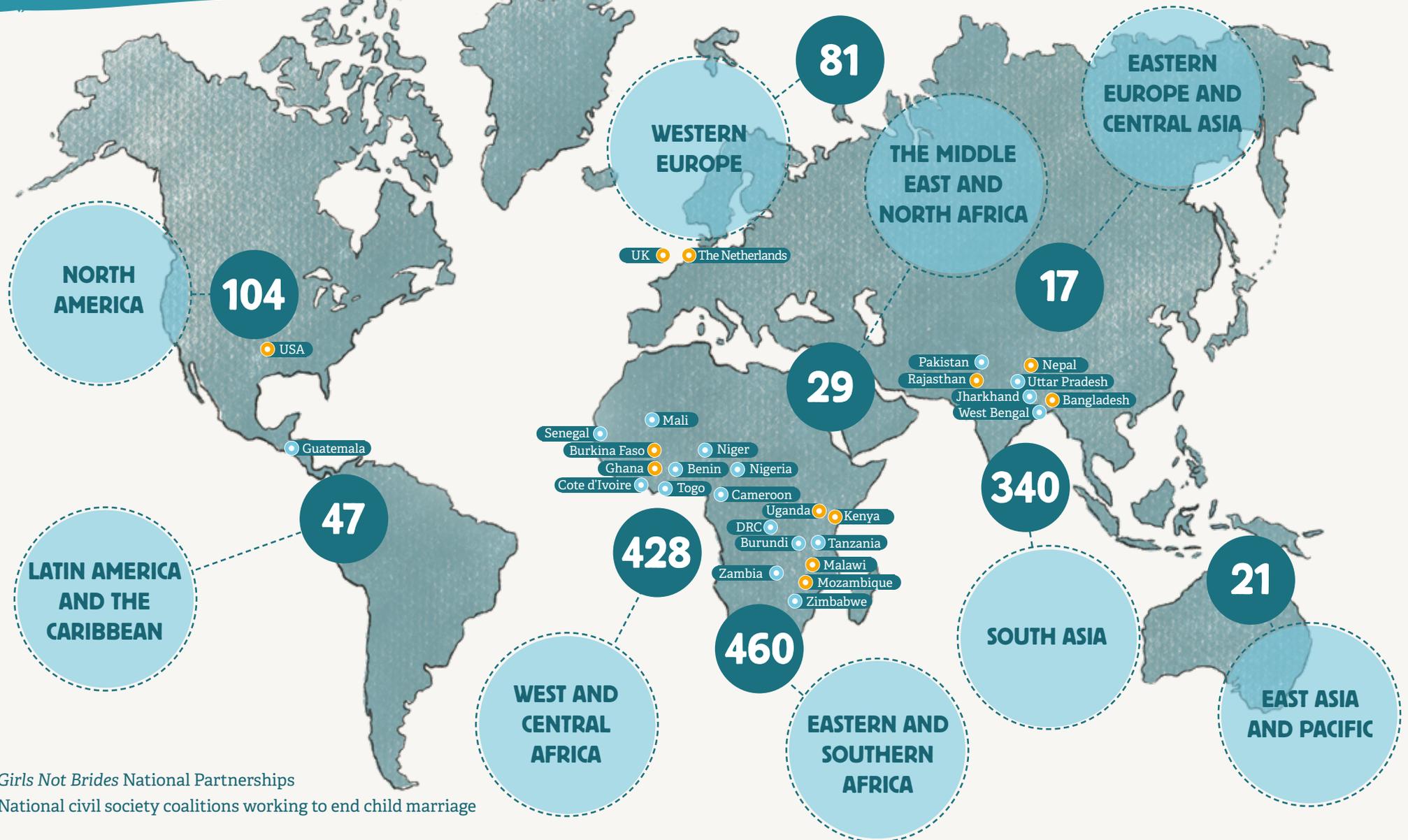
Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell
CEO, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*

THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

GIRLS NOT BRIDES MEMBERS BY REGION

THE GIRLS NOT BRIDES GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

At the end of 2020, the *Girls Not Brides* partnership was made up of **1,527 member organisations from 104 countries** committed to working together to end child marriage and support married girls. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations work across sectors – including health, education, human rights and humanitarian contexts – and range from small grassroots actors to large international organisations.



Note on terminology: In this report, we use the term **child marriage** as an umbrella term to encompass all forms of child, early and forced marriage and unions. Understanding the practice in the context of this broader term ensures that all girls affected by the practice are included, regardless of whether they are in a formal or informal union, and that all aspects of the issue – including culturally-specific understandings of childhood and development, and the relationship between age, consent and force – are recognised and expressed.

THE MOVEMENT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

The informal global network of civil society and grassroots organisations, national and international non-governmental organisations, activists, academics, UN agencies, funders, governments, leaders and champions, who are all working towards a different world – one without child marriage and where girls are free to decide their future.

THE GIRLS NOT BRIDES SECRETARIAT

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat coordinates, rallies and supports the work of the Partnership and movement. We are a lean team with staff members based across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. We play three broad roles in driving change: a central support and coordination body for the only global civil society partnership to end child marriage; a representative of and advocate for civil society on efforts to end child marriage; and an expert resource and central actor in the global movement to end child marriage.

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS

Many *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have come together to accelerate progress to end child marriage in their countries by forming National Partnerships and coalitions.

National Partnerships are networks of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations that believe in the power of collective action to end child marriage and ensure girls achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives. They have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat to align their work with the Partnership Strategy.

Coalitions are networks of civil society organisations that are committed to addressing child marriage and working together at the national level to spearhead this change. They are close allies to *Girls Not Brides*, but have not signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF GIRLS NOT BRIDES

“We have built alliances with other global and regional platforms to advocate for sexual and reproductive health issues. [We have also gained] a better understanding of the impact that child, early and forced marriage and unions have on girls and how the issue should be included in public policymaking.”

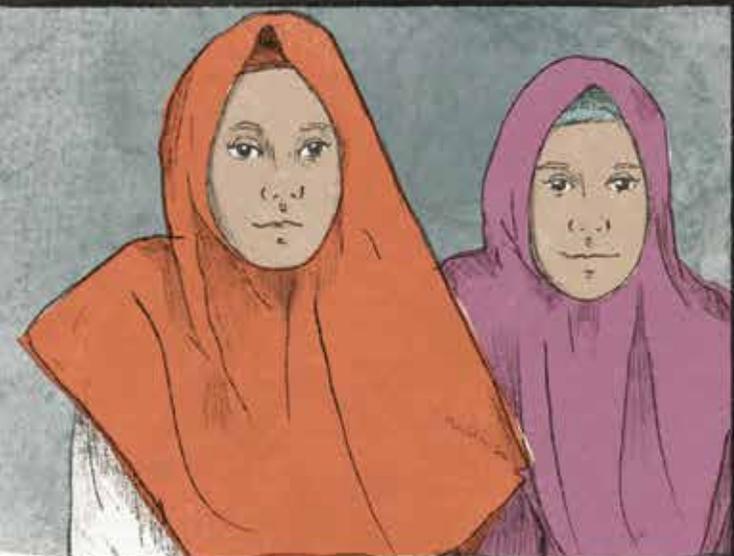
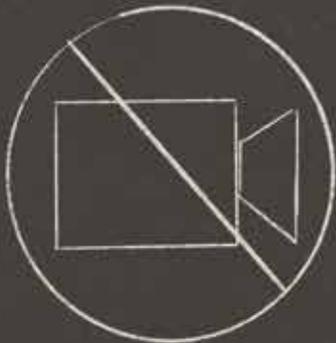
Fundación Mexicana para la Planeación Familiar (MEXFAM), Mexico

“Since our confirmation as a member, we have benefited from the movement through resource supports such as policy documents, webinar calls, newsletters with relevant information on child marriage, funding alerts and our direct communication with the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat. We look forward to more benefits as we move on with strategic development.”

Youth Dream for Constructive Achievement (YDCA), Liberia

“We have received technical support from *Girls Not Brides*, which has helped us to accelerate our child marriage campaign in the Nepali community. The *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change, fundraising toolkit and other publications are empowering as well as motivating us to work on child marriage.”

Janaki Women Awareness Society (JWAS), Nepal



WHAT 2020 HAS MEANT FOR GIRLS AND CHILD MARRIAGE

COVID-19 is threatening progress made over the last decade towards ending child marriage. School closures and increased economic hardship, early pregnancy, and gender-based and domestic violence mean that 13 million more girls could marry as children over the next decade.¹ This is in addition to the 12 million girls who already marry every year.²

WHAT THIS HAS MEANT FOR GIRLS NOT BRIDES

While 2020 was challenging, it was also an opportunity for us to show our resilience. The movement to end child marriage has lost dedicated activists and friends to COVID-19 and faced new challenges and restrictions to collective action, programming, funding and support for girls. Despite these setbacks, girls and communities continue to demand a better future, and our Partnership has risen to the challenge.

Girls Not Brides member organisations adapted and innovated in their programming, from using social media to reach girls, delivering resources to support at-home learning during school closures, and providing essential food, water and hygiene packages to those in need.

“With students at home [...] we shifted our focus to support girls who do not have internet [as] they are at a heightened risk of failing exams, dropping out of school and marrying early.”

Project Soar, Morocco

At the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat, we listened to our members and adapted our work to best support the Partnership through this global crisis. We facilitated peer-to-peer connection and learning; we advocated for girls to be at the centre of the COVID-19 response and recovery; and we developed and shared the latest learning and evidence on child marriage and COVID-19 so our members have the tools to respond and adapt effectively.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE FUTURE

The challenges of the pandemic will continue long after lockdowns are lifted. We are concerned about the projected increase in child marriage, and cuts to official development assistance and private funding for effective responses during current economic contractions. We are disappointed to see how in some contexts lockdowns and public health measures are constraining civil society space and limiting opportunities to hold governments to account.

Donors and decision-makers at every level must rally together to implement an integrated response to the pandemic that takes into account the needs of girls and those at risk of child marriage, in all their diversity.

¹ UNFPA, *New UNFPA projections predict calamitous impact on women's health As COVID-19 pandemic continues*, 2020.

² UNICEF, *Child marriage database*, 2020.

GIRLS NOT BRIDES SECRETARIAT OBJECTIVES

In 2020, the secretariat's approach to supporting the movement to end child marriage was underpinned by six objectives:

1

Catalysing and nurturing coordinated effective civil society action at all levels

2

Fostering the uptake of evidence-based solutions that have gender equality at their heart

3

Increasing the diversity of the global movement to address child marriage, amplifying the voices of youth, women-led and community-based organisations

4

Influencing governments and other actors to take effective action to address child marriage

5

Successfully advocating for more diverse and accessible funding to address child marriage, especially for civil society

6

Ensuring the secretariat team is empowered and supported, and has the resources and structures to effectively deliver the secretariat's vision and live its values

OBJECTIVE 1: CATALYSING COLLECTIVE ACTION

The determination and dedication of *Girls Not Brides* has shone throughout 2020. Despite navigating many new challenges and restrictions, member organisations continued to reach girls around the world, and collaborate on joint activities and share learning and advice with each other, supported by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat.

MEMBER ORGANISATIONS MOBILISED AROUND THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL

One highlight of the Partnership's work in 2020 was our joint action around the International Day of the Girl on 11 October. Over 250 of our member organisations mobilised around this year's theme of "My voice, our equal future," leading activities to support girls and call for action to end child marriage.

To support their advocacy, we designed, produced and disseminated a comprehensive toolkit with

information on the 2020 theme, key messages, campaign ideas, and practical resources including animated graphics for social media and template advocacy letters.

We also made small grants to seven of our National Partnerships and coalitions to support their collective activities. These ranged from a press conference on ending gender-based violence – including child marriage – in Benin, to a Girl Leadership Summit and social media campaign with the participation of over 5,000 girls in Uttar Pradesh, India.

Further details on our members' campaigns and activities are featured on the [Girls Not Brides website](#).

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat facilitated 90 shared learning and capacity strengthening sessions in 2020. This included online and in-person working groups and trainings, webinars and peer-to-peer learning sessions.

"*Girls Not Brides* toolkits and support really help us to construct plans and campaign activities. We really appreciate it!"

WE CAN, Bangladesh

"Working together brought understanding, happiness and sharing of ideas. We brainstormed [and] designed activities together and achieved success. I was excited to be working with young people because I believe they have a lot to offer and it paid off."

Young Pearl Foundation, Nigeria



NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS STRENGTHENED THEIR WORK

In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* National Partnerships and coalitions continued to advocate for – and achieve – meaningful change at the national level. For example, *Girls Not Brides Bangladesh* worked with legal experts to review the effectiveness and impact of the national legal framework to end child marriage and *Girls Not Brides Mozambique* trained 132 people for the effective dissemination and coordination of a newly approved law to address child marriage.

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat supported and responded to National Partnerships' and coalitions' needs, as identified through capacity self-assessments and ongoing discussions.

One example of this support is our work with the Working Group to Advance on Girls and Adolescents' Rights (the Mesa a favor de las niñas y las adolescentes, the Mesa de la Niña) in Guatemala, with whom we have collaborated since 2018. In 2020, this coalition of 22 civil society organisations requested our support to strengthen their capacity to work together and grow their technical expertise on child marriage. In response, we organised a series

of in-person and virtual workshops covering internal capacity strengthening and strategy development. We also coordinated two webinars on the drivers of child marriage in Latin America, the Caribbean and Guatemala, taking into account factors such as gender inequality, poverty and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare.

The Mesa de la Niña has since identified priorities for its work in 2021. These include improving access to education and sexual and reproductive healthcare, community interventions to address discriminatory gender norms, and social support programmes for pregnant and/or married adolescents. You can find out more about their work in a [guest blog](#) on the *Girls Not Brides* website.

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING INCREASED IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

While *Girls Not Brides* member organisations work in different contexts, they often face similar challenges and have relevant expertise to share. With the suspension of in-person transnational meetings in 2020, the secretariat facilitated a series of seven online peer-to-peer discussions, so that National Partnerships and coalitions could share their learnings, best practices, successes and challenges.

Each session was member-led and covered a range of topics from implementing policy and laws to engaging religious leaders and promoting girl-led research and campaigning. The discussions grew in popularity – with a 153% growth in attendance over the series – and member organisations reported strengthened cross-regional relationships and confidence. We will integrate this popular and effective innovation into our work beyond the pandemic, along with several new initiatives for 2021. These include the twinning of established and nascent National Partnerships for mutual support, and the establishment of an online hub for shared learnings.

We also organised an online convening of our English-speaking African National Partnerships, coalitions and members from Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Each of the 10 sessions had between 27 and 40 participants, who shared knowledge on issues such as improving economic security for girls, gender transformative approaches to end child marriage, and identifying global and regional advocacy opportunities. As a result, each participating coalition identified lessons learned and priority areas to take forward in their national collective work.

STORY OF CHANGE: UNLOCKING THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE WITH GIRLS NOT BRIDES UGANDA

In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* launched the Accelerating Progress to End Child Marriage Programme in Uganda with [Girls Not Brides Uganda](#) (led by Joy for Children) – a National Partnership made up of 90 civil society organisations – in a country where 34% of girls marry before the age of 18.³ Results include new commitments from government representatives’ grassroots advocacy on ending child marriage and increased media coverage of the issue.

Girls Not Brides Uganda led an integrated programme to end child marriage in the country, while the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat provided ongoing technical advice and support on issues identified by them: communications, budget advocacy, and monitoring, evaluation and learning. *Girls Not Brides Uganda* has now developed a communications strategy and established groups to monitor budget development and support media engagement. *Girls Not Brides* partially funded their National Coordinator, who has helped the National Partnership maintain and build momentum in their work.

Throughout the year, *Girls Not Brides Uganda* advocated for better implementation of existing laws

that protect girls, and called for the development of a revised National Strategy on Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. They secured pledges from 15 members of parliament to champion the strategy. They also implemented subnational activities in refugee-hosting districts, deepening our understanding of the causes of child marriage in humanitarian settings and fostering a relationship with the office of the prime minister of Uganda.

The programme also promoted community change in focus districts and built public support for the movement. *Girls Not Brides Uganda* trained youth activists using the *Girls Not Brides* Stand Up, Speak Out! training manual, with support from district champions. The latter are agents of change who, for example, share messages on radio stations and follow up on cases of child marriage in their communities.

Girls Not Brides Uganda also contributed to [media coverage](#) and engaged with radio stations, journalists, national TV and social media to build public awareness of child marriage. The Accelerator Approach pilot in Uganda was supported by players of People’s Postcode Lottery.

STRENGTHENING NATIONAL MOVEMENTS

Over the last decade, the movement to end child marriage has made great progress and – before the COVID-19 pandemic started – rates of child marriage were decreasing globally. However, child marriage persists in many countries and gender inequality still restricts girls’ lives around the world.

Girls Not Brides has proven that collective civil society action at the national and subnational level drives sustainable change. However, our member organisations need more support and resources to build their work and mobilise all the stakeholders that affect girls’ lives.

In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* launched a new multi-year approach to intensify support for national movements across select focus countries, with the greatest initial focus on Uganda, Niger and India. We believe this work will accelerate progress and provide evidence of what works to end child marriage in these contexts and beyond.

³ *Girls Not Brides*, [Child marriage Atlas](#) 2020. The Atlas is based on UNICEF data for 2020. It is updated every two years, with the next review taking place in June 2022.



OBJECTIVE 2: SHARING EVIDENCE AND LEARNING

To address gaps in the evidence base and avoid the duplication of research and learning on child marriage, *Girls Not Brides* spearheaded a major learning initiative with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in 2020: the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK). Other highlights include contributing to broader global learning opportunities and consortia, sharing evidence from the Partnership, disseminating new accessible resources – including on the impact of COVID-19 – and increasing the understanding of how child marriage intersects with related issues and sectors.

THE CHILD MARRIAGE RESEARCH TO ACTION NETWORK (CRANK)

The [CRANK](#) is a joint initiative by *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and brings together leading global researchers and organisations working on child marriage learning and evidence to ensure that the research community is aligned, responds to gaps in knowledge and is connected with practitioners so that new evidence can be taken forward in policy and practice. The first meeting in December 2020 brought together 54 participants from civil society, the United Nations (UN), research institutes and *Girls Not Brides* member organisations to discuss the latest evidence and research on the impact of COVID-19 in India and sub-Saharan Africa. In 2021, the CRANK will continue to bring child marriage researchers, practitioners and policy makers together every three months to share and discuss the latest evidence on priority learning

topics. It is also a knowledge management mechanism through which we track ongoing and upcoming research by CRANK members, monitor patterns and identify gaps. The CRANK is open to all. Those who sign up can participate in quarterly calls, receive the biannual research digest, and share their work through the CRANK's online research tracker.

WE DEEPENED KNOWLEDGE ON HOW CHILD MARRIAGE INTERACTS WITH OTHER SECTORS

In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* continued to build relationships with partners working across different sectors, including humanitarian contexts, education, and sexual and reproductive health. One highlight from our cross-sectoral collaboration is our work with the movement to end female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Girls Not Brides* worked with member organisations and partners in Kenya

to increase the evidence on the shared drivers of – and solutions to – child marriage and FGM/C. We reviewed these links by documenting the work of two member organisations in Kenya (the Association of Media Women and Msichana Empowerment Kuria), and carrying out a review of the global evidence to address child marriage and FGM/C. The review of the global evidence found that many approaches work better as part of a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy, and that poor implementation can often be a challenge; it also found that some approaches known to be effective from the global evidence are not well documented in Kenya. We shared our findings at a webinar co-hosted with Amref Health Africa, attended by 49 Kenyan stakeholders – including government representatives – and at a UNICEF-hosted webinar with a global audience of over 150 researchers, UN agencies and donors.

WE PROMOTED GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

Child marriage happens because girls are perceived as less valuable than boys. In all areas of life, systematic discrimination perpetuates unequal gender norms, which are reinforced by other forms of discrimination. Addressing these harmful gender norms and unequal power relationships is key to ending child marriage.

In partnership with the Child Marriage and Sexuality Working Group,⁴ which focuses on showing how control over adolescent girls' sexuality is a root cause of child marriage, we documented the positive, lasting impact that gender transformative interventions can have in girls' lives. This regionally specific work, which focused on Latin America and the Caribbean, adds to our 2019 work in Africa and Asia. The Working Group will expand this work throughout 2021 by developing a framework that provides guidance to strengthen programmes to take a more gender-transformative approach and put girls' agency at the centre of ending child marriage.

We also supported *Girls Not Brides Rajasthan* to host a workshop for 27 young people on gender, sexuality and discrimination, in collaboration with UNICEF. The workshop encouraged youth workers to use storytelling to share their experiences and communicate with other young people. As a result,

youth workers created seven stories and reported increased capacity in using social media and storytelling to explore gender and discrimination with the adolescents they work with at the community level.

WE PRODUCED AND DISSEMINATED NEW RESOURCES

We produced and disseminated 24 new resources in 2020. This included online resources and toolkits, thematic briefs, position papers, literature reviews and case studies.

This year, *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, partners and stakeholders continued to access the latest evidence and learnings to guide their work, through the *Girls Not Brides* online [Resource Centre](#). We produced several new and updated resources this year, including a series of thematic briefs on child marriage and [COVID-19, gender equality](#), the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and [humanitarian contexts](#), and a regional brief on [child marriage in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). This year we expanded the reach of our resources by translating into more languages, including Arabic, Bangla, French, Hindi, Spanish and Portuguese.

WE SUPPORTED GIRL- AND YOUTH-LED RESEARCH IN INDIA

In 2020, young members of the *Girls Not Brides* State Partnership in Rajasthan and state coalition in Uttar Pradesh designed and undertook research

to understand the impact of COVID-19 on young women and girls. With financial support from *Girls Not Brides*, researchers aged 15 to 25 years gathered data from over 700 young people across the two states to build an accurate picture of how girls have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Their findings will be used to inform the Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh coalitions' advocacy, and to ensure that the movement to end child marriage represents the voices of young women and girls.

OUR CHILD MARRIAGE AND COVID-19 BRIEF

For the movement to respond to COVID-19, we needed to understand its impact on girls and communities around the world. Early in the pandemic, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat sent out a survey for member organisations to share their concerns and experiences, adapted our work to respond to their needs, and rapidly published the [COVID-19 and child, early and forced marriage: An agenda for action](#) brief. This document provides insights, recommendations and resources to support girls during and after the crisis. It is one of our most downloaded briefs in 2020, and has been circulated and quoted by other partners including SheDecides, the World Health Organization and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

⁴ Members and Partners of the Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions, and Sexuality Working Group are as follows: Aahung, American Jewish World Service, CARE, CREA, Firelight Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Girls First Fund, Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage, GreeneWorks, International Center for Research on Women, International Women's Health Coalition, The Kendeda Fund, MADRE, Nirantar Trust, Plan International, Population Council, Promundo, The Summit Foundation, UNFPA, UNICEF, and The YP Foundation and Empower.



OBJECTIVE 3: AMPLIFYING VOICES

Amplifying the voices of under-represented groups is critical to ensuring that the movement to end child marriage not only represents the needs of all girls but also takes into account the expertise of those working at a community level. In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* supported our member organisations, young people and girls to share their experiences and solutions with broad audiences.

WE HELPED GIRLS AND MEMBERS TELL THEIR STORIES

Girls Not Brides member organisation stories featured in a range of global, regional and national media outlets. To ensure their experiences reached a broad audience, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat secured global coverage for stories from our member organisations, partners and girls themselves. This included features in a range of top-tier media, including the [BBC World Service](#), [the Guardian](#) and [Thomson Reuters](#). We also ensured the work of member organisations in Uganda and the Middle East was covered in regional and national media.

We focused on sharing girls' stories, told in their own voices. We published two long-form multimedia stories on our website, spotlighting the work of two of our member organisations – [the Mariposa DR Foundation in the Dominican Republic](#) and [International Rescue Committee in Lebanon](#). With support from Ignite Philanthropy: Inspiring the End

to Violence Against Girls and Boys, we also produced two illustrated stories and accompanying animations, which brought to life the personal experiences of girls who experienced child marriage in [Colombia/Venezuela](#) and [Uganda](#). We also created an animation to accompany a 2019 illustrated story from [India](#).

Social media continued to be an effective way to further amplify the voices of some of the world's most marginalised communities. For example, we collaborated with the Association of Indigenous Lawyers "Chomija," Ixoqib Miriam, Kinal Antzetik Guerrero, Mano Vuelta and the National Network of Indigenous Lawyers, to reach over 2,000 people with [Facebook Live](#), broadcasting a webinar on sexual violence and child marriage in Indigenous communities in Mexico and Guatemala.

WE SUPPORTED YOUNG PEOPLE

Thanks to social media and our connected world, we are seeing more young people than ever engaging

with the issue of child marriage around the world. Young women and girls are the group most affected by child marriage, and 40% of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations are self-identified youth-led organisations.⁵ We must support these young people to influence the movement to end child marriage and create meaningful change for girls everywhere.

In 2020, we delivered a range of in-person and online trainings and workshops to support young people in taking effective action to end child marriage. We partnered with Restless Development India to train over 50 youth staff of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, and the feedback from this training also contributed to the development of our youth strategies with young people and civil society leaders in Rajasthan and Jharkhand states. We also trained 17 young activists in Zambia and 12 in Uganda on using our youth activism toolkit, [Stand Up, Speak Out!](#) Participants can now facilitate and support youth-led collective action in their communities.

⁵ Based on a data set of 1199 members.



STORY OF CHANGE: YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN DESIGN AND DELIVER A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN

This year we collaborated with Jóvenas Latidas, a collective of youth activists based in 11 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean. We supported the design and delivery of their campaign to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality – specifically on increasing gender-based violence, including child marriage – and adolescent girls’ and young women’s rights.

The Jóvenas Latidas campaign messages were co-created and shared through four blogs on the *Girls Not Brides* website – covering the topics of [engaging young activists](#), [child marriage in the region](#), [girls’ and adolescents’ rights](#) and [the power of collective work](#) – [three podcasts](#), numerous illustrations, infographics and videos for [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), five audio clips broadcast on the [radio](#), and a [campaign statement](#). The campaign – which was built from the ground up – sparked 195,000 impressions on Facebook and a further 298,000 on Instagram; Jóvenas Latidas were able to reach their target audience of young women aged between 18 and 34.

The campaign was developed by its young leaders, with financial support and technical guidance from

Girls Not Brides throughout the design and delivery process. This included the production of four toolkits to strengthen the campaign team’s skills; technical guidance on how to edit audio and video content for radio and podcasts; the development of key messages and priorities for the campaign; and a suite of original illustrations and animations for their online content.

“I would like to thank the whole team for all their hard work and for guiding us so we could see our own potential, come together as a group and present ourselves as Jóvenas Latidas, in the region and to other organisations.”

Young leader of Jóvenas Latidas, Argentina

Jóvenas Latidas will continue their collective action and campaigning into 2021, as they move into new advocacy and activism spaces like the Argentine Ministry of Health’s Advisory Council on Adolescent and Youth Health. United by their strong group identity, Jóvenas Latidas will share their key messages and advocate for governments across the region to put the needs of young women at the centre of their pandemic responses, so they can live free and full lives.



OBJECTIVE 4: ADVOCATING TO DECISION-MAKERS

With the COVID-19 pandemic and global climate crisis front and centre for many leaders and decision-makers, it is more important than ever that girls are listened to and their needs are integrated into all the policies and programmes that affect them. In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* and partner organisations advocated for – and secured – political commitments and action on ending child marriage at the global, regional and national levels.

GLOBAL HIGHLIGHTS

Girls Not Brides member organisations advocated to their governments to take action and deliver on their commitments to end child marriage. The secretariat worked with member organisations on this, including the need for governments to implement their Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) promise to “eliminate all harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage” (SDG 5.3).

As a result of the advocacy of member organisations, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls was recognised by the 114 governments who co-sponsored a new UN General Assembly resolution on child marriage. This resolution was passed by consensus and maintains international pressure on governments to implement their commitment to ending child marriage and ensure that girls are not disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The Generation Equality Forum, which is led by UN Women to mobilise governments and civil society to accelerate gender equality and deliver on the commitments of the 1994 Beijing Platform for Action, benefitted from the participation of girls and young people after we worked with partners – including the Adolescent Girls Investment Plan⁶ and the Mexican government – to broker a relationship between the Forum’s Action Coalition leaders and over 150 youth and adolescent girls. By establishing an open space where girls and young people were able to speak directly to leaders and provide recommendations based on their expertise and lived experiences, we contributed to their voices being part of the Generation Equality process.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Child marriage was recognised as part of the priorities on the gender equality agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean, following advocacy by *Girls Not Brides* members and partners. The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat supported member organisations to

participate in the Regional Conference of Women 2020 and held collaborative side events with UN agencies and governments to drive interest in – and action on – the issue. Child marriage was acknowledged in commitments to advance gender equality in the region, and SDG 5.3 was formally included in the Gender Equality Observatory of the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Africa, *Girls Not Brides* worked with multiple partners and at regional forums to share learning and technical expertise with a number of high-level processes and initiatives. We highlighted the importance of comprehensive sexual education and sexual and reproductive health and rights services in West and Central Africa during discussions with the Economic Community of West African States Regional Child Protection Working Group, and engaged the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum in dialogue around the links between child marriage and education.

⁶ The Adolescent Girls Investment Plan brings together 11 partners to drive the political commitment and evidence-informed investments required to have impact, and to shift outcomes for adolescent girls on a global scale.

We engaged with the Forum for African Women Educationalists, Plan International and the Rozaria Memorial Trust as regional partners in Africa working on girls' education to influence regional bodies, including through an open letter to the African Union (AU), advocacy events and outreach. We also published a joint op-ed with the Global Partnership for Education on the links between child marriage, education and COVID-19. As a result, addressing child marriage was included in the AU's pandemic response. In addition, we strengthened our engagement with non-traditional regional partners – including the International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa – to ensure that a cross-sectoral approach to addressing child marriage was included on the regional agenda.

In the Middle East and North Africa, *Girls Not Brides* and regional partners contributed to the UN Regional Accountability Framework of Action on Ending Child Marriage. We contributed to the priorities outlined in the framework and sponsored a representative from Iraqi member the Khairat Al-Nahraeen Human Organization to participate and share their experiences and learning from programming in humanitarian contexts at the Regional Accountability Workshop in Amman, Jordan.

NATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Across the world, *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have advocated to national governments to implement existing commitments to end child marriage and to secure new ones. For example, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat worked with *Girls Not Brides Kenya* and Parliamentarians for

Global Action to advocate for the Kenyan government to develop a national plan of action to end child marriage and implement their commitments to the AU on ending child marriage. In total, 36 members of parliament and civil society and *Girls Not Brides* representatives were present at the virtual meeting, which also included contributions from Ugandan and Zimbabwean parliamentarians on developing national child marriage strategies. This meeting was a valuable opportunity to introduce the work of *Girls Not Brides Kenya* to national legislators and to present key asks, including increased budget allocations to end child marriage, strengthened child protection frameworks, and closer links between addressing child marriage and FGM/C. This is particularly important as we build our work to end child marriage in Kenya in 2021, where we will be working with a range of stakeholders at the national and subnational levels, including with government representatives, civil society organisations, young people and community-based organisations.

Girls Not Brides member organisations in a number of countries advocated to their governments to secure funding for national and subnational work to end child marriage. Following a successful workshop in 2019, the secretariat directly supported six member organisations from Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and Togo in their advocacy to secure budget lines related to preventing and responding to child marriage. In 2020, we provided follow-up funding for five of those organisations. As a result of the 2019 pilot in Nigeria, the Society for the Improvement of Rural People (SIRP) secured the equivalent of \$6.8 million in the Enugu State 2020 Budget for child and

social protection, primary and secondary schooling for girls, and the provision of sanitary products. In 2020, one of SIRP's key areas of focus was to track this budget to ensure the government delivered on their budgetary commitments in the context of COVID-19. For example, SIRP's budget monitoring ensured the renovation of classrooms in three schools, in line with original budget commitments. SIRP's achievements – and those of the other five member organisations – provide key learnings for how budget advocacy can increase investment by governments by ensuring that budget lines support girls and address child marriage.

“We shared stories and experiences of a number of girl school dropouts in the 17 local government councils of Enugu State [...] due to poverty, lack of access to school facilities, patriarchy and the consequent result of forced and early marriage for these young girls [...] We painted a scenario of the impact of the practices of child marriage on the girl, and in that way we were able to secure approval of State actors.”

Society for the Improvement of Rural People, Nigeria

STORY OF CHANGE: YOUNG PEOPLE AND CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILISE AROUND CHANGES TO THE LEGAL AGE OF MARRIAGE IN INDIA

Focusing only on laws and age risks criminalising boys and girls who are already married, and driving the practice underground. It also overlooks the social and economic changes needed to ensure girls and their families have alternatives to child marriage, and to challenge existing gender norms and promote gender equality.

In India – the country with the highest absolute number of child brides in the world – laws prohibiting child marriage have been in place since 1929, but the practice continues. In 2020, a government task force proposed increasing the minimum age of marriage for girls from 18 to 21 to delay when girls have their first child. In response, *Girls Not Brides* joined a group of 96 civil society and youth organisations in India to ensure the voices and needs of young people were heard by this task force.

With these organisations, we surveyed 2,500 young people on the potential impact of increasing the legal age of marriage. Young people were concerned that, if other aspects of their realities are not addressed, changing the law could lead to an increase in child marriage and greater gender bias. For example, if parents with limited means are expected to support their daughters for longer, they may marry them off in secret, or with forged documents.

The survey responses, formally recorded and published in the [Young Voices National Report](#), highlighted young people's nuanced understanding of the issue of marriage as an institution. A common thread emerged: young people lack choices and freedom to have aspirations and make decisions on the matters that impact their lives the most – marriage, relationships, education and career.

“Amending the law is not the same as changing our realities; realities are very different from one family to the other. All girls should have equal access to education, and this will ensure the reduction in child marriage. Girls do not have access to the opportunities that boys enjoy.”

Participant in the survey with and of young people in India

As a result of this process, four young women directly addressed the government task force and submitted a series of demands. These included the right to complete their education; employment opportunities that are safe and close to their homes; incentives that enable girls to realise their aspirations;

comprehensive sexuality education in schools and communities; and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Young people also shared their experiences in regional and national media, and through taking part in Facebook Live sessions which reached over 1,000 people. Find out more in our [blog](#) covering this process.

The Young Voices movement in India illustrates the importance of civil society-led advocacy in challenging governments to move away from protectionist policymaking – which threatens the autonomy and agency of adolescents and young people – towards decision-making that takes into account the experiences and needs of young people and addresses the systemic and complex causes of child marriage.

Laws and policies are only one part of ending child marriage – reaching this goal also means addressing community attitudes, social norms and service provision for girls.

OBJECTIVE 5: SECURING FUNDING FOR THE MOVEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the already limited resources available to the movement to end child marriage, and will continue to have an impact in 2021 and beyond. We are concerned about the impact of cuts to official development assistance and government and foundation funding, particularly on our smaller community-based and national member organisations. From available data, half of our member organisations have reported to us having annual budgets of under \$50,000. It is more important than ever that donors invest in and support civil society organisations, and that *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have the support they need to access these opportunities.

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat works closely with donors to share information and evidence and discuss funding flows. In partnership with Global Affairs Canada, we convened a meeting of 33 representatives from key donors to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on girls and the movement to end child marriage, and to share recommendations that emerged from conversations with *Girls Not Brides* member organisations. We also worked with the Ford Foundation to host a virtual event, which amplified the experiences of young women and girls working at the community level to end child marriage. Participants shared insights and recommendations on how donors can support girl-led, youth-led and community-based organisations working to end child marriage during the pandemic.

The event was attended by 133 participants including donors and civil society organisations.

In 2020, *Girls Not Brides* member organisations accessed funds from diverse sources, including grants and crowdfunding with the GlobalGiving, JustGiving and W4 platforms. Over the year, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat compiled and sent member organisations eight newsletters sharing relevant funding opportunities. We also organised a webinar and email outreach on digital fundraising with GlobalGiving, which is a popular method of fundraising for our community-based members. In total, 30 member organisations successfully joined the platform, and the projects that were featured on the [Girls Not Brides website](#) secured over \$25,000.

“Thank you for sharing this information with us to seek fundraising at this time of COVID-19, when we are facing enormous challenges.”

Association Solidarité et Actions pour le Développement Durable, Democratic Republic of the Congo

GIRLS FIRST FUND AND VOW TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

In 2018, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat helped to catalyse a new donor collaborative – the [Girls First Fund](#) – to increase funding and support for community-based organisations working to end child marriage. In 2020, we provided expertise as part of the Girls First Fund's Board Committee, and connected its work to the latest developments in the global movement to end child marriage. In its first granting year (2019-20), the Girls First Fund granted funds to 150 community-driven, girl-centred organisations across six countries. The secretariat also collaborated closely with [VOW to End Child Marriage](#), an innovative initiative to mobilise the wedding sector to raise money for the Girls First Fund.

OBJECTIVE 6: ENSURING THE SECRETARIAT CONTINUES TO BE EFFECTIVE

The collective work of *Girls Not Brides* and the movement to end child marriage is supported by a global secretariat with staff based across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. To best serve the needs of the movement, the secretariat made a number of changes in 2020, including strengthening our systems, structures and policies, and diversifying our governance.

GOVERNANCE

This year we expanded our Board of Trustees by hiring three new additional board members. These are [Emma Puig De La Bellacasa](#), [Rita Sarin](#) and [Zipporah Jean Alaroker](#), who bring a wealth of experience and expertise from their work in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

MEMBER VOICES

This year, the secretariat created a Member Advisory Committee, comprised of 12 individuals from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations across the globe, selected through an open application process. Playing an advisory role, the committee ensures another channel for the knowledge, perspectives and interests of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations

to inform relevant decisions and projects by the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat. This is particularly important to our global Partnership Strategy and Theory of Change refresh process, the results of which will be launched in 2021.

CHANGES AT THE SECRETARIAT

We established an internal diversity, inclusion, voices and equity (DIVES) taskforce to ensure that commitments in these areas are set and translated into action throughout our work. The DIVES taskforce has identified priority areas including human resources, policy and recruitment; organisational culture and ways of working; learning and reflection; governance and decision-making; and language and communication.

To ensure the secretariat can effectively support our growing global partnership, we restructured the now over 40-strong secretariat team into three directorates to streamline decision-making and improve cross-team communication.

We also updated and implemented a robust safeguarding framework focused on ensuring that all children, young people and adults at risk who come into contact with *Girls Not Brides* are safe from harm. The framework comprises a Staff Safeguarding Policy, a Code of Conduct for all secretariat staff and a Safeguarding Standards Policy for all *Girls Not Brides* member organisations.

REFLECTIONS AND LOOKING FORWARD

Four key members of the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat and Board of Trustees share their reflections on the global and regional status of the movement to end child marriage, and on what is to come.



EUGENIA LOPEZ URIBE, HEAD OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN ENGAGEMENT

For so long, child, early and forced marriage and unions have been a silent alarm in Latin America and the Caribbean, where there is little understanding of its prevalence and impact. We made progress in 2020, however, with the prioritisation of the issue by the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean. Through building collective action – especially with feminist and human rights movements – and amplifying the progress already made, *Girls Not Brides* has contributed to further change. We worked with our growing membership in the region as they adapted their interventions to support girls at the frontline of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and political unrest. We will continue to put gender transformation at the heart of the movement to end child, early and forced marriage and unions, and will engage in collective advocacy to ensure that girls and adolescents can access their rights, despite the challenges of the pandemic.



YVETTE KATHURIMA MUHIA, HEAD OF AFRICA ENGAGEMENT

In Africa, 2020 has seen greater recognition of the importance of education in preventing child marriage and a concerted effort to advocate for girls' retention in learning programmes. Member organisations have innovated – with the use of test papers and radio programmes – to ensure a lack of internet does not block girls' access to education. With schools now reopened in most African countries, it is critical that we work with young people – and especially young women and girls – to ensure they are enrolled in learning programmes that enhance their agency and amplify their voices and solutions to end child marriage in their communities. In 2021, we will also support *Girls Not Brides* member organisations to monitor commitments made by African governments to end child marriage and – with evidence on what works to end the practice – rally our governments to dedicate resources to these initiatives.



SHIPRA JHA, HEAD OF ASIA ENGAGEMENT

The movement to end child marriage is stronger than ever in the Asia region, with a clear mission to work for real change in girls' lives. We have identified strategies to ensure that choice and consent are front and centre of our work to end child marriage in South Asia, and that families, communities and governments support this approach. Child marriage is increasingly acknowledged as an issue that laws alone cannot address. Together with a stronger membership and growing networks in the region, *Girls Not Brides* is advocating with governments, persuading them to take positive actions. We will take this forward in the coming year, addressing the root causes of child marriage and highlighting alternatives so that young people are able to make informed choices.



MABEL VAN ORANJE, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As *Girls Not Brides* approaches its ten-year anniversary, I cannot help but reflect on the values that have shaped our work to end child marriage. While there have been great changes in the last decade, our ethos remains the same and will continue to guide us in our mission. We believe that:

- **There is power in partnership.** Everyone can make a difference, but we cannot create a critical mass for change unless we work together as a truly global partnership.

- **We are always learning.** We recognise the need to constantly learn from each other – about what works, and what does not – evaluate and improve our approaches.
- **Collaboration at all levels is key.** As civil society acting alone cannot end child marriage, we need to continue to mobilise and collaborate with all relevant actors – including the UN, governments, religious leaders and donors – and across related sectors.

- **Change happens on the ground.** The pandemic has made it crystal clear that working with girls, their families and their communities is central to progress. Their empowerment is the key to a world without child marriage.

The first decade of our work has shown that real change can happen. A world without child marriage is in sight. We now need to accelerate our efforts to make sure that all girls can reach their full potential.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

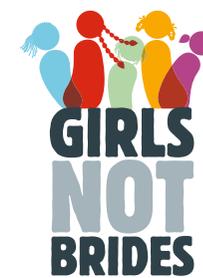
The work of *Girls Not Brides* would not be possible without the support of our donors. Their generosity drives our contribution to the global movement to end child marriage. They are:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- Nationale Postcode Loterij
- The Kendeda Fund
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Department for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Government of Canada
- Players of People's Postcode Lottery
- NoVo Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- Every Good Thing LLC
- The Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
- Private family foundation managed by Greenwood Place
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

- Skoll Foundation
- Education Out Loud (managed by Oxfam IBIS and financed by the Global Partnership for Education)
- Jeremy Collier Foundation
- Vintner's Daughter
- Ignite Philanthropy: Inspiring the End to Violence Against Girls and Boys – a project of the New Venture Fund

Friends and partners of *Girls Not Brides*, who, even under the most challenging circumstances, have continued to collaborate with us on our mission to end child marriage and champion our values across the globe.

The 1,527 *Girls Not Brides* member organisations working at the community, national, regional and global levels to bring child marriage to global attention, build an understanding of what it will take to end child marriage, and call for laws, policies and programmes that will make a difference to the lives of millions of girls



The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

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Girls Not Brides

Seventh Floor
65 Leadenhall Street
London
EC3A 2AD
United Kingdom

☎ 0203 725 5858

📞 0207 603 7811

🌐 www.GirlsNotBrides.org

✉ info@GirlsNotBrides.org

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

📘 www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides

***Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership of more than 1,500 civil society organisations from over 100 countries united by a commitment to work in partnership to end child marriage and enable girls to fulfil their potential.**

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