



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL COMMUNICATIONS AROUND CHILD MARRIAGE

Principles, best practice and tools

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Introduction

Guidelines for a movement

Communicating ethically centres on one key question – who has power? Every human interaction is affected by power dynamics. These dynamics depend on personal characteristics – like gender, race, ethnicity or age – and how they are valued in the interaction. How people feel in this dynamic depends on who they are interacting with, for what purpose, and how much agency – that is, opportunity to choose and act on those choices – they have.

A girl, adolescent or young woman sharing her story will always feel these power dynamics, as will the person she is sharing her story with. The storytelling process can lead to a girl feeling reduced or silenced, or – if the process responds to and mitigates unequal power dynamics – able to express her autonomy, voice and choice.

Communicators in the end child marriage movement are responsible for ensuring the storytelling process is a source of power for contributors,¹ and that contributors feel positive about the following portrayal. This means examining biases, story and image choices, and decision making to ensure they reflect contributors' wishes, as expressed by them. It also means constantly learning and improving approaches to ethical communications based on contributors' diverse experiences and feedback.

These guidelines outline ethical communications principles and good practices for the end child marriage movement, and include the practical considerations and tools needed to deliver on them. They are designed to support those communicating around the issue of child marriage to consider:

1. If their communications materials reflect the wishes and expectations of the girls, adolescents and young women who share their stories.
2. How communications materials are received by external audiences.

These guidelines were produced by *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*, building on the ethical communications work of other civil society organisations,² and shaped by the *Girls Not Brides* member organisations and contributors who kindly shared their ideas, experiences and passion for girls' and women's rights and agency.

This is a “living” document, which will be reviewed and amended as the movement to end child marriage learns and evolves together.

“A set of ethical communications guidelines would help to create clarity on the best practices that all member organisations should adhere to and would help to uncover some of the blind spots and omissions that [we] could otherwise be oblivious to during story gathering and communication.”

Girls Not Brides member organisation
in Uganda

¹ See the full definition of “contributor” on p. 6.

² Guidelines that have informed this work include Bond's [Putting the people in the pictures first](#), Oxfam's [Ethical content guidelines](#), and WaterAid's [Ethical image policy](#).

Understanding the context into which we tell our stories

These guidelines were written during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the significant increase in anti-racist awareness and activity around the world. Both these global events contributed to increased scrutiny of international development and humanitarian sector communications, particularly with regards ongoing inequality.

Stories about child marriage are not told in a vacuum, they are added to the wider communications and media environment, and to local, regional and global political contexts. These stories inform audiences about places and situations, as well as delivering the intended messages of organisations in the end child marriage movement, and the girls, adolescents and young women they work with.

These stories – images and words – have power to create both short- and long-term opinions about people and locations. Ethical communications create connections between those who have experienced or are working to end child marriage and the people who view their stories. They challenge stereotypes about girls, adolescents and young women – particularly those that have experienced or are at risk of child marriage – so they are seen as full, complex human beings, rather than defined by one experience or period of their lives.

Figure 1: What is ethical communications? Ideas from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations and staff



Language and terms

Why language is important to ethical communications

Every sector operates within a “universe of discourse.” This universe of discourse it is made up of a common set of facts, relations and ideas that guide behaviour and define how members of the sector share experiences, collaborate and imagine new worlds. It is expressed through shared jargon, codewords, terms and symbols.³

The international development and humanitarian sectors use and operate in a universe of discourse which contains elements of colonialism, militarism and capitalism. Unchecked, these elements perpetuate unequal relationships of power, negative stereotypes and associated worldviews – going against the principles of ethical communications, as set out on p. 8.

Because language and ideas are constantly evolving, they need to be continuously examined to ensure they capture the essence of the work, values and relationships involved in ending child marriage. Some guiding principles include:

- Not using language that is influenced by or validates existing unequal relationships of power, negative stereotypes – particularly around gender – and associated worldviews.
- Using inclusive language that speaks about the work and relationships involved in ending child marriage in a way that affirms girls’, adolescents’ and young women’s agency and capabilities.
- Using language that accounts for intersectionality in the lived experiences of girls, adolescents and young women, in all their diversity. This means understanding the multiple forms of oppression and discrimination that affect them, including gender, race, ethnicity, caste, disability, age, sexuality and class.
- Continuously reviewing and challenging problematic language, thinking about how it is used in practise, and if this aligns with the principles of ethical communications.

Terms used in this document

Child marriage. In these guidelines, we use the term “child marriage” to refer to all forms of child, early, and forced marriage and unions where at least one party is under the age of 18. These guidelines focus on child marriage among girls and adolescents, whilst acknowledging that boys are also affected by the practice, but to a much lesser degree.

Girls, adolescents and young women. The [United Nations](#) defines a child as someone under the age of 18. In these guidelines, we refer to “girls, adolescents and young women” to recognise their evolving capacities up to and beyond the age of 18. This complements a rights-based approach that also considers those who are or have been married or in a union.

Contributor. A contributor is someone who is prepared to share their story and who has been involved with – or impacted by – the end child marriage movement. This could be a

³ Hendrix-Jenkins, A., [“It’s time to put an end to supremacy language in international development,” Open Democracy, 2020.](#)

wide range of people including girls, adolescents, young women, boys, men, parents, whole families, civil society organisation staff, supporters and donors.

Stories. Stories highlight the important issues and situations around child marriage, showing the people involved and impacted, and hearing their voices. Stories bring the work of the end child marriage movement to life, showing why an intervention was made, what impact it had and what happened afterwards. Stories can be made up of a combination of media – including photographs, videos, illustrations, written materials and audio recordings – and may be gathered in their entirety in a day or built up over several years.

Authenticity. Authentic stories are ones that are told in a contributor's own words; unfiltered, honest, real stories from real people. They do not exaggerate or minimise someone's experience – even if that experience is difficult to hear or see – and they are gathered in a way that facilitates a contributor to share their story in the way they prefer.

Terms not used in this document

Dignity. Dignity in this context is usually understood in terms of how people are represented in finished stories. It should be considered when choosing stories, and is an objective of ethical communications, but it is not used in these guidelines because it is too open to interpretation. The concept is subjective, and what one person sees as dignified may not be the same as another person. Personal perceptions of dignity also change over time, depending on a person's circumstances. These guidelines do not mention wanting to "show someone in a dignified way", or "giving dignity". Instead, they aim not to stereotype or "other" individuals, as the best way to mitigate concerns over story choices that may seem to remove dignity.

Truth. Identifying a story as "The Truth" is sometimes used to justify the use of certain words or imagery. Images which are not fake and which are accompanied by factual information are A Truth, they are not The Truth. *When* images are made or content is gathered, *who* gets to speak, *where* the camera is focused, *what* is included or left out and *how* or where the story is presented affect the way audiences view and understand it. Communicating ethically means being mindful of this, not claiming to show The Truth and creating and selecting stories that show as much context as possible.

Beneficiary. This term – while still used broadly to describe those who receive support from charitable organisations – indicates passivity and reinforces stereotypes about girls, adolescents and young women waiting to be rescued, without agency or ability. This does not reflect proactive and active steps that girls, adolescents and young women take to help themselves and others in their lives.

Section 1: Principles of ethical communications

Below are the four core principles of ethical communications that have guided the practical steps and tools outlined throughout this document.

Adoption and implementation of these principles will be different depending on the objectives and resources of different individuals and organisations. Overall, these guidelines can be used in the day-to-day work of anyone who creates communications materials with a purpose of ending child marriage and advancing girls' rights and agency.

In ethical communications:

1. The rights, safety, autonomy and agency of the girls, adolescents and young women with whom we work – directly and indirectly – are our first concern, prioritised above any need to tell a story.
2. The girls, adolescents and young women with whom we interact in our communications work are our partners. Their knowledge and expertise in their own experience is recognised, and editorial decision-making is shared throughout the process and final portrayals.
3. The communications process prioritises informed consent, and facilitates it as a multi-staged and ongoing dialogue.
4. Stories – in whatever format – challenge stereotypes and do not contain oversimplified narratives that can dehumanise individuals or groups of people.

Section 2: Editorial decision-making

Explainer

The power of storytelling is more compelling than any statistic. But creating a story or communications material means making a series of editorial decisions that impact on what story is told, how it is told, what messages the audience will receive and what long-term perceptions will remain about the people in the stories.

Communicating ethically means considering who makes the decisions, how they can be made responsibly and in an informed way, and how to ensure girls', adolescents' and young women's voice and choice are included.

It is not always possible to organise a fully contributor-led programme for gathering or using communications materials, but participation can always be facilitated. Roger Hart's "Ladder of participation" for children and young people⁴ is a useful model for considering how to include people in editorial decision-making.

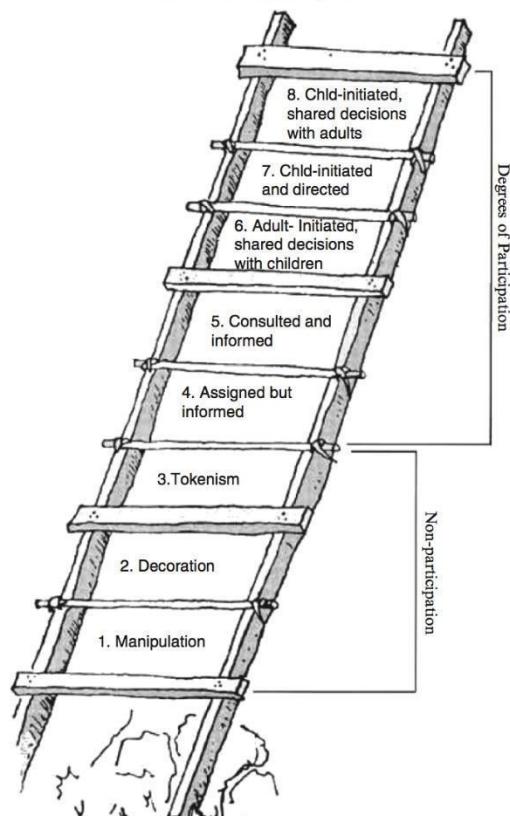
Communicating ethically around child marriage means consistently operating between rungs five to eight where – as a minimum – girls, adolescents and young women are informed and actively consulted as part of the consent process.

The aim is for more and varied communications which are proposed and led by girls, with full and appropriate support. The practicalities below are designed to facilitate this way of working.

"These images can show the self-reliant person. That is our ultimate goal – an empowered and self-reliant girl, who can be the AGENT of change for herself and others."

Girls Not Brides member organisation in India

Figure 2: The ladder of participation



Source: Roger Hart/UNICEF

⁴ This ladder was created with UNICEF in 1992, but adapted from an earlier "ladder of citizen participation" created by Sherry Arnstein. Please find the full report here: https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf

Practicalities

- 2.1 Editorial decision-making matrix
- 2.2 Examples of stories and images to use/avoid
- 2.3 The triangle of risk
- 2.4 Planning for diversity in storytelling
- 2.5 Test and learn in communication approaches
- 2.6 Ethics v engagement?
- 2.7 Create a “Girls and Young Women Communications Advisory Group”

2.1 Editorial decision-making matrix

This tool is a set of questions designed to help investigate the choices – conscious and unconscious – made before, during and after a story is gathered.

It supports due consideration of the balance between sharing someone’s story respectfully and in a way that does not endanger a girl, adolescent or young woman’s rights, remove her agency or promote harmful narratives and/or stereotypes.

The matrix is divided into four areas:

1. Promoting autonomy and agency
2. Challenging stereotypes
3. Risk mitigation
4. Authentic storytelling

To use the matrix correctly, review all four sections at the start of any storytelling editorial process, and/or when choosing which stories to share. This includes images and stories produced in-house, and those that are sourced from third-parties.

If the answer is not “yes” to *all* the questions in all four sections below, then the story probably needs to be a) reworked or b) avoided. Consult a line manager and/or relevant team member(s) to support in making a decision.

“Girls already go through so much and don’t need to be portrayed in an even more pitiable state to pass the message across. [Photos of suffering] come across as strengthening already upsetting stereotypes that we should be changing. We can do more to depict girls in a positive state and communicate our advocacy in a way that truly empowers girls and mobilises communities to do the same for girls.”

Girls Not Brides member organisation in Nigeria

Area 1: Promoting autonomy and agency

Considering and including the wishes of contributors – girls, adolescents, young women and others who share their stories – is the most critical ingredient in ethical communications. It requires time and flexibility to ensure shared decision-making and power in the story gathering and telling process.

The answer to all the following questions should be “yes”.

Making editorial decisions before a story is gathered:

- Are we preparing a process that actively facilitates story ideas and development from the people and communities we work with?
- Have we considered the motivations of each team member, and created a working environment in which the agency and autonomy of girls and young women is prioritised?
- Am I/are we the best person/people to be gathering this story and is there nobody else who may be better placed to do this based on the intersection of who they are and who they work with?
- When we want to talk about a specific issue, have we asked our Girls and Young Women Communications Advisory Group, personnel based in that context or equivalent what is important to understand about this situation from their point of view?
- Have we researched the relevant regional information needed to run a content gathering process that considers cultural sensitivities and is in line with the guidance on the production of communications materials on p. 40.
- Have we researched the potential risk involved in creating a story about this issue for the people involved, and planned how to protect them (for example hiding identities)?
- Have we left sufficient flexibility and time to ask our contributor(s) what story they wish to share, and – if they wish to tell a different story, and we agree it is appropriate for our purposes – change our plans?
- Where possible, have questions been shared in advance for contributors to review?
- When sourcing stories, have we asked for volunteers rather than selecting contributors ourselves?
- When sourcing stories, have we asked contributors if they would rather share their stories as a group or individually?

Selecting or creating content after collection:

- Have the contributor’s wishes about what or how a story is portrayed – as communicated during content collection – been considered in the creation of content?
- Has the contributor been shown the content and consulted for sign-off on the content created, and have amends been made based on their input?

Area 2: Challenging stereotypes

This section is designed to ensure editorial decisions do not validate or perpetuate unequal relationships of power, stereotypes and associated worldviews. It also helps avoid the misrepresentation of certain groups, people or situations.

See the examples of stories to avoid/use on p.16 for examples of stereotypes around gender and child marriage, and how to choose imagery that does not perpetuate these.

The answer to all the following questions should be “yes”.

Making editorial decisions before a story is gathered:

- Are we aware of the ways that this specific group of people have been stereotyped and have we considered how to depict them in a way that challenges or does not perpetuate these stereotypes (see example of stories to use/avoid on p. 16)?
- Have we considered how to share this story in a way that shows diversity of experience, as opposed to sharing stories that are already well known?
- Is the process we are planning one that follows the actions outlined in the guidance on production of communications materials on p. 40?
- Have we communicated with anyone external that will be supporting our content gathering – for example media partners or freelance photographers – our commitment to challenging stereotypes and creating an enriching process, and have we shared these guidelines with them?
- Have we considered the practicalities and logistics to support ethical storytelling – is everyone briefed, have they been trained on our consent process and principles of ethical communication, and had the opportunity to ask for any points of clarification?

Selecting or creating content after collection:

- Is the person in this story an example of many similar people in these circumstances in this location (as opposed to being an exception that may create a stereotype)?
- Have we made sure that the girl, adolescent or young woman in the story or image is not shown in a way that could reinforce stereotypes of those who have experienced child marriage? (See example of stories to use/avoid on p. 16).
- Have we told the contributor’s story in a way that shows them as someone not entirely defined by their experience of child marriage? For example, including their preferences, interests, likes and dislikes.
- If working with images and the person in the image is suffering or upset, is it necessary to share this image and have we looked for an alternative? If you feel it is necessary and has been agreed as part of this process with the contributor, are they shown with support or in the context of care, for example with a family member, community supporter or friend who is from the country or region depicted?

- When working with imagery, have we made sure not to include an image that may reinforce the idea and/or practice of “White⁵ saviourism”?⁶
- Are we ensuring that we do not include in the story the idea that staff from overseas will somehow contribute more, or are in a position of greater authority than staff from the country in which we are working?
- Is this person clothed, not in state of undress and with no genitals or breasts exposed? The exception would be a breastfeeding mother who wishes to discuss the right to breastfeed.
- If using stories featuring personnel from our organisation, are we prioritising stories with people from the country being discussed as examples of those who work with communities and individuals – as opposed to White staff from overseas – to counter representation that may be viewed as White saviourism?
- If using stories featuring personnel from our organisation, are we prioritising stories with differently abled people as examples of those who provide support to counter representation that may be viewed as ableist?
- If using stories featuring personnel from our organisation, are we ensuring a mix of gender in our communications where possible?
- If using images featuring personnel from our organisation, are the people we work with being shown in an active role in the image, engaging with the scenario being depicted?
- When using stories showing personnel from my organisation, are we being careful to share stories that depict a range of staff hierarchies rather than only sharing stories about senior management?

Area 3: Risk mitigation

This section is designed to protect contributors by considering the risk to them in sharing their stories, and properly considering and mitigating this.

The answer to all the following questions should be “yes”.

Making editorial decisions before a story is gathered:

- Has our organisation written and implemented a Safeguarding Policy, and has everyone involved in this communications exercise read it and taken any necessary actions? If not, the *Girls Not Brides* [safeguarding standards for members](#) is a useful model.
- Have we mapped the services available that the contributor may need to access?⁷

⁵ The capitalisation of White as a descriptor of a group of people has been subject to much debate recently, but we subscribe to the definition as explained by scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah who argues that "not capitalizing “white” is an anti-Black act which frames Whiteness as both neutral and the standard." Please see <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/glossary/white-white/> for further explanation.

⁶ “White saviourism” refers to a White person helping people of colour in a way that perpetuates stereotypes about people of colour and their reliance on Western White people for help.

⁷ It can be quicker and easier to make safeguarding referrals if a list of the services (with contact details) – like child protection or gender-based violence prevention services – that are available and accessible (and to whom) is prepared before the project starts.

- Has the GPS tracking information on our phone(s) or camera(s) been turned off so that the metadata of any image does not contain this information?
- Have we considered the potential risks – including those related to safeguarding – of gathering and sharing this story by researching and contacting in-country/in-community teams to help inform our decision-making? If so, have we considered not taking these actions, including not gathering the story?
- Have we carried out the pre-consent risk assessment (see p. 27) so that contributors are involved in risk conversations, aware of protection concerns and have their choices included in final decisions?
- Have we considered any culturally unacceptable activities that may harm the contributor if they are shown undertaking them, and removed them from the content plan?
- Have we left sufficient time in the planning for a properly informed consent process?
- Do we have all the consent tools needed to support the process?
- Is the person gathering consent trained in how to do this?
- Have we generated creative solutions to be able to tell a story powerfully even if we cannot show contributor identities?
- Has a police check or equivalent been carried out on any freelance or external people taking part in a content gathering exercise to ensure they do not have a criminal record and are not a risk to contributors?⁸
- If a safeguarding risk occurs, or a contributor highlights a risk, do we know who to refer this to for further action? Please be aware that this must be a specialist organisation, not the contributor's family or husband/partner, as this may incur additional risk.

Selecting or creating content after collection:

- Has consent been collected for this story? Please see the section on consent on p. 24.
- Have we considered any risk mitigations outlined in the consent process and on the form (for example, hiding identity)?
- If the story does not have consent attached, have we (or whoever shared the story with us) completed the “No consent risk assessment” in [Appendix 1](#) for that story?
- Are we protecting people by making sure that we are **not** sharing more than **one** of these three pieces of sensitive information: 1. their family name, 2. specific location or location of origin and 3. identifiable image?
- If the primary subject of an image is a child or adolescent at school, is their identity protected by **not** showing their full name or location, the name of the school, or any other details that could help someone locate the child or adolescent?
- If the primary subject of an image is shown in front of a well-known or easily identifiable landmark, has this been cropped out, or have we looked for an alternative image without that identifying feature?

⁸ If police checks are not possible, seeking three references from other rights-based organisations is an alternative.

- In an image, is any visible personal data about this person – for example an identity card – hidden and unreadable?
- Has the sign-off process included people from the country in which the contributor is currently living assessing the story from a protection perspective?
- Has the contributor been able to review, assess and sign off the story and story use themselves? See the section on sign off on p. 51.

Area 4: Authentic storytelling

Having integrity in storytelling means telling authentic stories. These may not always be positive or hopeful, but with context and a full narrative they can demonstrate the person's agency and active role in helping themselves and others, and in living a full life.

While it is not always easy to include a whole story in a short video clip or one image, the information provided should be as full as possible. The stories selected should contain context and the wider story – with more details – should be shared across several different products and/or channels.

The answer to all the following questions should be “yes”.

Making editorial decisions before a story is gathered:

- Have the people at the centre of the stories, the Girls and Young Women Advisory Group, or personnel working in the location where the stories are from been consulted on the issues facing them and their communities, and their own ideas and solutions? Does their input represent the common experience among this community?
- If so, does the story gathering process consider how to present the proposed contributor-led solutions?
- Have we considered the risks to the person in the solutions they propose and, if so, how are we working with them to mitigate these? For example, are they discussing doing something that is criminalised in their country (eg, underage sexual activity), or telling a story of oppression while in a location where the oppressor is still in a position of power (eg, a married young woman stating “I am not safe living with my husband”).
- Have we considered the risk to us or our organisation by not reporting any illegal activity that is disclosed in the story, and how to mitigate this? For example, not reporting a crime to the police because reporting it could result in the criminalisation of a girl or young woman. See the section on discovering illegal activity on p. 49.
- Have we considered how to share the original words or images shared/produced by the contributor without editing in a way that could alter their original meaning?

Selecting or creating content after collection:

- Does this story share context from the situation in which it was told?
- If they are available, are the person's words accompanying their images?
- If working with images, is the primary person in the image shown with their own story (rather than with a story of a different person, or a “composite” story made up of different

people's experiences presented as if it was one story)? See the section on composite stories on p. 51.

- If an image is shared, is it accompanied by a caption providing context?
- If appropriate and safe, is this person or group of people named and do we tell their story in these communications (even if indirectly, for example in the click-through materials) to help show them as a named human rather than as a prop to an issue?
- Is the person in the story affected by the situation to which these communications refer?
- Is the person in this story working/participating with the organisation sharing the story?
- If working with images, are they being used without being manipulated in a way that changes their narrative? If you are unsure, see the section on manipulating images on p. 56.
- Can we explain why the person in the story was working with our organisation or partner?

2.2 Examples of images and stories to use/avoid

Images to avoid include those showing the following scenarios:

- A girl or adolescent in a high-risk situation.
- In a state of undress.
- In distress, alone.
- Extremely malnourished, alone.
- Pregnant adolescent girls depicted as hopeless, alone or reduced to that one experience.
- Children and adolescents shown in a sexualised or provocative way.
- A child or adolescent bride wearing a wedding dress, unless the wearing of the dress is a campaigning act agreed with the contributor.
- Young girls with older men in a wedding setting.
- Girls or adolescents in distress in a wedding setting.
- Children, adolescents or women in a violent/conflict setting.
- Girls and adolescents – and their families or communities – as passive recipients of outside help needing to be “saved” by others (an example of this can be “White saviourism”).

Images to use would include those showing people in the following scenarios:

- Girls, adolescents and young women going about their daily lives, engaging in an activity or hobby that may challenge stereotypes, such as playing soccer, skating, rapping or boxing.
- With family, friends, members of their community – a support network.
- Where they are in control or engaging with their surroundings.
- Going to school.

- Showing their activism (where it is safe to do so) – joining a march, speaking to other girls or young women about child marriage.
- A pregnant adolescent or young woman showing how capable she is, or at a happy time with her friends, family or community.
- A girl, adolescent or young women who is upset but being supported by family, friends or members of her community, and with contextual information or accompanying images that mean she is not *only* shown as being upset.
- In a loving relationship with a husband or partner who also supports the aim to end child marriage.



PICTURED: Ghazal, a Syrian living in Lebanon, with her husband and two children. Ghazal was married at 13 and is carving a different path for her younger sister and daughter. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Thom Pierce

2.3 The triangle of risk

To protect contributors, in finished content do not reveal more than **one** of these pieces of information that make up the “triangle of risk”:

1. their family name
2. specific location or location of origin
3. identifiable image

The exception to this is when people explicitly wish to share all these details, for example because they are campaigning on an issue they have experienced. This decision should be supported by the team working with them in their location, and risks must be shared explicitly with them at the consent gathering stage. See the section on consent on p 24 to review these considerations in full.

2.4 Planning for diversity in storytelling

Communicating the diverse experience of child marriage means being deliberate in planning for stories that cover a range of experiences. This table offers suggestions for what kinds of targets to include in communications around child marriage across a year, to meet ethical communications good practice. It can be adapted depending on the objectives, reach and resources of any organisation or individual.

	International	National
Locations where stories are gathered	Stories from a minimum of 3 x continents.	Stories from a minimum of 3 x areas of your country.
Racial diversity	Stories showing a diverse range of girls, adolescents and young women, (including White girls and young women) so that we demonstrate that child marriage is an issue that affects people from multiple racial backgrounds, and do not perpetuate stereotypes that these practises happen only to People of Colour.	Include if you are working in a racially diverse environment.
Religious diversity	Stories communicating a diverse range of religious beliefs to demonstrate that child marriage can happen within multiple faith backgrounds.	Include if you are working in an environment with multiple faiths.
Ethnic diversity	Stories showing that child marriage affects girls across multiple ethnicities.	Stories showing that child marriage affects girls across multiple ethnicities.
Socio-economic status	Stories showing child marriage across high-income and lower-income countries across the world. Stories that show that child marriage affects girls and young women from both richer and poorer backgrounds.	Stories that show that child marriage affects girls and young women from both richer and poorer backgrounds.
Age	Include a range of stories of girls, adolescents and young women	Include a range of stories of girls, adolescents and young women
Experience of child marriage	Include stories that have positive and/or negative elements, as well as those which may be more complex and need more time to explain. Include stories from different contexts, including rural and urban settings, humanitarian settings, situations where girls, adolescents or young women may be displaced or obliged to migrate, or where they remain in or close to their family and community.	Include stories with positive and/or negative elements, as well as those which may be more complex and need more time to explain. Where possible and appropriate, include stories from different contexts, including rural and urban settings, humanitarian settings, or situations where girls, adolescents or young women may be displaced

		or obliged to migrate, or where they remain in or close to their family and community.
Disability and child marriage	2 x stories about girls and young women who have disabilities	2 x stories about girls and young women who have disabilities

2.5 Test and learn in storytelling

Communications materials are often made based on what has gone before, as that is where there is data to guide the approach, especially when it comes to raising money.

Being more ethically focused, may mean trying out new communications approaches and creative materials. Creativity can be as broad as the ideas generated or sought, but some suggestions include:

- Participatory projects with a process designed to hand over all editorial decision-making power to the girls, adolescents and young women involved.



PICTURED: Salah from South Sudan poses with his barber tools. He has set up his own hair cutting business after participating in a programme designed to support post-conflict livelihood provision.
Photo: Save the Children/Hanna Adcock.

- Images that protect identity but still create visual excitement.

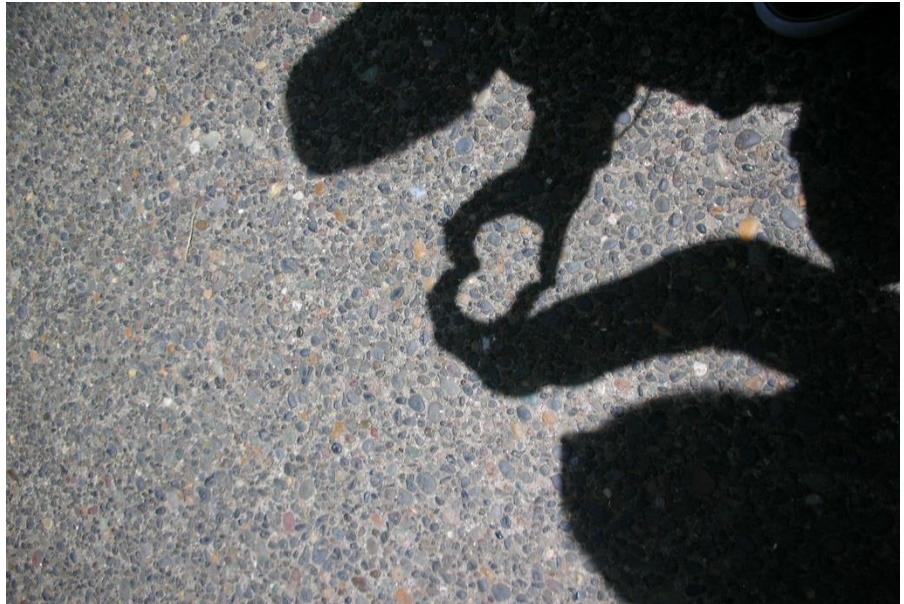


PICTURED: A child standing before a sunset Photo: Gungun Photographers/Shutterstock.

- Images where someone's identity is entirely hidden, but that still can show their personality.



PICTURED (left): Young women at home in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 2009. The photographer described how “one night I stayed in a women’s hostel and I was talking with the girls about my work. They were really interested and I showed them my website. ‘We wish we could help you,’ they told me, ‘but you couldn’t take any pictures of us unless we’re wearing our abayas...’ It was late, about one in the morning, but they laughed and decided to put on all their outside clothes and pose. It was a fun atmosphere, they joked around a lot and I really wanted to try and capture that feeling, because it’s not what people expect.” Photo: Olivia Arthur/Magnum Photos)

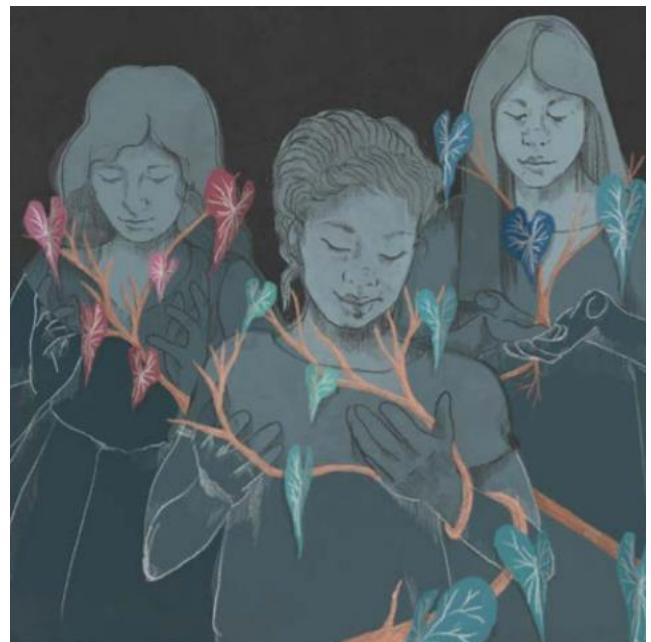


PICTURED (right): Heart Hands. Photo: Nicanicasather (licensed by creative commons)

- Illustration.

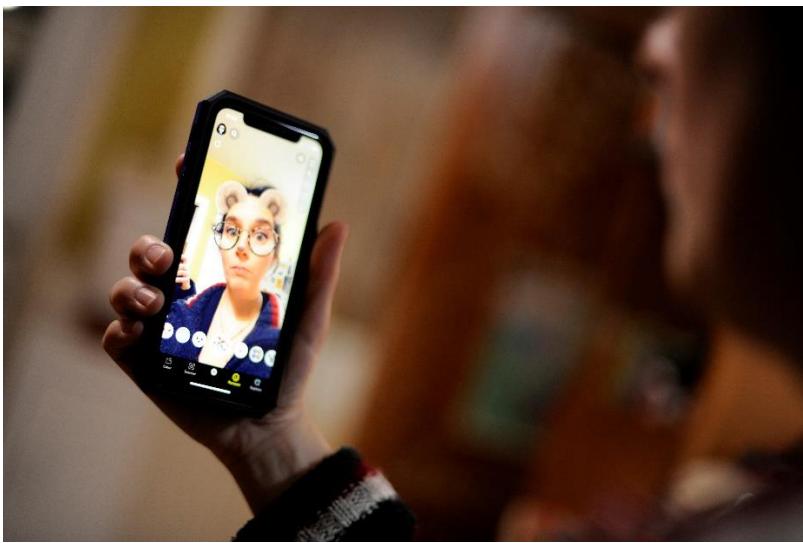


PICTURED: A still from the illustrated story "[The respect I deserve](#)". Image: *Girls Not Brides*



PICTURED: A still from the illustrated story "[I am a person](#)". Image: *Girls Not Brides*

- Using filters when taking images on a phone (the contributor could choose their preferred filter, again giving an opportunity to show their personality):



PICTURED: A woman in Quebec playing with a mouse face app on Snapchat. Photo: Pascal Huot/Shutterstock.

- Audio stories for use in podcasts, or to send with an email for audiences to listen to the testimony of a contributor sharing their journey, or group of contributors discussing their collective experience or actions taken to address child marriage.
- Using your supporter's mobile/cell phone numbers to tell a written story over WhatsApp, releasing a new chapter every few days to keep audiences engaged.

There are a lot of ways to be creative in telling stories, so time should be spent thinking about how best to tell a story creatively and talking to contributors about their preferences and creative ideas before gathering it.

It is good practice to test and learn with a minimum of 10% of communications materials, being creative and leaving time and investment to try new methods, channels and solutions. This creates space to gather new data about how audiences respond and how to tell stories that are both ethical and engaging.

The data gathered will depend on the project objective, contributors and audiences, but could include quantitative (eg, money raised or actions taken) and qualitative (eg, types of responses/comments received) evidence.

2.6 Ethics v engagement: Mitigating donor concerns

Organisations and their donors may be concerned about ethical guidelines limiting their ability to raise money or engage audiences. Five recommendations for mitigating donor – or even colleagues’ – fears are:

1. Speak to the donor – or colleague – about the importance of ethical communications practises at the start of the project, encourage them to read this document and find out more.
2. Share examples of ethical projects that have also been successful in terms of engagement and explain how they were created, and what the success looked like.

For example: [Longform](#) and [illustrated](#) stories by *Girls Not Brides*.

3. Explain the risks associated with not working ethically around a) the risk to the contributor, and b) the reputational and perception risk to the organisation and donor if they are seen to be working in a way that is not ethical.
4. Inform them that as part of the consent process, if a contributor withdraws consent to use a story, all materials containing that story must be withdrawn, and that they will be informed and have a maximum of seven days for any content sharing that person’s story to be withdrawn.
5. Share this statement with donors:

The safety, well-being, agency and autonomy of the girls, adolescents and young women with whom we work is our top priority, above all other considerations. During our partnership, we will work closely so that together we can shape activities and communications that strengthen our partnerships with girls and young women, and showcase how powerful and effective ethical communications practices and storytelling can be in creating change.

2.7 Create a “Girls and Young Women Communications Advisory Group”

For organisations and individuals that have the resources – funds and staff capacity – to do so, creating an Advisory Group will help to involve girls, adolescents and young women in communications at a more strategic level.

This Advisory Group can be a small group of girls, adolescents and young women with relevant lived experience – including of child marriage – who work with an organisation to periodically review and guide their communications practises and output.

Suggested terms of engagement – which can be adapted depending on an organisation’s resources and capacity – for this Advisory Group include:

- Review ethical communications and storytelling approaches and practice – ideally based on these guidelines – once a year.
- Input ideas for changes to these approaches.
- Attend a bi-yearly meeting to view, review and feed back on a selection of communications materials against the principles laid out in these guidelines – or similar – inputting ideas for future storytelling.

Ideally, this role would be voluntary and last for a set period (suggest two years) with paid expenses. It would be open to applications, with a recruitment process appropriate to the ages and life circumstances of potential Advisory Group members.

Smaller organisations with fewer resources or limited capacity to create an Advisory Group could take these actions instead, or as an initial step:

- Create an open forum for anyone to share ideas for stories and/or ethical communications and comment on the communications materials that they have seen produced about the child marriage.
- Carry out a periodic – ideally annual or bi-annual – meeting for staff, partners and contributors to share ideas for stories and/or ethical communications.
- Create a feedback survey – online, physical or verbally delivered – for contributors to share their experience of the communications process, and ideas for improving it.

Section 3: Consent

Explainer

Consent is part of the primary objective of ethical communications to facilitate agency and autonomy with the girls, adolescents and young women – and other individuals and groups – who are impacted by child marriage and the movement to end it.

The contributors who generously share their time, words and images have a right to know why these are being gathered and how they are likely to be used. All consent should be informed; **if it is not informed, it is not consent.**

Rather than simply ensuring a contributor fills in a form, informed consent is a multi-stage process. As well as being ethically the right thing to do, taking the time to ensure contributors understand and are comfortable with the story gathering and use, have had time to share their preferences and ideas, and understand that they can say no or withdraw their participation at any time will result in more powerful images and stories.

Practicalities

- 3.1 The importance of time
- 3.2 Consent and safeguarding
- 3.3 Consent with children and adolescents
- 3.4 Consent with children who do not have a legal parent/guardian or whose parent/guardian cannot be involved in the consent process
- 3.5 Consent with contributors who are or become upset
- 3.6 Consent when photographing or filming groups
- 3.7 Contributor pre-consent risk assessment questions
- 3.8 Verbal or written consent?
- 3.9 Consent with someone who is visually impaired or deaf
- 3.10 Gathering consent remotely using WhatsApp
- 3.11 Translating consent documents
- 3.12 Consent process: Suggested script
- 3.13 Supporting materials
- 3.14 Leave-behind card
- 3.15 Consent tables: When to gather consent and when not to gather consent

“Consent is a very important topic when we talk about gender challenges, which needs to be discussed in more detail. Storytelling is an effective way to communicate with our community, but there are many consequences of sharing a story and risks of stereotype which need to be clear for the storyteller while communicating.”

Girls Not Brides member organisation in India

- 3.16 When consent cannot be gathered
- 3.17 Guidance on anonymisation and name changing
- 3.18 Renewing consent
- 3.19 If a contributor withdraws consent
- 3.20 Consent process checklist

[Appendix 1: No consent risk assessment.](#)

3.1 The importance of time

The single most important ingredient in good consent is **time**. Leaving time for the contributor to consider the implications of sharing their story and what it means for them are the cornerstone of what it means to gather informed consent. Time is needed for the following:

- Before content gathering, time must be allocated to consent, ideally with a discussion about consent being carried out with the contributor a minimum of 24 hours before the content gathering takes place.
- During content gathering, a contributor must be given a significant amount of time to discuss consent and any concerns, including with family or friends.
- After content gathering, a contributor must be asked if they are still comfortable with their story being told. A reminder of what they have shared should be outlined, alongside an explanation that they may withdraw consent at any time, and details on how to do this.

3.2 Consent and safeguarding

Every organisation must have a safeguarding standards document in place before gathering any story from any girl, adolescent or young woman. This document will guide the safeguarding of any young person involved in the storytelling process, and also offer guidance on what to do if their safety, rights or agency has been compromised.

This safeguarding document should include:

- A clear definition of what constitutes a safeguarding risk and concern.
- Who is responsible for dealing with it and how they should do so.
- How contributors' safeguarding rights will be communicated to them.
- How they can make a complaint.
- Service mapping.
- Provision for a named Safeguarding Focal Point in communications activities.

If one is not already available, a safeguarding standards document should be compiled and implemented before any communications work commences. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations have committed to upholding these [Safeguarding standards](#), and the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat is available to support in its implementation.

3.3 Consent with children and adolescents

A child or adolescent is someone under the age of 18.

When working with a child, adolescent or young person who agrees to take part in communications work, all attempts must be made for them to fully understand and be informed within the consent process, including understanding that they can withdraw at any time, and how.

Children should sign their own forms/give verbal consent, in addition to the form/verbal consent being given by their parent or guardian (if they are present and it is appropriate for them to be involved in the consent process).

3.4 Consent with children who do not have a legal parent/guardian or whose parent/guardian cannot be involved in the consent process

The legal standard is that children's consent must be accompanied by the consent of a parent or guardian. However, if the child is speaking about a situation in which they have been harmed with the involvement of their parents, parental consent should **not** be sought, and the child's story must be gathered so that their identity is concealed. Understand that this will create legal risk for your organisation if the child claims consent shared under coercion.

In this situation, prepare a person who can support the child during the consent process who is not from the organisation gathering the story, but who has a professional background in supporting young people. This could be a social worker or child protection professional. This person should sign the form as a consent witness, indicating that they have witnessed the consent process.

See also the section on enabling contributor choices on p. 48.

3.5 Consent with contributors who are or become upset

If a contributor is too distressed to participate in an informed consent process, then it is not an appropriate moment to be filming, photographing or attempting to carry out an interview with them.

If a contributor has agreed to take part in a content gathering exercise, and then becomes upset, the person gathering the content should pause, check that the contributor is OK, and ask if they want to have a break – as in the guidance on interviewing thoughtfully on p. 48. They should ensure that consent to use the material is sought again at the end of the content gathering process. This is so that the contributor is aware that imagery or footage showing their distress has been gathered and may become public, to confirm that they are comfortable with that content being used and understand that they have the option to request it is not shared or even to withdraw consent entirely, with a clear process for communicating this change in consent.

3.6 Consent when photographing and filming groups

Non-organised settings

When capturing imagery of large groups of people – like when filming with a drone, or photographing in a street or a refugee camp – gathering consent from each person may be difficult or even impossible. However, showing someone's likeness may place them at risk, for

example if their location or actions are something they need to hide for their own safety. In these situations it is better not to show people's faces in close proximity.

If someone's face is captured in a way that makes them clearly recognisable, the image(s) should only be used if:

- The location is not currently involved in a conflict.
- The location is not a refugee camp.
- The people are not migrants currently on the move or awaiting repatriation.
- The people are not refugees awaiting asylum.
- The people are not stateless and in a country illegally.
- The people are not known to be subject to persecution based on where or who they are – including their sexual orientation (if this is disclosed to you), gender, religion and/or race.
- No one person is the clear focus of the image. If one person is the clear focus, consent should be sought from that person.
- The people are shown in a way that meets the standards outlined in the communications risk assessment in [Appendix 2](#).

Organised settings

When photographing or filming in an organised group scenario – like in an organised activity or event – everyone there should be informed verbally that images will be made, where these may be shown and for what purpose, and that if they would prefer not to be in those images, to indicate this publicly or privately to the person making the images.

One way of respecting these wishes is for the person making the images to bring a set of coloured bands and ask – with sensitivity and respect to any avoid shame or pressure – those who do not want to be in the images to wear them on their wrists. This will allow the person editing the images to de-select any images with those people in. Staff or individuals who know the context can advise on how best to do this.

3.7 Contributor pre-consent risk assessment questions

The consent process includes an explanation of the short- and long-term risks of participating to the contributor and their friends, family and/or wider community. This may mean that they decide not to share their story, as is their right.

Safe and meaningful participation in this context encompasses three fundamental elements:

1. Providing contributors with information on the procedure, options and outcomes. This should include information about how their views were considered and why they were or were not acted on.

"In Burkina Faso, the stigma quickly arrives and the gossip easily leads the girls to regret having shared their testimonies."

Girls Not Brides member organisation in Burkina Faso

"From our point of view, it would indeed be good to approach and educate people about the potential long-term consequences."

Girls Not Brides member organisation in Niger

2. Ensuring the contributors are supported to participate in an age-appropriate and culturally-sensitive way that promotes their resilience, in a format that is accessible to contributors with different abilities.
3. Ensuring contributors – particularly children, adolescents and young people – can share their views and have these views taken into consideration in accordance with their age, maturity and evolving capacities.

To facilitate this, the contributor can be asked the questions below before any consent process is carried out – so also in advance of content gathering – to assess their understanding of risk.

Do you understand that:

1. You can ask any questions or share any concerns with me about this process? Do you have anything you want to ask?
2. You may choose to share your story anywhere that you feel most comfortable, and that you can choose what you wear and how you are shown in the images/film footage?
3. The process of sharing your story may bring attention to you because you will be visited by people who will gather your story?
4. If there are people who may wish you harm, they may see this story and use it to find you?
5. If you have social media accounts or profiles and you share your real name, you may be contacted by people who have seen your story for both positive and negative reasons? See the section on contributor aftercare on p. 43.
6. If you share your story, we cannot guarantee that it will not end up online, and may therefore be available to view for many years into the future?
7. If you share your story, it may be viewed in any and every country, city and town, and by people you know, like family members, teachers and friends?
8. You can withdraw your consent to use your story at any time? Before, during or after this process. But also, that it may not be possible to recall materials once they have been published?
9. You can share your story with a different name, or in a way that hides your identity?
10. You can decide what parts of your story you tell us, what we share and how?
11. While we will provide some aftercare (see the section on contributor aftercare), it is important that after you share your story you have someone who can support you if you feel concerned or if you receive any negative interest? Do you have a person who can support you in this way?
12. You can share any concerns with me at any time and we will ensure you are supported after you share your story. If we can't support you, we will advise that we do not work with you to share your story. Do you have anything you want to ask now?

The contributor must feel comfortable with and understand all these scenarios before their story is gathered. If a contributor expresses concern or doubt, talk this through with them and then leave them to consider this, ideally for at least 24 hours.

See also the section on managing expectation on p. 46.

An assessment should also be carried out with the contributor to see if their identity should be hidden, visual media should be avoided or even if their story should not be told.

See the guidance on anonymisation and name changing on p. 36.

3.8 Verbal or written consent?

Consent can be gathered in these ways:

- Using a written form (preferred method)
- Verbally using film (preferred method)
- Verbally using audio (not preferred)
- Remotely using WhatsApp (not preferred)

A consent form is the best way to gather consent. This is because it is a more formal process and will help the contributor understand the seriousness of sharing their story. It is also a more easily checked and stored type of consent.

If consent is gathered verbally, the reading out of the consent statement **must** be recorded in the same piece of recording as the contributor giving consent, or the verbal evidence will not be valid.

The last two options are not preferred because they make it harder to prove that informed consent took place.

3.9 Consent with someone who is visually impaired or deaf

When working with someone who is visually impaired or deaf and has different communication needs, always ensure that there is someone who can communicate and translate, as you would do for different languages. This may mean a sign language translator, or someone who can give an audio description of what images or film footage looks like.

3.10 Gathering consent remotely using WhatsApp

Good practise is to gather consent at the same time as gathering the story, or before. This might not be possible if:

1. There is a good logistical reason consent cannot be gathered (not just because too little time has been allocated), for example a parent whom we wish to indicate consent is not present.
2. A girl, adolescent or young women creates her own materials without anyone there who can gather consent, and shares them with an organisation to use in their communications.

In these rare scenarios, the following is good practice:

- Have a phone call to go through the entire consent process with the contributor.
- Share the consent statement with them over WhatsApp (or other secure platform).
- Ask them to record a voice note where they read the consent statement, and then indicate that they give consent, in **one piece of recording**.
- If they are under 18, ask their parent/guardian to do the same.

- Store the consent recording safely as you would any consent form or film verbal recording.

3.11 Translating consent documents

Before gathering consent, all consent documents should be translated into the language most commonly spoken in the region where the story is being gathered. This may not be the same as the official language of the country.

If written translations are not possible, a verbal version should be recorded to play to contributors and for them to keep (it can be shared with them digitally using email or WhatsApp).

3.12 Consent process: suggested script

As part of consent gathering it is useful to have a script – that is, a set of points to communicate – that will help guide whoever is gathering consent. This also helps ensure the consent process is of equal quality whoever is gathering the consent.

Suggested explanation for contributor:

Introduction

- Hello and greeting. My name is X and I work for *[insert name of your organisation]* organisation. Thank you for talking to us today.
 - *[Insert explanation of your organisation's work and example activities].* Have you heard of us? Would you like to know more?
 - Before we work with you to tell your story and create any images, we would like to make sure that you understand what we might do with your story. This is what this conversation is about.
 - You may stop me at any time to ask questions or say that you do not understand, and if I/or the translator are speaking too fast please ask to slow down.
- ✓ Are you happy for us to continue?

Contributor pre-consent risk assessment

- We want to make sure that you understand any risks involved in sharing your story before we talk more about the story. I'm going to ask some questions about this – is that ok? *[Discuss questions outlined in the contributor pre-consent risk assessment on p. 27].*
- ✓ Would you like me to repeat any of this?

What we might do with your story

- ✓ We are interested in your story because we wish to work with you to *[insert reason you are gathering story here].*
- ✓ *[Bring out your examples of your organisation's work to help illustrate these points. These can be printed screen grabs, a film downloaded on to your phone, or physical examples, but visual examples of what you create are helpful.]*
- Over the next three years, your whole story might be shared on any of these places:
 - TV

- Online on websites, or on social media like Facebook or Twitter
- In printed materials like magazines or leaflets
- Any other ways that people see messages from civil society organisations
- We may share your story with trusted partners like other charities, or media organisations like *[please reference a local media channel]*, so that they can share your story too.
- However, only a section of your story might be used, or it might not be shared at all. This won't be because you have done something wrong.
- Once a story has been shared, it may be reshared by others in a way that we cannot control, so it is important that you understand that your story may still exist, and still be viewed and shared into the future, even after we have stopped using it. This may happen in any and every country.
- If you are concerned that sharing your story may endanger you in some way – however small – please let us know and we can either not share your story, or we can make sure that no one knows it is you.
- If you prefer, we can share your story in a way that your identity is hidden, or you can choose to change your name – and select your preferred new name – or both.
- We keep your personal information in a safe and private place, and if your identity needs to be protected, we will do everything we can to make sure that you remain anonymous.
- After three years, we will either stop sharing your story or ask you for your consent to continue sharing. We will keep your story in a protected place, and will only use it again if you have given us permission to do this.

- ✓ Do you understand that your story could be used anywhere at any time, or not at all, for the next three years?
- ✓ Do you have any questions or concerns?
- ✓ Would you like me to repeat any of this?

What this form is and how it will be used

- We will use the form to explain more details of how your story could be used.
- We can gather your consent by you signing this form/adding your mark, or if you do not feel able or comfortable to do that, we are happy to read out the details on the form, so you can then give verbal agreement that you understand and agree.
- It is important that you understand that if you do not feel happy working with us to tell your story, please let me know, we will not mind at all if you say no, and it will not stop us supporting you in the way that we have been, the most important thing is that you feel comfortable sharing your story.
- If you do decide to share your story, but afterwards wish that you had not, you may contact us and say you have changed your mind, and we will delete it from our archive, and if it has been used, do our best to recall any ways that it has already been shared.
- *[Give the contributor the form at this point for them to read OR ask if they wish it to be read to them.]*

- [Give the contributor the leave-behind card (see p. 32) and explain that they should keep this and contact the number at any time if they have questions or concerns.]
- ✓ We will leave now to give you some time to think about this, or to discuss it with a friend or family member. Remember there is no pressure to share your story, and whether you do or don't won't affect any interactions between you and XX organisation. I will return in XX hours/days and let's talk again then.
- ✓ Thank you!

3.13 Supporting materials

Informed consent is based on consent being brought to life for a contributor. The best way to do this is with supporting materials. This can be done in several ways, including:

1. Gathering a set of examples of the types of communications that could be produced. For example, a leaflet, a Facebook post, an Instagram post, a web page and a short film. These can be printed using a standard colour printer, or if digital they can be downloaded to a phone to show later, even when there is no Wi-Fi connection. This approach is cost-effective and can be tailored to the contributor.
2. Producing an official leaflet with examples and explaining how content can be used. This approach is more costly but may ensure higher quality of explanation.
3. Producing a simple template into which anyone can add an image/text explaining how content can be used. This approach is less costly. This could include four sections on one sheet of A4 paper which can be folded to create a “card”.

3.14 Leave-behind cards

As part of the supporting materials, the contributor needs to have the phone number and email address of someone they can contact if they have questions or wish to change or withdraw consent.

This can be done in several ways, including:

1. Adding this section to the supporting materials (if following routes 2 or 3 in the supporting materials section above).
2. Leave a business card.
3. Share your phone number via a pre-prepared digital image containing your details to an encrypted system like WhatsApp. Please be aware that you must not be in a WhatsApp group alone with a child, adolescent or young person. Instead create a group of three, send the card, and then leave the group.

3.15 Consent tables: When to gather consent and when not to gather consent

When to gather consent	How to gather consent
Anyone whose story is being gathered (imagery alongside audio or a written case study).	Standard consent form signed by individual or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details.
Anyone who is clearly identifiable in a non-public setting – like a clinic, school or home – even if they are not the focus of a story.	Standard consent form signed by individual or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details. Announce clearly – and respectfully – that a photo is being taken in this setting and that whoever does not wish to have their picture taken should move to a place in the room that will not be shown in the photo.
A posed group image or non-posed “candid” images of a group taking part in pre-organised activity where they are aware that someone is gathering imagery of them as they have been informed before the activity. Eg, posed group photo or gathering of people involved in the organisation’s activities, like a community meeting or a fundraising challenge.	Standard consent form signed by the person leading the activity on behalf of the group after the group have indicated their willingness to consent as a group. Announce clearly – and respectfully – that a photo will be taken in this setting, that a consent form will be signed by the person leading the activity (name that person), ask for everyone to raise their hands if they are happy to have their image taken, and indicate that whoever does not wish to have their picture taken should move to a place in the room that will not be shown in the photo and/or wear a band that will allow them to be edited out of any images if they are inadvertently included.
All children and adolescents whose story is being gathered. and All clearly identifiable children and adolescents in a non-public setting – like a home, school or refugee camp – who are the focus of an image. Eg, clearly identifiable in a small group shot of about five children.	Standard consent form signed by individual and parent/guardian or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details (if gathering consent from the parent/guardian will not create further harm). When gathering the stories of children and young people informed consent must be gathered wherever possible, and any refusal to take part must be respected. This depends on the age of the child or adolescent, but the conversation about whether they feature in any content must happen with them as well as their legal guardian if they are of an age to be able to understand the context. If a child or adolescent tells a story where they feel distressed or where they share information that may create future risk for them, the further consent of the parent/guardian must be sought. If the child is thought to be at harm from their parent/guardian due to their disclosure, the advice of the country team must be sought, and the relevant child safeguarding/public authorities must be alerted.
Unaccompanied minors (anyone under the age of 18). This includes girls and adolescents who are under the age of 18 and are married or in a union.	Standard consent form signed by individual or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details.
When someone is taking part in a media opportunity – including events – that is being captured by a	Standard consent form signed by individual or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details.

contracted photographer or videographer.	
When someone has shared their story but full consent has not been gathered and the only way to gather this is by phone.	A consent process to be discussed over the phone. The consent statement should then be shared for the contributor to record a voice note reading the statement aloud and then indicating their consent in one continuous recording . This should be shared via a secure channel like WhatsApp.
When someone is taking part in a learning or advocacy event – like the Generation Equality Forum or Africa Girls’ Summit – that is being captured in recordings that may be shared online or quoted in print.	Standard consent form signed by individual or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details. Please announce before the event the intention to record and ask that whoever does not wish to be recorded should indicate this so that their contribution is not captured. Announce this again at the start of the event.
Social media imagery shared on a different platform.	Standard consent form signed by individual or verbal consent recorded alongside consent gatherer reading the consent details. If using an image taken from social media on another platform and/or in a use that is not a reshare – that is, it does not contain the original imagery text and context of the original post – consent to use the image must be sought from the creator of the image. As they are not only the subject of the image but also the creator as the copyright owner, this information should be added to the notes section of the consent form.

When not to gather consent	
Anyone in public spaces who are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not the focus of a story or image, not in danger due to their location, religion, gender, age, socio-economic status, race or ethnicity. • Doing jobs or activities that do not place them in potential immediate or future danger 	No consent needed.
Anyone who is not identifiable or not the focus of an image in a private, non-high-risk setting.	No consent needed.
When someone is taking part in a media opportunity that has been arranged by an organisation and to which media have been invited who are not commissioned by that organisation.	No consent needed. The photography gathered will be the property of the press agency or photographer who takes the images. However, it would be good practise to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support those participating to think through the implications of their participation and what they might want to say • Inform the participants that their images could be widely spread and that they will not be given the opportunity by the media to choose or veto where they are used.
Social media imagery shared on the same platform as it is posted.	No consent needed but the images must be used strictly following the guidance below. When people share their imagery on social media sites – including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter – legally they sign up to terms and conditions that mean that these images can be reshared on the same platforms without needing their consent. If the content is being used in another context – that is, not on the same platform as a reshare – consent is needed. See the section on social media imagery shared on a different platform above in the table above. If resharing, always think about how the people in the images might feel about this. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only using the image in the same as the context and tone in which it was originally shared. • How old the image is, and if the image of the person is still representative of who they are today. Good practise is not to use the image for more than 18 months. • If the person in the image might feel positively about the image. If unsure, it is better not to use the image. • Who else is in the photo: if they are very visible and it is not a public location, they may not be happy with you sharing their image.

3.16 When consent cannot be gathered

While this should not happen often, sometimes consent cannot be gathered because someone wishes to share their story but – for their own reasons – not to take part in a formal consent process. In these circumstances, a “No consent risk assessment” should be completed with the contributor. This helps to assess the dangers to the contributor, and if it is safe to use their story. This will also help leave a “paper trail” capturing actions, including those taken to mitigate risk for the contributor and organisation gathering their story.

The completed form should be stored in the same location as all consent forms/verbal consent recordings.

See [Appendix 1: No consent risk assessment](#).

3.17 Guidance on anonymisation and name changing

Hiding identities

Contributors may choose to hide their identity, and it is their right to keep their reasons private if they choose. It is also their right to share their identity; this can help some girls, adolescents and young women feel empowered, as long as they fully understand the possible risks and responses involved in doing this. These will be highly context specific, so each person's personal needs and situation should be considered when making decisions with a contributor. See the pre-consent risk assessment on p 27.

All contributors should be offered the opportunity to be photographed or filmed with their identities hidden and in a location of their choosing, which may be far away from their home. Check if they wish to be:

1. Entirely concealed. For example, a photograph of their shadow, an illustration, an avatar, or no photographs or footage taken of them at all.
2. Concealed. For example, a photograph taken from behind where the contributor is not wearing their own clothes (instead wearing other clothes provided for the purposes of the photograph).
3. Semi-concealed. For example, a photograph of their hand/foot, a photograph taken of the back of their head or their whole self in shadow, or holding something that hides part or all of their face.

If they are not sure, select options 1 or 2, depending on their personal risk. Discuss ideas on how to conceal identity with the contributor(s) and make sure that they agree before capturing any images.

Name changing

All contributors should be offered the opportunity to give a different name, even if they are being photographed or filmed in a way that does not hide their identity.

It is best practise to ask the contributor what alternative name they might prefer, explaining that this is the name that will be shared publicly and therefore advising them to select a name that is not easily linked to them. If this is not possible, select pseudonyms with the support of colleagues or volunteers from the same country or region as the contributor to ensure accurate and appropriate use of names.

When a contributor wishes to share their identity but doing so may create risk

A contributor under the age of 18 may wish to share their real name or not conceal their identity, even when this may put them at risk. In this scenario, time should be spent going over the questions in contributor pre-consent risk assessment on p. 27. If after this process the contributor does not seem to fully understand, then the person gathering their story should explain that the risk feels too high, and that their identity should be concealed anyway. This should be followed by a discussion of how this could be done in a way the contributor feels comfortable and that their choices are being considered.

If the contributor still feels strongly that they want to share their identity, and the person gathering the content still feels strongly that this places them at unacceptable risk, it may be necessary not to gather the story.

3.18 Renewing consent

The majority of stories are used without renewing consent for the purposes and time agreed in the original consent process. However, sometimes consent needs to be renewed before a story is used beyond the original purpose:

- If someone is in a life situation that is subject to rapid change and/or deterioration, for example someone in the process of leaving a marriage.
- If someone is in a context that is subject to volatility or rapid change, for example someone living in a conflict setting, or a migrant.
- If someone may be at risk if their story is used again in a different context.
- If someone is living in a country or environment where the release of their story may cause them harm due to the political or social environment changing, for example a girl or young woman who expresses her wish to attend university in Afghanistan after the Taliban reclaimed control.
- If someone's story/image is selected as a main asset in a large-scale campaign that will have a large audience.
- If a story is to be retained, consent should be renewed every three years (see the section on image retirement on p. 57).
- When a child turns 18 (even if within the initial three-year period).

If the person cannot be contacted to renew consent, the content should not be used.

Renewing consent also provides an opportunity to follow up with the people whose stories have been told. Updating stories means detail and context can be added, and the ways contributors' lives have moved on can be shown, ensuring they are not always defined by one image or experience – like child marriage.

3.19 If a contributor withdraws consent

If a contributor withdraws consent, all content featuring that contributor must be withdrawn from the database on which it is stored, and the contributor's images removed from use. The image-maker, and the teams or external partners who have already downloaded and/or used the images must be informed so they can stop their planned activities or remove existing content.

In such situations, the removal request and actions taken should be recorded along with supporting documentation – including original and withdrawn consent – so that records exist in the event of a future need to prove actions taken.

3.20 Consent process checklist

When	Action	Resources	Completed (Y//N)
Before consent gathering	Carry out the pre-consent risk assessment.	Pre-consent risk assessment questions	
	Contact the safeguarding focal point and share the risk assessment with them for input.	Pre-consent risk assessment questions	
	Prepare consent forms: • Translate • Print hard copies	Consent form	
	Create supporting material showing examples of communications materials to help contributors understand where their contribution may end up.	Supporting materials	
	Prepare leave-behind cards with the phone number of the office or person the contributor can contact if they have questions or wish to withdraw consent.	Leave-behind card	
	Plan story gathering to leave sufficient time for a proper consent conversation.	Content gathering plan	
During consent gathering	Prioritise time to have proper consent conversations.	Content gathering plan	
	Show all supporting materials to the contributor and leave time for them to consider them, share them with friends/family, ask questions.	Supporting materials	
	In a group scenario, follow the guidance on gathering group consent or making announcements/handing out coloured bands.	Coloured bands (or alternative)	
	Help the contributor fill in the form or give verbal consent. Verbal consent must be recorded with the consent explanation on the same recording.	Consent form	
	Use the leave-behind card to explain further and inform the contributor of their rights to contact your organisation at any time if they have questions or wish to withdraw consent.	Leave-behind card	
	Store the consent forms properly and safely in a locked space (password protected digital folder/lockable safe or cabinet).	Consent form	
	Check that the contributor is still happy with what they agreed to and understands the details.		

After consent gathering	Share or show the content gathered with the contributor for their approval. For images, they can watch the video or view the photos in the camera's view finder. For words, their testimony can be read back to them.		
	Complete the no consent risk assessment form if necessary.	No consent risk assessment	
	Ensure that any preferences regarding anonymity and name changing are captured in image metadata.		
	File physical consent forms in a safe place with content.	Consent form	
	Renew consent if necessary.	Consent form	

Section 4: Production of communications materials

Explainer

The process of making communications materials should result in a contributor feeling respected, empowered and heard. A process that does not follow ethical principles can leave them feeling frustrated, disrespected and even retraumatised.

This section is about practical actions that prioritise contributors' agency and autonomy during the storytelling process. It is divided into four sections: planning, before content gathering, during content gathering and after content gathering.

Practicalities

- 4.1 Planning for an appropriate team ahead of any content gathering
- 4.2 Working with third parties
- 4.3 Story gathering: Key ethical roles and responsibilities
- 4.4 Allocating a specific person to run the consent process
- 4.5 Trained content gathering colleagues
- 4.6 Preparing for contributor aftercare
- 4.7 Commissioning an external image maker
- 4.8 Communications risk assessment
- 4.9 Managing expectations
- 4.10 Informing contributors about how to make a complaint
- 4.11 Right to help
- 4.12 Informed image making
- 4.13 Enabling contributor choices
- 4.14 Interviewing thoughtfully
- 4.15 Discovering illegal activity
- 4.16 Working with interpreters
- 4.17 Gifts, expenses and compensation for contributors
- 4.18 Composite stories
- 4.19 Stock imagery
- 4.20 Sign-off processes
- 4.21 Returning imagery
- 4.22 Self-care
- 4.23 Learn and reflect
- 4.24 Production of communications materials checklist.

[Appendix 2: Communications risk assessment](#)

Planning for content gathering

4.1 Planning for an appropriate team ahead of any content gathering

Before content gathering, it is a good idea to create a list of professionals in the locations where content is regularly gathered. This allows the person gathering content to move quicker with trusted individuals.

The content gathering team should be assembled with sensitivity to race, gender, ethnicity, age and cultural norms, and their intersections. The project lead should find out in advance what is sensitive and appropriate in the story context, and be aware that this will change between locations and groups of people.

Planning a team. When bringing together a team to gather content, the characteristics and behaviour of the team and how these will impact on the person sharing their story should be considered. If possible, the contributor should be asked if they have any preferences before content gathering begins. The following areas should be considered as a minimum:

- Gender: is it appropriate to have someone male on the exercise?
- Nationality: what is the relationship between the nationalities of the person who is sharing their story and the person gathering it?
- Age: it may be more comfortable for the contributor to have someone older, or someone younger, on the team. Their experience and preferences should be considered.
- Language: sharing a language with someone can help everyone feel more comfortable.
- Race: including team members who share racial characteristics with a contributor can help them feel more comfortable and less “other”.
- Religion: including someone on the team with a shared religion can also help a contributor feel less “other”.
- Ethnicity: if there are ethnic divisions or differences in the location or context, the way the proposed team members intersect with the contributor and their community should be considered.
- Migration/refugee/or stateless status: if someone is in a place where they are currently experiencing the uncertainty of having refugee or stateless status, or are newly arrived in a country, they may feel vulnerable. Having someone on the team who has this shared experience may help and should be considered.
- Cultural norms: behaviours that may help the contributor feel comfortable should be considered. This can range from clothing to respecting greetings customs and much more.

Questions to ask potential external contractors – including photographers, videographers, interviewers or interpreters – to assess their sensitivity to ethical practice:

1. Have you ever worked on the issue of child marriage before? If so, what happened? If not, can you explain to me your understanding of the scenario we are proposing you work?
2. What ethical issues do you foresee in this proposed scenario?

3. How would you help a girl, adolescent or young woman feel comfortable in the scenario in which we are proposing you work?
4. How would you ensure that the girl, adolescent or young woman understands exactly what it is that we are doing in this scenario?
5. What actions would you take to make sure the girl, adolescent or young woman in this situation can share her ideas, opinions and feedback to influence the communications materials we are proposing you work to create?
6. How would you ensure that the girl, adolescent or young woman in this situation is protected and finds this experience enriching?

4.2 Working with third parties

When working with third parties – including external media partners, donors, non-governmental partners, UN agencies or governments – these guidelines (or similar) must be upheld. The following actions are designed to promote this:

1. Schedule a meeting specifically to discuss these guidelines and any implications/questions arising. All participants should read the guidelines before the meeting.
2. Highlight the principle of partnership and ask third parties how they will facilitate this in their activity.
3. Provide the third parties with the consent materials and other relevant tools.
4. For external contractors, make it a contractual obligation to follow these guidelines, with payment reliant on these actions being carried out.
5. For external partners – like media or high-profile supporters who are also media creators – communicate clearly the objectives of the work, the situation of the contributors and their storytelling idea, and the risk associated with not following this guidance.
6. Ask to review finished content *before* publication for safeguarding purposes. Please note that external media and content creator partners may not agree to editorial input, so communicate clearly that the review is specifically for safeguarding purposes.
7. Explain that if a contributor withdraws consent, you will need to withdraw all materials containing that person's story. See the section on what to do if a contributor withdraws consent on p. 37.

Before content gathering

4.3 Story gathering: Key ethical roles and responsibilities

This section lists a set of responsibilities that need to be taken during a story gathering exercise. This is not a list of who should be on the exercise and they are not job titles. There is flexibility on who takes on these responsibilities, sometimes a role will be split between two people, or one person may take on more than one role, or even all the roles.

- **Producer:** overall responsibility for the story gathering exercise and making sure that all the team and processes are in line with these guidelines.
- **Image-maker and Interviewer/writer:** responsible for delivering stories in line with these guidelines.
- **Interpreter:** responsible for delivering cultural and language interpretation, and for flagging if there are any misunderstandings or causes for concern to any members of the team who do not speak the language.
- **Consent gatherer:** to gather consent in line with the consent section of these guidelines.
- **Safeguarding Focal Point:** responsible for inputting into the risk assessment processes by using the “Communications risk assessment” in [Appendix 2](#) before any content gathering. If there are safeguarding concerns that arise later in the process, safeguarding colleagues should again be consulted to come to a joint decision on whether and how to use any communications materials.

4.5 Allocate a specific person to run the consent process

To run a high-quality consent process as outlined in the consent section, one member of the content gathering team must be responsible for the task. Sufficient time should be allocated to carry out a high-quality process, even when working under pressure.

4.4 Trained content gathering colleagues

It is best for content gathering to happen with individuals who know how to gather strong content, are aware of ethical communications issues and have been trained in these guidelines.

These guidelines can be shared with third parties – preferably as a contractual obligation – and time should be taken to explain why this document exists. The best way to ensure that contractors and partners read, understand and implement these guidelines is if they understand how following them is better for communications, contributors and their communities.

4.6 Preparing for contributor aftercare

A named staff member should be allocated to carry out these tasks after someone has shared a significant contribution. The contributor should have access to a named individual who

they can contact to discuss any concerns. This should be a professional with a background in child marriage and supporting children and young people. This is likely to be someone in the programmatic area rather than communications team.

Aftercare will take two forms – social media and proactive checking in.

Social media

It is important to find out if the contributor has social media accounts. If so, they should be made aware that if they share their real name and/or a recognisable image, they may be contacted by others on social media, and that this communication may be positive and/or negative. There are two main ways that negative comments are left:

1. What is often called “trolling”. This is done by people who may not have any strong beliefs or even knowledge of the subject or story that is being communicated, but who choose to leave negative comments which may be very nasty in their tone and subject matter.
2. Negative comments by people who do not have the points of view shared in the communications. These can take many forms.

The following steps can be taken to prepare for potential communications on social media:

1. Ensure the contributor knows that if they share or engage with the materials in which they feature, they will be linked to that story. This is particularly important when someone has decided to conceal their identity or change their name. Good practice in this case would be for them **not** to communicate about their participation in this communications activity on their own social media channels.
2. Recommend to the contributor that they enable privacy settings so they cannot be proactively contacted by anyone.
3. Advise that if they receive negative comments that they **do not** engage and instead block that individual.
4. Recommend that the contributor may wish to take a break from social media around the story being released.
5. Ensure that they know how to carry out these tasks.
6. If any person leaves a comment that threatens the contributor’s physical safety in any way, they must report this to the police, unless the activity being communicated is illegal in that location, in which case they **must not** communicate about it on social media.
7. Remind them that they can discuss any concerns with the organisation gathering content.

Proactively checking on a contributor

The named individual will proactively contact the contributor at the times below. This should be the same individual each time rather than a different person:

“We should work as self-care guides after [stories] have been exposed, [covering] how this can affect the emotions, mental health, tranquillity of those who share their stories.”

Girls Not Brides member organisation in Ecuador

1. One week after content gathering, to ask if they still feel OK about their contribution and whether they have received any feedback, positive or negative.
2. When the content has been created, so they can see it and discuss whether they are happy with how they are shown.
3. One month after content gathering to ask if they still feel OK about their contribution.
4. In advance of the content being shared to warn them that it will be in the public domain, ideally no less than a week before.
5. 24 hours after the content is shared.
6. 1 week after the content is shared.
7. 1 month after the content is shared.
8. At any point that it is reshared in a new context. A new context means if it is shared as a new story in a new campaign or communications activity, as opposed to more widely within the same planned activity.

4.7 Commissioning an external image-maker

When commissioning an external image-maker, it is good practice to:

1. Carry out a criminal background check on every individual. This can take time if the person has lived in multiple countries.
2. Negotiate and complete a written contract.
3. Request that each individual reads and considers the actions included in these guidelines, carries out the contractor training (to be created based on these guidelines), and commits to implementing them.

Where possible, sole copyright arrangements should be contractually agreed with external photographers and writers. If the communications activity is high risk, the images and stories they capture must be subject to sole copyright arrangements.⁹

Joint copyright offers the photographer and/or writer flexibility in publishing and reproducing the images and stories. Joint copyright means that before publishing, the image-maker must request permission to publish.

The copyright agreement should be clearly stated in the contract.

4.8 Communications risk assessment

It is good practice before any content gathering to carry out a risk assessment of any communication activities that involve or feature children, young people and/or adults at risk.

The risk assessment should include the context in which the activity will take place, where images and/or stories may be published and who might have access to them.

⁹ Sole copyright means that images and information featuring children, adolescents and young people obtained during the communications activity are the sole property of the commissioning organisation and can only be published or reproduced with their permission.

This assessment should be carried out in partnership with the Safeguarding manager (or equivalent) of the organisation gathering content. They should be in agreement that any risks have been mitigated.

Risks to consider include:

- Whether staff, consultants and others involved in the communication activities have been appropriately checked and whether they understand how to safely obtain and publish images and information featuring children and young people.
- Whether the communication activities are being conducted in an appropriate place and at an appropriate time. For example, children should not be taken out of school to participate in communication activities, and the communication activities should not take place in a public place where there is a risk of people overhearing children and young people's stories or personal information.
- Whether the group of children, young people and adults at risk involved in the communications activity fully understand what they will be involved in, have had the opportunity to input into what stories they wish to tell, how and when they are gathered, and how their images and stories will be used.
- Whether there are particular risks or vulnerabilities to consider. For example, children or young people have already experienced violence – whether in a child marriage, family home or community – or they and their families have fled from places of conflict or tension and do not want their images made public.
- Whether the location of the activity presents potential risks. For example, it is taking place in a community or place which has been subject to conflict or tensions that has put children and/or young people at risk of harm; or in a context where a girl leaving a child marriage may experience backlash from her partner, family or community.
- Whether the activity is highlighting issues such as discrimination or violence in communities and publishing images and information which associates individual children or young people with these issues may put them at risk of harm/retaliation.

Please see [Appendix 2: Communications risk assessment](#) to complete this task.

4.9 Managing expectations

Before any content gathering, it should be made clear to potential contributors that:

- Storytelling will not lead to direct assistance for themselves or their families. Contributors may agree to take part in this work because they feel they “owe” something to the organisation gathering content because of past support. They may also feel like future support depends on them taking part. Care should be taken to ensure contributors understand that this is not the case.
- Their story may not end up featuring in any communications materials and that this is not because of the quality of the story or their telling of it, but instead depends on when sharing that story is going to have the most impact.
- While direct quotes will never be changed, their contribution may be edited and only a section of their story may be shared, but they will be able to see it and decide if they want it to be shared in this way.

- That their preferences around how they are described and the language they use about their experience will be respected.
- Working with external media means having less control over how their story is told. The organisation gathering content can advocate for some aspects to be emphasised/included, but do not have final control and can rarely review content before it is published.
- Drawing public awareness to their story is unlikely to resolve their personal and specific problems, and any effects of them sharing their story may not be immediately felt or obvious.
- The organisation gathering content may agree to follow the contributor's story over a longer period of months or years. Those involved in such storytelling must be aware that this may raise expectations of assistance in a contributor or their family; while at the same time, other members of the community may become suspicious of this relationship. Advice from the teams based in this location – and effective communication with contributors – is essential to manage these relationships.
- Interview questions will be shared in advance (where possible).

4.10 Informing contributors about how to make a complaint

Before any communications activity starts, the team should set up a complaints mechanism in case a contributor wants to make a complaint about the communications work or a person who has been part of the work.

There should be at least two options provided to the contributor, including:

1. The email address and phone number for the Safeguarding Focal Point for the activity.
2. An email address and phone number for the central office or equivalent. This should be the name and number of someone not part of the communications work, so that the contributor can comfortably make a complaint about someone who was there when the communications activity took place.

During content gathering

4.11 Right to help

Everyone featuring in communications materials should have a past, present and/or planned future relationship with the organisation that gathered the content. This is part of that organisation fulfilling their commitment to supporting and protecting the contributor. If a contributor expresses a need that cannot be met by locally available services, the content-gathering organisation should find out if there is other support and share this with them later.

4.12 Informed image making

The content-gathering organisation should make every effort to find out about a contributor's personal circumstances before working on their story, so they can support and mitigate against harm. Time should be spent thinking and finding out about these considerations:

- In what location they feel most comfortable.

- What topics may cause them extra distress or trauma.
- What physical risks they may face.
- Any people in their family or community with whom they have a difficult relationship, or who might not approve of them sharing their story.

4.13 Enabling contributor choices

Use this checklist to enable contributor content gathering preferences:

- Ensure that the contributor is informed that they can dress in whatever way they feel most comfortable.
- Ensure that the contributor can share their preferences about where the content gathering takes place. This may mean finding somewhere private to speak; if this is not possible, content gathering may need to be rescheduled or cancelled.
- Ensure the contributor is physically comfortable. For example, they can sit comfortably, not being exposed to sun or rain, have water to drink, and are a comfortable distance from the interviewer.
- Inform them that they can take a break – or multiple breaks – whenever they choose.
- Indicate that if they wish not to answer a question, this is their right and it will be respected.
- Recognise that sometimes people become upset when recounting their experiences, and that if this happens, the process should be paused and space provided for them to consider what they have shared.
- Stop interviewing or filming/photographing immediately if the contributor wants.
- Mirror the contributor's choices. For example, if they sit, sit with them; if they stand, stay standing.
- Never speak with the contributor alone (unless on the phone).
- Find out what is culturally appropriate and modify the approach to be sensitive to these considerations.
- Ask if the contributor would like to have a friend with them to support them while they share their story.
- Show **all** the materials gathered directly after the content gathering and communicate that they may request that some or all of it not be used.

4.14 Interviewing thoughtfully

This set of actions will help any interviews happen in a sensitive way.

- Contributors should not be asked direct questions about traumatic events that have happened to them. If these are raised, the interviewer should listen actively but not push for detail, letting the contributor decide what to say and how.
- In situations where a parent or partner insists on being present during the interview, the interviewer should consider carefully how this may affect their planned questions and the

possible responses by the contributor. If the planned questions could likely place the contributor in a difficult position with their parent or partner, the questions should be avoided. Potentially sensitive questions should be discussed with a member of staff who works with the contributor, before the interview takes place.

- Interviewing should involve a maximum of two people, normally someone who is carrying out the interview and an interpreter and/or social worker/supportive party for the girl, adolescent or young woman. No external parties – like donors – should ever be present during interviews.
- Ask open questions rather than leading ones. For example, “how did you feel in that situation?” rather than “were you scared?”
- Do not try to “cheer them up”. Respect how the contributor is feeling, do not ask them to suppress these feelings.
- Do not say “yeah, I know that, it happened to me too” as this can feel alienating and stop someone telling their story.
- Do not rush the contributor. Let them take the time they need to tell their story in their own way.
- At the end, repeating the story back to the contributor can help them process it and correct any inaccuracies. This should be done with sensitivity and care, and without drama or judgment.
- Ask who they might talk to when they feel upset or worried and whether they need support in contacting that person.
- Finish the interview by asking about something positive in the contributor’s life. For example, their favourite food, what they do when they are not at school or work, their favourite TV show.
- Say thank you – whatever happened, make sure the contributor does not feel that they have “let you down”.
- Be careful not to make promises that cannot be kept, like “I’ll make sure you get help soon”, or “I’m sure things will get better for you”.
- Let the contributor lead the storytelling. Listen if they tell you stories that you might not find directly relevant as this is important to them and part of them sharing their experiences. If their body language indicates that they are bored or uncomfortable, let them rest or even stop.
- Never ask a child, adolescent or young person to repeat their story again and again to different people – like journalists or high-profile visitors – this increases the risk of emotional harm and can lead to them feeling exploited.
- If someone says they feel suicidal, “close to the edge”, are thinking of or have been self-harming, or distressed to the point that they cannot engage in day-to-day activities, they must not be interviewed and the support available to them should be investigated.

4.15 Discovering illegal activity

When someone reveals illegal activity in an interview or content gathering context, this must be immediately communicated to Safeguarding and Security staff, and their advice must be followed. The police should not be contacted straight away, although this may be a later outcome depending on what is revealed.

4.16 Working with interpreters

Some communications activities may require an interpreter. This person may be staff or they may be an external contractor. If possible, the interpreter(s) should be comfortable with the contributor(s) and understand their circumstances.

If hired externally, the budget for the interpreter(s) should cover their time on the content gathering exercise and an additional day afterwards to support the accurate translation of captions, case studies, etc.

The interpreter's responsibilities are to:

- Immediately share concerns regarding the contributor's welfare which the content gatherer or image-maker may not be aware of.
- Read these guidelines and the content plan; be familiar with the purpose of the content gathering and the background of potential contributors and their lives/circumstances.
- Be available for a meeting with the content gathering team before this exercise begins.
- Be culturally and politically sensitive to the environment and story they are translating.
- Translate sentences in full, and never abbreviate statements.
- Translate accurately and directly at all times, however difficult, incorrect or inappropriate they think the answers are.

4.17 Gifts, expenses and compensation for contributors

- Anyone involved in content gathering must not offer any direct gifts to contributors. This includes cash, objects and gifts in kind.
- Receiving gifts from contributors or their communities should also be avoided where possible and culturally appropriate. Contributors may have limited resources and assets, so content teams should explain that they are not allowed to accept gifts or subsistence other than small refreshments from the people they work with.
- Compensation should be paid if there are costs to the contributor or community during content gathering process. For example, if content gathering required heating to be turned on in a house out of normal hours, heating costs should be reimbursed; if meals are eaten at the contributor's expense, food costs should be reimbursed; or if the contributor has lost a daily wage to participate in the exercise, their day rate should be reimbursed.
- If compensation is paid, there must be a clear explanation of what is being paid for. Ideally, this would be supported by a receipt that shows the contributor was not paid for their involvement in content gathering, but for a specific cost incurred.
- These funds should be planned into the content gathering budget at the start of the process.

After content gathering

4.18 Composite stories

A “composite story” is one where several different people's experiences are joined and framed as if they were the experience of just one person. This is not ethical good practice: the story is not authentic, may be deceiving to audiences and silences or changes the stories of the original contributors.

4.19 Stock imagery

When originally created imagery is not available, it may be necessary to buy or acquire stock imagery. To indicate this, a caption with the line “image purchased/acquired from *[insert name of source]* stock library” should be included. This is to avoid the image being understood as showing a person in the story it is accompanying. All relevant credits and licensing information must also be displayed.

4.20 Sign-off processes

Sign-off changes depending on who is creating communications materials, and where. However, it is important that the contributor and in-country teams can input at the sign-off stage, whatever other process is underway.

Contributor

- When possible, edited or finished content should be shared with the contributor to ensure they are happy with the way their story has been told.

In-country teams

- Content referring to a particular region or country must be signed off by staff in that location before it is used.
- Content created with or through partner organisations must be signed off by them before they are used.
- When content gathering is completed, written materials, photo edit and film B-roll – or finalised films if B-roll is not created – must be sent to the point of contact in the in-country team or partner organisation. They will assess the story and sign off on the basis of risk to contributors or programmes featured.

4.21 Returning content, including images

When possible, files and/or hard copy images should be shared with contributors.

Follow-up with contributors and returning content and/or images offers solutions to challenges relating to expectations, accountability, duty of care and consent. It can:

- Demonstrate respect towards contributors and acknowledge the value of their contribution.
- Mitigate any anxiety caused by uncertainty over audience and use.
- Help to manage expectations, some of which may have been created by the initial interest shown in their lives at the time of content gathering.

- Provide an opportunity to check contributors' wellbeing and fulfil aftercare commitments towards those who contribute to storytelling and/or image-making.
- Check that contributors are comfortable with how their image and story have been used, and are happy to give consent for their use in future.

4.22 Self-care for story gatherers and creators

Communications and media colleagues – and their interpreters – can become traumatised or experience depression or burn out because of their engagement with people who have experienced child marriage and other forms of violence. Given the sensitive issue, they may also experience hostility from family or community members who do not agree with the stories being told. This can be mitigated by:

- Being realistic about what can be achieved from the start of the content gathering process.
- Taking regular breaks between content gathering conversations or trips to reflect on those experiences.
- Noticing emotions and health, eating well, exercising, sleeping and taking care to recognise any changes to usual patterns.
- Talking to friends or peers for support, and/or capturing experiences in writing or another way to process the experience of content gathering.
- Asking for help.

4.23 Learn and reflect

Despite busy schedules, time should be taken to reflect, examine failure and learn from actions taken. After each content gathering exercise, a reflection meeting should be held consider the following questions:

1. Was this content gathering carried out in line with the Ethical communications guidelines?
2. Were we able to gather consent, and if not, why not and what can we do differently?
3. Were we able to take all the practical steps outlined in the section on the production of communications materials? If not, why not and what can we do differently?

Findings should be captured and stored. They should be shared with relevant team members and partners. If necessary, changes to this document should be recommended, to ensure they reflect learnings. See the section on ongoing commitment on p.58.

4.24 Production of communications materials checklist

	Action	Resources	Completed (Y/N)
Planning	Plan for an appropriate team		
	Review guidance on working with 3 rd parties		
Before story gathering	Complete a Communications risk assessment	Communications risk assessment	
	Allocate roles and responsibilities to the team		
	Train the team in these guidelines	Training slides	
	Prepare for contributor aftercare		
	Commission an image-maker (if appropriate)	Image-maker contract	
During story gathering	Investigate what support the contributor might need		
	Investigate contributor's personal circumstances and content gathering preferences		
	Enable contributor choices		
	Interview thoughtfully		
	Manage contributor expectations		
	Arrange any necessary compensation		
After story gathering	Show content to the contributor for input and sign-off		
	Return imagery		
	Consider self-care		
	Learn and reflect		

Section 5: Distribution and storage

Explainer

How stories are stored and shared is a part of ethical communications because a person's story can impact their lives now and in years to come. Having an ethical process in place ensures that stories that are widely shared are only used and repurposed in the way intended.

Doing this well will protect people's sensitive personal data and respect their wishes. It can also help respect contracts with external people or organisations with or from whom story materials are sourced.

Practicalities

5.1 The necessity of background information in metadata

5.2 Image captions

5.3 Image credits

5.4 Using multimedia materials bought in from stock libraries (third party purchasing)

5.5 Sending stories to third parties (media and donors)

5.6 Manipulating images: Cropping, changing colour, flipping, editing footage, retouching

5.7 Story retirement: Time

5.8 Story retirement: Risk

5.9 Data protection

5.1 The necessity of background information in metadata

The privacy and preferences of contributors are a top priority, as is the commitment to behaving in accordance with data protection laws and policies.

Images must be filed with captions alongside, ideally embedded in the metadata of the photo. All film footage must be filed with clear logs, and all written materials with references to the accompanying multimedia materials. These should reflect the context in which the content was gathered.

5.2 Image captions

The more context provided alongside an image, the more the shared humanity of the person or people in the image can be recognised. Where possible, image captions should always be used, even if "roll over" captions – those that only appear when your cursor moves over the image – are needed in a digital space.

A caption should include the name – or pseudonym – of the person, where they are and what is happening in the image, whilst also considering the triangle of risk in terms of revealing data that may be sensitive.

5.3 Image credits

Images from a picture supplier or from an individual should be published with a credit alongside. Usually, the agreement to licence the image will require this credit.

5.4 Using multimedia materials bought or sourced from stock libraries

It may sometimes be necessary to buy in imagery – film footage or photographs – from a stock bank or library. The person who buys the image should:

- Negotiate a price (if from a paid for source).
- Agree or note the period and purpose for use of the imagery.
- Ensure it comes from a trusted and verifiable source (such as a reputable agency).
- Ensure consent is attached to the image.
- Ensure all captions and any consent information is obtained at time of purchase.
- Ensure correct copyright terms and appropriate licence fees are agreed.
- Investigate whether other organisation(s) has bought the imagery, to avoid the same imagery being used across different organisations or for different purposes.
- Ensure the content is used accurately to illustrate the specific situation depicted, rather than in a more generic sense that may tell a misleading story.
- Ensure the image is not used alongside a story from a different person so that it appears that the story is about the person in the image.
- Ensure the image meets the questions outlined in the Editorial decision-making matrix on p. 10.

If an image of a recognisable person does not meet the standards above, it must not be bought. In the rare instance that images that do not meet the criteria above have to be bought, anyone in the image must be shown in a way so that their identity is entirely hidden.

When using a stock image alongside a story about a sensitive topic such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, or gender-based violence, any imagery showing a person **must** be depicted so that their identity is entirely hidden. While the person in the image or their parent/guardian may have agreed for it to be used in multiple ways, any potential risk or negative reactions resulting from being placed alongside a story about such a sensitive topic should be mitigated.

5.5 Sending stories to third parties (media and donors)

All stories and images must be stored with information on whether they can be sent to third parties. Stories and images sent to third parties must be accompanied by full and correct caption and credit information, any additional conditions of use and an explanation that the stories must be used respectfully, correctly and consistent with the background information provided. This includes ensuring that the duration of use is clear.

To support responsible third-party use of images, this statement can be shared with them:

This/these image/s are the copyright property or licensing property of [insert name of organisation]. They are being shared with [insert name of third-party organisation] for the purposes of [insert purpose – be detailed, including proposed usage locations and usage duration]. If your organisation wishes to use this/these image/s for any further purposes, you must contact us for permission at least seven days before use.

Please be aware that as part of our responsible informed consent process, anyone who shared their story with us can withdraw consent at any time. If this happens, we will contact your organisation and ask that every effort is made to withdraw use of this/these image/s and that they are not used again under any circumstance. If you do not comply with this statement, you may be causing significant risk to the person in this image.

5.6 Manipulating images: cropping, changing colour, flipping, editing footage, retouching

Cropping and retouching should only be done in line with the guidelines below. More fundamental manipulation of an image is unethical as it changes the informed consent agreement. It also risks damaging an organisation's credibility in delivering authentic documentation to their supporters and the public.

- The narrative of a photograph should not be altered by cropping significant areas. For example, an image of a girl and her sister may convey its message more effectively or fit in a specific space by slight cropping of insignificant details in the background, but it is not acceptable to entirely crop out the girl's sister, thereby making the girl look more vulnerable than she is.
- Slight alterations to colour are acceptable, such as correcting the colour balance. More significant alterations to colour are only acceptable if it does not change the narrative of the image.
- Flipping imagery is acceptable provided it does not change the meaning of the image. However, if the same image is used across various communications, audience may notice if an image has been flipped in and this could impact on audience trust in the organisation as a source of honest and authentic communications.
- Any edited film footage must stay true to the story presented by the contributor. Films must not be edited to change the original narrative.
- For reasons of protection, imagery sometimes needs to be retouched to remove identifying features such as school badges, a name badge or other identifying feature that may mean someone at risk is traceable. This is acceptable as it mitigates safeguarding risks.
- Content which is in post-production should be aligned to the Editorial decision-making matrix on p 10.

5.7 Story retirement: Time

It is good practice to retire all stories from use after a maximum of three years – or when a contributor turns 18 – unless consent is renewed. This is because:

- After three years, the person in the story is unlikely to be in the same life situation as shown in the images or materials.
- Usage contracts with those who created the images are likely to have expired.
- In the case of a girl reaching legal majority, this may be a legal requirement.

The exception to this rule is for deliberate long-term stories that follow contributors over a period of more than three years, or when discussing a historical event in that context.

5.8 Story retirement: Risk

A group of people may have been safe to share their stories when the content was gathered, but may later be put at risk if that story is shared.

Examples include stories about working women in Afghanistan after the Taliban reclaimed control in 2021, an LGBTQI+ person in a country which has recently experienced anti-LGBTQI+ demonstrations or changes to the law, or people seeking asylum in a country that has recently changed their asylum laws to be less accommodating.

In this event, these stories must be removed immediately from use to protect these people from harm.

Section 6: Ongoing commitment

Explainer

These guidelines – and any context-specific versions based on them – are only useful as long as they are regularly reviewed and amended, and when all staff creating communications materials are confident to operate within them. To maintain the validity of these guidelines, it may help to carry out these actions.

Practicalities

- 6.1 Training
- 6.2 Annual reviewing
- 6.3 Live amends

6.1 Training

All relevant staff should be trained in using these guidelines on a regular basis. Trained staff should use the guidelines in their own work, and promote their use at the organisational level. This includes raising any examples of good and problematic practice with their communications colleagues, and contributing to the continuous development of the guidelines through both the live amends and annual reviewing processes outlined below.

6.2 Annual reviewing

It is good practice to hold an annual review of communications materials to consider and learn from experiences. Ideally, this process would follow these steps:

1. Set aside a half day for the review.
2. Invite all communications staff, Girls and Young Women Advisory Group and anyone who is involved in the creation of communications, including colleagues from other teams and departments, partners and regular external contractors.
3. Select a set of example communications materials from the preceding year. This should be three to ten items from each channel (social media, website, media, etc.).
4. Print them out in a room, have them ready to view on a screen or create an online space.
5. As a group, review them against the principles in these guidelines.
6. Review what went well/what was challenging.
7. Capture main findings and create measurable objectives and actions.
8. Link these actions to staff and roles.
9. If using a variation of these guidelines, directly implement changes to them; if using these guidelines, share recommendations with *Girls Not Brides* so they can be updated.
10. Republish and communicate changes.

6.3 Live amends

These guidelines will need amending in more minor ways throughout the year to reflect work done in new scenarios, new ways of working and learnings from trials of ideas carried out to improve this document.

Girls Not Brides commits to making minor amends as we learn with member organisations, partners and supporters, to keep this a live – and living – document.