The impact of education on child marriage: Evidence & insights in practice

Based on the evidence, the WHO recommends implementing child marriage interventions that:

- Remove gender-based barriers to education
- Ensure girls’ completion of 12 years of quality education

Check out the evidence behind this recommendation in our brief.

Why focus on education & child marriage?
Education is a protective factor around child marriage; the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to marry before age 18.  

In contexts where marriage and education are mutually exclusive, just being in school can be enough to prevent child marriage.

In school, girls acquire skills, confidence, connections and new opportunities outside the home, expanding their aspirations beyond marriage.

A critical mass of girls going to school can transform social norms in families and communities to expand opportunities for girls.

What works to improve education & child marriage outcomes?

1. National-level policies to improve outcomes at scale:
- Remove school fees & financial barriers (uniforms, books, exams, transport)
- Support girls’ transition & retention in secondary schooling
- Implement gender-transformative approaches to schools, curricula & teaching
- Develop policies that challenge gender discrimination & increase long-term economic opportunities for girls & women
- Strengthen civil registration & education policies to include displaced & refugee girls

2. Multicomponent interventions linking education, social norms and livelihood programming:
- Consider gender-transformative, whole-system approaches to address multiple drivers of child marriage
- Use feminist participatory approaches to address gendered social norms & create inclusive education models with the wider community
- Consider using cash transfers, combined with investment in key services

3. Targeted interventions accounting for context and the girls most at risk:
- Consider the specific needs & barriers for ever-married, pregnant and/or parenting girls, LGBTQIA+ people and people with disabilities, and those affected by conflict & crisis
- Blend formal and informal education to build girls’ foundational, transferable & technical skills
- Use safe spaces to engage ever-married girls & girls affected by conflict & crisis in education & vocational training beyond school
- Consider (married) girls’ unpaid domestic & care work

Some practical tools:

- Gender-transformative education: Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world
- Visualisation tool: Assessing the girl friendliness of schools
- Shifting norms around violence in schools: A guide for trainers and facilitators working with children and young people
- Gender responsive pedagogy teacher training: The case for holistic investment in girls
- Guidance for developing gender-responsive education sector plans
- International technical guidance on sexuality education
- International technical guidance and programmatic guidance on out of school comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)
- Technical note on life skills programmes for empowering adolescent girls: Notes for practitioners on what works
- Financing matters: A toolkit on domestic financing for education
- Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack:
  - Resource bank of tools to support the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration
  - Toolkit for collecting and analysing data on attacks on education

Spaces for learning:
- UNGEI knowledge hub & learning series
- The Child Marriage Research to Action Network
- Align platform

Working on child marriage and education?
Submit your research to the CRANK.