



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

LEVERAGING UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

**A STEP-BY-STEP TOOLKIT FOR
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS**



This Toolkit was compiled at the request of *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*. It was written by Paula Trujillo González (overall lead) and Martha Castro (research lead), in close collaboration with members of the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat team, Georgiana Epure (Advocacy and Campaigns Interim Manager) and Sophia Lane (Advocacy and Campaigns Officer). Additionally, inputs were provided by several *Girls Not Brides* member organisations. Copy editing by Emma Sadd.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	The UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CRC	The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
ECOSOC	The UN Economic and Social Council
HRC	The UN Human Rights Council
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LOIPR	List of Issues Prior to Reporting
OHCHR	The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNTBs	United Nations Treaty Bodies
UPR	Universal Periodic Review

GLOSSARY

Child marriage terms:

- **Child marriage:** Any marriage or union – whether formal or informal – where at least one party is under age 18.
- **Child marriage prevalence:** The proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or entered a union before the age of 18.
- **Evolving capacities:** The way young people gradually develop the ability to take responsibility for their decisions and actions.

UN Treaty body terms:

- **Alternative, parallel or shadow reports:** Civil society organisations write and submit reports to human rights mechanisms, offering insights into the human rights situation in a given country. For the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, an alternative report is submitted when no government report is available, either because the government has not produced one or because it was submitted too late. A shadow report is submitted when civil society organisations have access to the state report.
- **Concluding Observations:** After examining a state party, the Committee of the treaty body issues concluding observations or “recommendations”. These observations are the primary outcome to strengthen the domestic enforcement of the treaties. They are publicly documented and highlight the state’s progress, the Committee’s main concerns, and recommendations for improving the implementation of the Conventions and/or their Optional Protocols. Issues not raised during the session with the state party are not included in the concluding observations.
- **Committee members:** The members of the treaty bodies are independent experts chosen for their expertise in human rights. They are elected by countries but are expected to work independently, putting fairness and objectivity first in all their work.
- **General Comments or General Recommendations:** Treaty bodies also create general comments or general recommendations to guide states on how to apply and interpret the treaties they have agreed to.
- **Human Rights Council (HRC):** An inter-governmental body within the United Nations system, responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights globally. The HRC addresses situations of human

rights violations and makes recommendations on them. It responds to human rights emergencies, conducts assessments of human rights situations in all UN member states through its Universal Periodic Review mechanism, and promotes human rights education and awareness. The Human Rights Council also collaborates closely with the UN Special Procedures – independent human rights experts and bodies responsible for reporting or advising on human rights.

- **List of Issues:** A list of questions directed at states by the Committees overseeing human rights conventions. These questions cover topics like updates on laws and policies, ratifications of human rights instruments, and requests for specific data and statistics to clarify the implementation of the conventions.
- **List of Issues Prior to Reporting:** A list that includes questions and concerns regarding the implementation of the conventions in the reporting country. It guides the state in writing its report under the Simplified Reporting Procedure.
- **Optional Protocols:** Optional Protocols to human rights treaties are added to the treaties, introducing new commitments or addressing issues not previously covered. Similar to the main treaties, Optional Protocols are open for signature, accession, or ratification by countries that are party to the main treaty.
- **Pre-session:** The pre-session, held in Geneva, Switzerland, is a week-long meeting which UN human rights mechanisms Committees convene with Committee members, civil society organisations and UN agency representatives to discuss civil society reports and prepare for country sessions with state representatives. Pre-sessions are typically confidential, except for the CESCR which is public. These meetings address the status of specific UN human rights conventions in specific countries, allowing civil society to voice concerns regarding the conventions’ implementation to Committee members.
- **Pre-sessional working group:** Comprising five Committee members, this group uses inputs from pre-sessions and civil society organisations’ reports to compile lists of issues and questions for countries to be reviewed in the next scheduled session.
- **Reservations:** When countries sign up to international agreements, they sometimes opt out of certain parts. This is called “making a reservation”. But there is a rule: these exceptions cannot completely go against the spirit and purpose of the agreement itself.

- **Simplified reporting procedure:** The reporting procedure employed by certain UN treaty bodies simplifies the state reporting process. In this procedure, the Committees issue a request to the state party for specific information, known as the “List of issues prior to reporting”, which includes up to 30 questions. The state’s response to these questions is then considered as their official report.
- **Special Rapporteur:** An independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council to monitor, advise and report on human rights conditions in specific countries and worldwide, including on violence against women and girls. Special Rapporteurs address individual complaints, conduct studies, offer technical cooperation advice, and make country visits to evaluate human rights situations. They operate independently, supported logistically by the UN but not financially compensated, ensuring impartiality in their duties.
- **State review session:** The session is a three-week meeting usually held in Geneva, Switzerland, where the Committees convene to discuss countries’ fulfilment of human rights obligations under their respective Conventions. During these sessions – which are public – the Committee meets with government representatives from states under review and engages in interactive dialogues. Discussions are based on various documents, including state reports, replies to the Committee’s List of Issues, civil society organisations’ alternative reports, pre-session information, and other relevant documentation. Observers – including the media and human rights defenders – can attend, but only state representatives and the Committee can speak. The sessions can be viewed online live or after they conclude.
- **Traditional reporting procedure:** In the traditional reporting procedure, state parties are required to submit a state party report and written replies to a list of issues. However, under the Simplified Reporting Procedure, state parties are now only required to submit one report to the Committee, which serves as the reply to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.
- **Treaty accession:** Accession is the act whereby a state accepts the offer or opportunity to become a party to a treaty already negotiated and signed by other states. It has the same legal effects as ratification but happens after the treaty has entered into force.
- **Treaty or convention:** A treaty or convention is an international legally binding agreement among states, where they commit to following requirements under international law. States become parties to a treaty by ratifying it, indicating their approval and agreement to follow its rules. By ratifying a treaty, a state voluntarily agrees to be bound by its provisions, obligating itself under international law to align its laws, policies and practices with those outlined in the treaty.¹
- **Treaty ratification:** Ratification is the international action of giving formal consent to a treaty or convention. Ratifying a treaty makes a state’s commitment to following it legally binding.
- **Treaty signature:** By signing a treaty, a state expresses the intention to comply with it. But this expression of intent is not binding – it needs to be ratified to be legally binding.
- **Troika:** In the Universal Periodic Review, each state review is assisted by groups of three UN Member States known as the troika, who serve as rapporteurs. The troika has two main responsibilities: collecting all preliminary questions from UN Member States and delivering them to the state under review; and helping draft the Working Group’s report with the support of the Human Rights Council Secretariat and the state under review.
- **United Nations Economic and Social Council:** is a principal organ of the UN, responsible for promoting international economic and social cooperation and development. It facilitates discussions and coordination among Member States and specialised agencies to address global economic and social challenges.

1. For more information, see the International Service for Human Rights [Guide on UN treaty bodies](#). You can check the [ratification status](#) by country or by treaty on the OHCHR website.

- **Universal Periodic Review Working Group:** Responsible for conducting reviews at the Human Rights Council. It comprises UN Member States who wish to participate in the Universal Periodic Review, and the delegation of the state under review.
- **United Nations treaty bodies:** The UN treaty bodies are international committees of independent experts (Committee Members) who monitor the implementation of the core international human rights treaties by State Parties. Each treaty body² corresponds to a treaty and performs a variety of functions to ensure that States Parties fulfil their treaty obligations. The treaty bodies review reports from countries on their human rights compliance (known as “state reports”); review information provided by civil society organisations, human rights institutions, UN agencies and other stakeholders to assess the situation in the countries; and give feedback and suggestions to help countries meet their treaty obligations. This is provided both verbally in person through state reviews and in writing (known as “Concluding Observations”).³
- **UN treaty bodies Working Group:** A Working Group consisting of five members nominated by the Chairperson of the each of the UN treaty bodies. Its primary task is to identify key questions that will be the central focus during the review session with representatives of reporting states. The aim is to make the system more efficient and facilitate more targeted preparations.

2. At present, there are 10 treaty bodies monitoring the implementation of the nine core international human rights treaties and one Optional Protocol. You can find more information about the UN treaty bodies on the [OHCHR website](#).

3. You can find more information about the [functions](#) of the UN treaty bodies on the OHCHR website.



1. PREFACE

Child marriage is a persistent challenge, threatening the childhood, rights, autonomy and opportunities of 12 million more girls every year. Through Goal 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, governments around the world committed to end child marriage by 2030 – a commitment which is repeated in numerous other international, regional and national declarations and strategies. What this political commitment involves – ensuring girls’ access to education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, ending gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, and ensuring equality before the law – has a strong foundation in international human rights law.

International human rights treaties are a powerful set of tools for advocates seeking transformative change. By understanding and using the provisions of these treaties, civil society organisations can engage with state reporting mechanisms and hold governments accountable for their legal obligations under international human rights law.

This toolkit is designed to support civil society organisations – including *Girls Not Brides* member organisations – in their vital mission to end child marriage and support girls who are – or have been – married or in a union. It is more than just a compilation of legal texts and procedural guidelines: it is a practical companion, offering actionable steps and promising practices from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations around the globe.

Whether you are a seasoned human rights advocate or a new actor in the field, this resource includes the tools and knowledge you need to use international human rights law and UN human rights mechanisms to advance national-level advocacy and press governments to take action to end child marriage and respect, protect and fulfil girls’ rights.

Georgiana Epure
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Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage



2. INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS TOOLKIT MATTERS AND WHO IT IS FOR

Child marriage is a global issue, with negative impacts on girls and women. This is why international legal frameworks stress the urgent need to reduce prevalence and address these impacts. Four key legal frameworks for advocacy on child marriage are:


1. The **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (CRC Convention) does not explicitly mention child marriage, but it does emphasise ending harmful practices that affect children's wellbeing and rights like education, health and protection from violence.
2. The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (CEDAW Convention) requires states to remove gender bias in marriage and family matters, ensuring equality in the right to marry and freely choose a spouse. This Convention also prohibits child betrothal and marriage, requiring the adoption of laws to set a minimum age of marriage and enforce marriage registration.
3. The **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (CESCR Covenant) highlights the negative impacts of early marriage on rights like health, education and employment. It calls for measures to protect children from social and economic exploitation.
4. The **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** is a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a regular peer review of its human rights records. The UPR provides each state the opportunity to regularly report on the actions they have taken

to improve the human rights situation in their countries, and receive recommendations from UN Member States for continuous improvement. Hundreds of recommendations concerning child marriage have been issued through the UPR, highlighting the growing recognition of the urgent need to address this practice to safeguard girls' and women's rights.

The Committees overseeing these legal frameworks offer many opportunities for civil society organisations to participate in reviewing how states fulfil their human rights obligations, and in pressing for better implementation of human rights law. Incorporating engagement with these human rights monitoring mechanisms into their advocacy strategies can be an effective way for civil society organisations to advance the agenda to end child marriage and support girls and adolescents who are – or have been – married or in a union (ever-married girls).

In this context, *Girls Not Brides* has developed this comprehensive toolkit for member organisations and other civil society organisations working on child marriage to facilitate their engagement with the CRC, CEDAW and CESCR Committees, and the UPR mechanism.

The toolkit is intended to enhance national advocacy strategies addressing child marriage by using recommendations from these international human rights mechanisms, providing a framework for action, and driving transformative change at the national and local levels.



HOW THE TOOLKIT IS STRUCTURED

This toolkit is structured into four main sections, one for each key human rights monitoring mechanism: the CRC Committee, CEDAW Committee, CESCR Committee, and the UPR. You can view it as one text, or view each chapter as a standalone section. It includes all the relevant information to engage with these mechanisms at all stages of the reporting cycle.

The sections related to the CRC, CEDAW, and CESCR Committees (UN treaty bodies – UNTBs) are organised as follows:

1. Introduction to each mechanism
2. Articles of the Convention/Covenant, Optional Protocols and General Comments/ Recommendations relevant for child marriage advocacy
3. A practical, step-by-step guide on how the Committee's reporting process works and how civil society organisations can engage with it
4. Examples of promising practice and learning shared from *Girls Not Brides* member organisations
5. A guide to writing a civil society organisation report for these mechanisms

The section related to the UPR is organised as follows:

1. Introduction to the UPR
2. Understanding the links between child marriage and the UPR
3. The UPR cycle explained
4. Step-by-step guide on how civil society organisations can engage with the UPR
5. Guiding examples for UPR civil society organisation submissions
6. A guide to writing a civil society organisation report for the UPR

Key for this toolkit

Because civil society organisations have different capacities to engage with these human rights mechanisms, this toolkit uses a traffic light system to help prioritise advocacy actions:



Highly recommended

and



Recommended

However, these suggestions are flexible and should be adapted according to your organisation's capacity and advocacy strategies with international human rights mechanisms.

Other icons to look out for:



TOOLBOX! Useful resources



SCHEDULE: Timeline for action



TIP! Helpful to know



LINKS to text above



HOW TO: Supporting guidance



ACTION: Step to take



IMPORTANT! Key information



CASE STUDY: Good practice example



GET IN TOUCH

If you have any questions or need support in using this toolkit, reach out to the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat at info@girlsnotbrides.org. Write "UN Treaty Bodies/UPR toolkit" in the subject line.

If you spot any inaccuracies or mistakes, or would like to share any insights from your advocacy work, please let us know! We value continuous improvement and embrace an inclusive approach to shared learning. Your feedback is essential in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of our collective work.



3. USING HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING MECHANISMS FOR STATE ACCOUNTABILITY IN ADDRESSING CHILD MARRIAGE

WHY ENGAGING WITH UN TREATY BODIES AND THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW IS KEY FOR STATE ACCOUNTABILITY AROUND CHILD MARRIAGE

“Engaging with these mechanisms goes beyond simply holding the state accountable and driving local impact. It’s also about recognising the value of organising the everyday information we generate as civil society organisations. During the development of these reports, we recognised the urgent need for advocacy in certain areas, and this made us think how we could broaden the scope of our network.”

Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia (Child and Adolescent Rights Coordinator, CDIA), Girls Not Brides member organisation in Paraguay that engaged in the CRC and the UPR processes between 2020 and 2023

By becoming parties to international human rights treaties, states adopt obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights:

- The obligation to respect means states must not interfere with or limit the enjoyment of human rights.
- The obligation to protect requires states to protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses.
- The obligation to fulfil means states must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of basic human rights.

By ratifying international human rights treaties, governments are legally bound to put in place domestic measures and legislation to implement their treaty obligations and duties. UN treaty bodies (UNTB) and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism regularly (every 4-5 years) review states’ implementation and compliance with their obligations, so ensuring everyone in the state can enjoy the rights set out in the treaties ratified by the state.

Engaging with the UNTB reviews and the UPR is a critical step in holding states accountable for their human rights obligations and in addressing child marriage. Civil society organisations play a pivotal role in this process by contributing with thematic and contextual expertise, including grassroots perspectives. Civil society organisations are essential partners in complementing state reporting and influencing the UNTBs and UPR recommendations. They ensure governments uphold their commitments to address child marriage, and advocate for tangible actions to end this practice and ensure girls’ rights are fulfilled.

By amplifying the voices of girls and adolescents directly affected by child marriage, civil society organisations ensure their concerns are heard by these mechanisms. Collaborative engagement with civil society organisations makes the UNTB and UPR processes more robust, inclusive and effective.

Civil society organisations can also promote public awareness by sharing state reports and advocating for the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations coming out of these review processes. At the local level, discussions around child marriage contribute to policy influence and the creation of transformative spaces for girls and adolescents.

3.1 ENGAGING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS BETWEEN CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) monitors the implementation of the [International Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the most [ratified](#) convention in the world.

The Convention on the Right of the Child does not directly address child marriage, but nearly the whole Convention is relevant to protecting children’s rights from violations occurring in the context of child marriage, like education, health, protection from sexual abuse, the right to be heard, the right to birth registration, and the right to play, among others.



TIP! Highlight the Convention articles relevant to child marriage

When engaging with the CRC, it is crucial to highlight the articles of the Convention that are most relevant to child marriage. This will guide you and your organisation in preparing your written reports and in influencing the monitoring of child marriage prevalence as a threat to children’s rights in your country. We have highlighted these relevant articles in the table below. You can build an evidence-based report using the resources in the Toolbox on p. 17.

Table 1: Overview of the Convention on the Rights of the Child articles most relevant for child marriage

Convention on the Rights of the Child articles related to child marriage	Relevance to child marriage
<p>Article 2: Right to non-discrimination.</p> <p>The rights set out in the Convention apply to every child, whatever their race, colour, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, disability, or any other status.</p>	<p>Protection from child marriage should be equally ensured to all children, irrespective of their identity.</p>
<p>Article 3: Best interest of the child.</p> <p>In all decisions and actions, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.⁴</p>	<p>Child marriage compromises the best interests of the child. It often denies children and adolescents a voice in decisions around if, when and whom to marry, and fails to consider what is best for them according to their age.</p> <p>This practice can deny children the power to make and act on their decisions – that is, their agency – and perpetuates harmful cycles that can have lasting impacts on their wellbeing and development.</p>
<p>Article 6: Right to survival and development of the child.</p> <p>Every child has the right to survive, and the state must do all it can to ensure that children survive and develop to the full extent possible.</p>	<p>Child marriage can have lasting consequences on the health, wellbeing and rights of girls. Evidence strongly suggests that it is closely associated with a range of negative outcomes, including lower educational attainment, early and more frequent pregnancies, intimate partner violence, maternal and child mortality, increased rates of sexually transmitted infections, intergenerational poverty, and lack of decision-making power and opportunities.</p>

4. As stressed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (General Comment No. 14 (2013), para. 6.), “the best interests of the child” is a threefold concept: it is a substantive right, a fundamental interpretative legal principle, and a rule of procedure. Assessing and determining the best interests of the child requires procedural guarantees. States must explain what criteria have been used and how the child’s best interests have been weighed against other considerations when developing policy that affects children.

<p>Article 7: Right to birth registration.</p> <p>Every child has the right to a name, a nationality and, as far as possible, to be cared for by their parents.</p> <p>Article 8: Right to identity. Every child has the right to their identity – including their nationality, name and family relationships.</p>	<p>Children without legal identities are put at risk of child marriage because they have no proof of age, and may find it harder to register for protective services like education. This is particularly true for girls who are displaced or refugees.</p> <p>Child marriage may lead to the separation of children from their birth families, affecting their ability to know and be cared for by their parents. In some cases, married girls may move – sometimes under force – to another location, potentially affecting their nationality or the recognition of their nationality rights.</p> <p>When an early marriage takes place, the child's identity is often shaped and constrained by their marital status, hindering the development of a unique and self-determined identity.</p> <p>Child marriage may also disrupt the natural course of identity formation by pushing children into adult roles prematurely.</p>
<p>Article 19: Right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect.</p> <p>The state should do all it can to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse by their parents or anyone else who looks for them.</p>	<p>Child marriage is legally recognised as a form of gender-based violence. It puts children at greater risk of physical, emotional and psychological harm from their partner and partner's family.</p> <p>In many cases, married girls may be subjected to forced sexual relations within the context of marriage. This constitutes a form of sexual abuse.</p> <p>The prevalence of child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence increase in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.</p>
<p>Article 24: Right to health and healthcare.</p> <p>The state should take all measures to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.</p>	<p>Child marriage has negative impacts on children's physical and mental health and wellbeing, and particularly girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights. Pregnant adolescents and young mothers are more at risk of health complications – and even death – during pregnancy and childbirth. Their children's health also suffers.</p>
<p>Article 27: Right to an adequate standard of living.</p> <p>Every child has the right to a decent standard of living so they can grow and develop.</p>	<p>Child marriage limits children's right to develop physically, mentally and socially in a safe environment. The economic consequences of child marriage can increase the risks associated with poverty.</p> <p>Limited educational and economic opportunities for married and parenting girls contribute to a cycle of poverty, impacting on girls and their children.</p>

<p>Article 28: Right to education.</p> <p>Every child has the right to education. Primary education should be compulsory and free. Different forms of secondary education should be available and accessible to every child.</p>	<p>Once married, girls are very unlikely to remain in or return to school. Girls who are not in school are also more likely to marry before age 18.</p> <p>Married and parenting girls – particularly those who are displaced or refugees – face many practical barriers to education, including unpaid household and care work, stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep them at home.</p> <p>Pregnant and parenting girls may leave or be excluded from school because of national laws, a lack of support for re-enrolment and stigma.</p>
<p>Article 34: Sexual exploitation and abuse.</p> <p>Every child must be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.</p>	<p>Child marriage often involves age and power imbalances and coercion, where children may lack the ability to negotiate, refuse or make independent decisions about their sexual lives.</p> <p>The coercive elements within child marriage contribute to an environment that tends towards sexual exploitation and abuse.</p> <p>The risks are heightened for girls living in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.</p>

Relevant CRC General Comments related to child marriage

The CRC develops General Comments with additional guidance and interpretation about specific articles of the Convention, related themes and state's obligations.

General Comments are resources for civil society organisations in the reporting cycle. They provide additional information on how the CRC frames and interprets certain issues, like child marriage and related rights and policy areas relevant under the Convention. Civil society organisations can also use General Comments to frame their reports and as advocacy tools to further influence the state.

The CRC and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted a joint General Comment/Recommendation, revised in 2019, which offers crucial insights into the rights of children concerning harmful practices, explicitly defining child and forced marriage as such. There are other General Comments that are directly relevant to human rights violations in the context of child marriage.

Relevant CRC General Comments regarding child marriage and associated children's rights violations

- General Comment No. 4, on [adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (adopted in 2003)
- General Comment No. 13, on [the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#) (adopted in 2011)
- General Comment No. 14, [on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration](#) (adopted in 2013, article 3, paragraph 1)
- General Comment No. 15, [on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health](#) (adopted in 2013, article 24)
- Joint General Comment No. 18 of the CRC and General Recommendation No. 31 of the CEDAW, [on harmful practices](#) (adopted in 2014)
- General Comment No. 20, [on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#) (adopted in 2016)
- General Comment No. 19, [on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights](#) (adopted in 2016, article 4)
- Joint General Comment No. 18 of the CRC and General Recommendation No. 31 of the CEDAW, [on harmful practices](#) (revised version, adopted in 2019)

Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child

There are three Optional Protocols to the Convention, but not all states that ratified the Convention have ratified the Protocols. Optional Protocols are additional treaties that either further address something in the original Convention, or address something the Convention does not mention:

1. **Optional Protocol on the [sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#):** Defines the “sale of children”, specifying that it is when a child is exchanged for money or other benefits.

In 2019, the CEDAW and CRC Committees jointly affirmed in General Recommendation No. 31/ General Comment No. 18 that child and forced marriages are considered “sale of children” under this Protocol.

The Protocol emphasises that state parties to the Protocol have explicit obligations regarding child and/or forced marriages – including where dowry payments or bride prices are offered – as they could be construed as a sale of children.

2. **Optional Protocol on the [involvement of children in armed conflict](#):** Increases the protection of children during armed conflicts.
3. **Optional Protocol on a [communications procedure](#):** Upholds children's entitlement to seek protection and redress through a dedicated international mechanism in cases of rights violations, including instances of child marriage.

ENGAGING WITH THE CRC REPORTING CYCLE



TOOLBOX! Resources to ensure your reports are based in the evidence

You can use these resources to build an evidence-based report, and to define what issues and follow-up questions you want to be addressed through the CRC review process.

Country-level data:

- The *Girls Not Brides* [child marriage atlas](#) has information on child marriage prevalence, drivers and laws per country.
- UNICEF [child marriage country profiles](#) include statistics on prevalence, characteristics of unions and insights into the lives of married girls by country.
- [Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism](#) showcases global, regional and national-level data and trends, disaggregated to highlight disparities within and among countries based on household wealth, educational attainment, rural or urban residence and subnational region.

Thematic briefs and evidence reviews:

- Brief and evidence review on the [impact of the law on child marriage and girls' rights](#).
- Brief and thematic paper on [supporting girls who are married, pregnant and parenting](#).
- Brief and thematic paper on [girls' education and child marriage](#).
- Research Spotlight and poster on [education interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Blog outlining successful approaches and key resources on child marriage in [humanitarian settings](#).

The CRC reporting cycle – what is it?

The CRC monitors states' progress in fulfilling their obligations on children's human rights through a reporting cycle that includes the review of information provided by:

- Civil society organisations in the country.
- A report provided by the state.
- One pre-sessional working group (online or in person), with invited representatives from civil society organisations, UN agencies and other stakeholders working on child rights.
- A session with the state representatives to review progress and challenges of implementation in more detail.

The CRC applies the **simplified reporting procedure** to almost all state parties, aiming to reduce the reporting burden on states while enabling the CRC to concentrate on priority issues.⁵ The step-by-step guide to engaging, which begins on p.21 follows this simplified reporting procedure.



Sessions take place about **three times a year**, in-person in Geneva, Switzerland, typically in January/February, May/June, and September/October. States are reviewed in one session.



TIP! To find out which states are currently under review [check this webpage](#).

5. From 1 January 2024, the CRC applies the [simplified reporting procedure](#) to all periodic reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and for initial reports under the Optional Protocols. As of September 2023, Angola, Bolivia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Mexico and Myanmar [opted out](#) from the simplified reporting procedure and will be reviewed under the traditional reporting procedure.

Key moments for engaging with the CRC

Civil society organisations play a pivotal role in the reporting cycle on children's rights. Organisations can contribute at any stage, even if they have not participated in earlier stages. The more alternative and rich information the CRC receive from civil society organisations, the greater the possibility of counterbalancing the information presented by the state and therefore ensuring CRC members have a realistic picture of the child's rights situation in the country under review, including the prevalence of child marriage and efforts – or lack of efforts – to address it.

The main goal of engaging with the CRC is to ensure that it includes child marriage in its questions to the state and in its Concluding Observations at the end of the cycle. The Concluding Observations contain specific recommendations for states to advance the implementation of the Convention and respect, protect and fulfil children's rights. The CRC's recommendations represent a valuable and authoritative tool for civil society organisations to use in their national advocacy on ending child marriage and press governments to adopt necessary measures to address this issue politically, legally and/or financially.



This is the **List of Issues Prior to Reporting** under the simplified reporting procedure, or the **List of Issues** under the traditional reporting procedure.

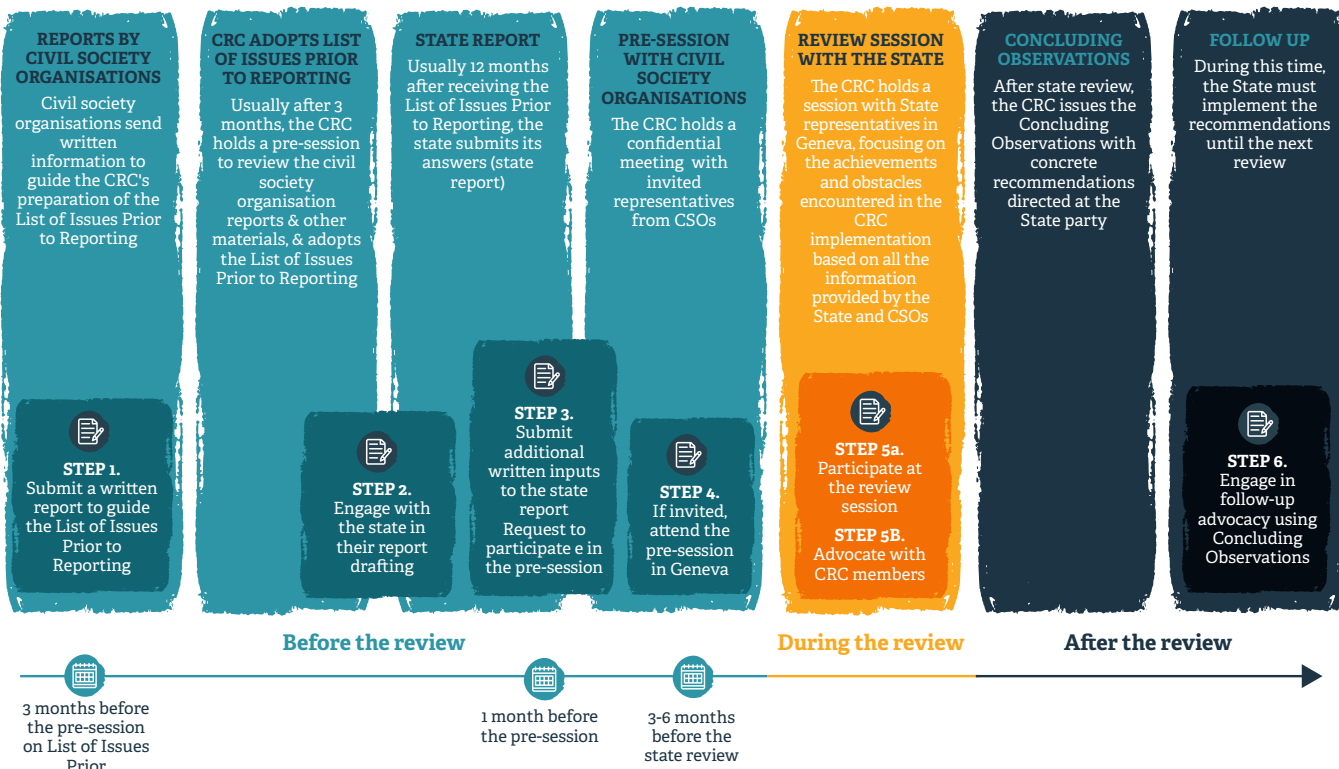


TIP! Child Rights Connect has more resources and support on their website

[Child Rights Connect](#) is an independent Geneva-based non-profit network working to ensure all children can fully enjoy their rights as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They develop resources for civil society organisations to engage with the Convention, and support engagement and facilitate platforms for civil society organisations to advocate directly with the CRC – check out their website!

Figure 1: Overview of key entry points for engaging with the CRC

SIMPLIFIED REPORTING PROCEDURE



TRADITIONAL REPORTING PROCEDURE

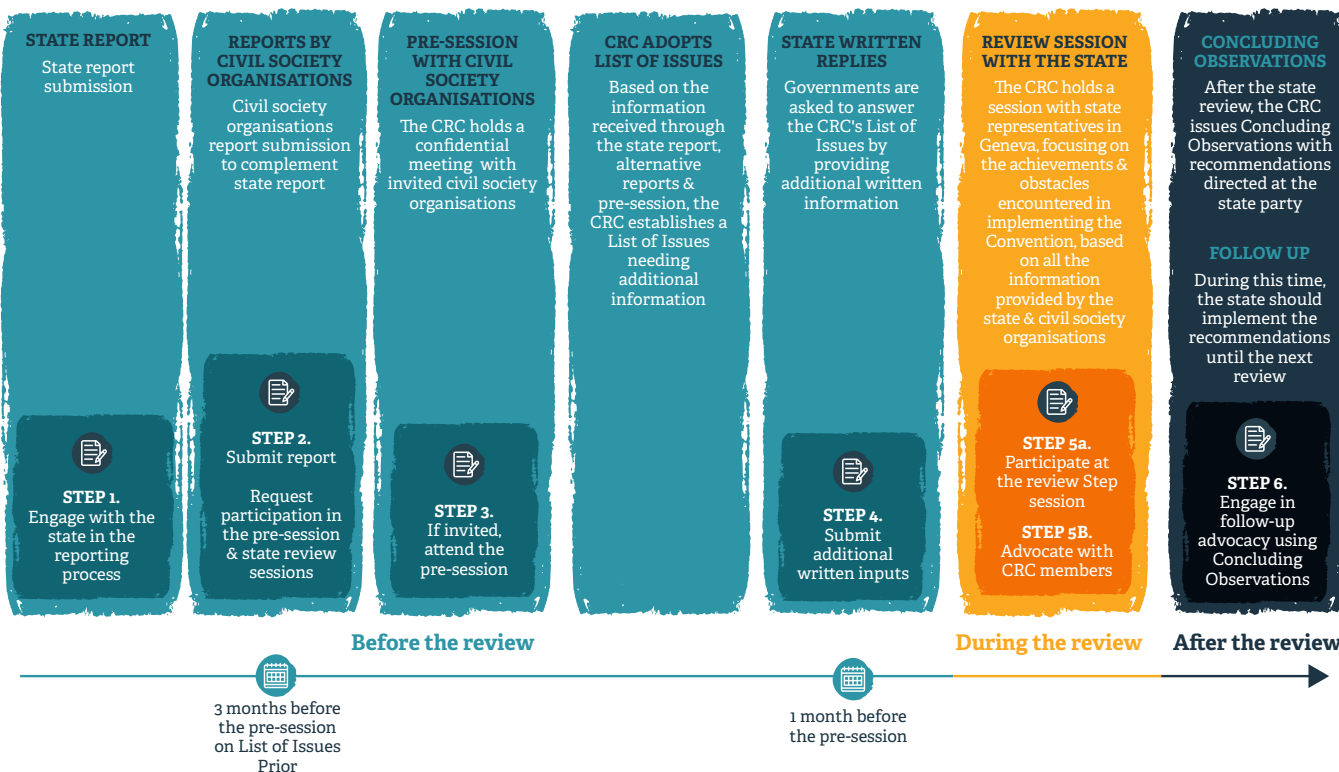


Figure 2: Example CRC review timeline under the simplified reporting procedure – The Zambia examination⁶

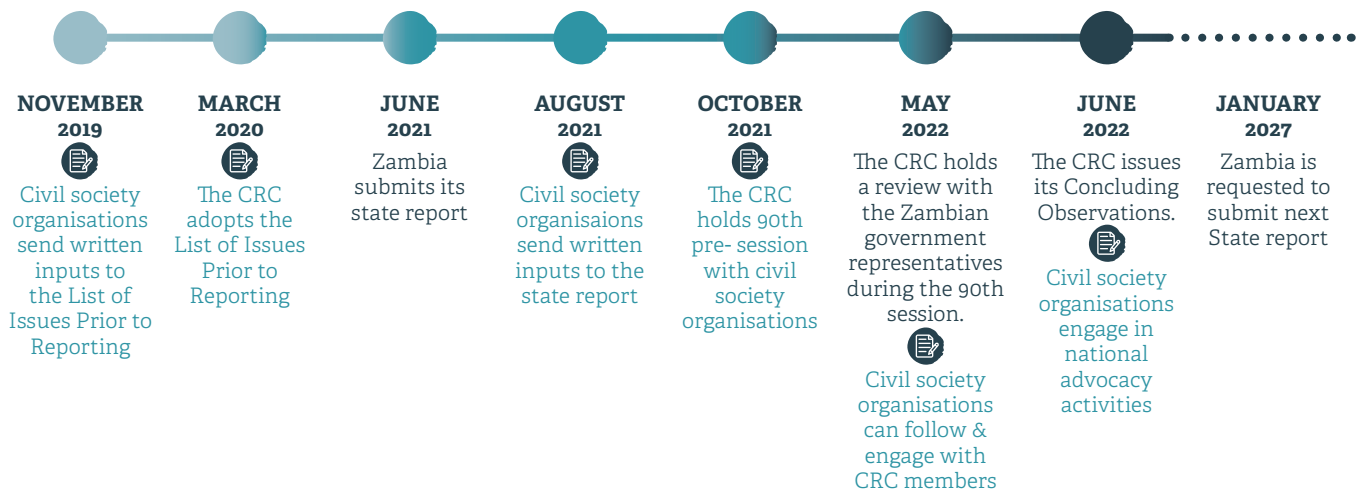
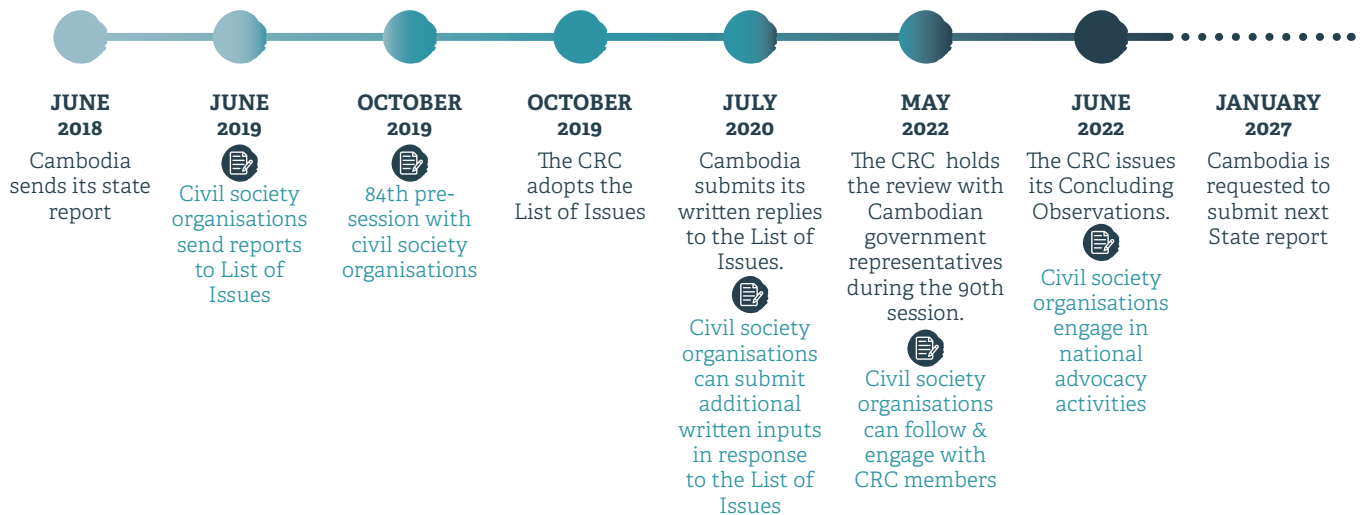


Figure 3: Example CRC review timeline under the traditional reporting procedure – The Cambodia examination



7. Find out more in this Save the Children [case study](#).

BEFORE THE REVIEW



STEP 0.

CHECK THE SCHEDULED STATE SESSION AND THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF EACH SESSION (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



HOW TO: You can check the schedule of sessions on the OHCHR [website](#).



TIP! If you are not sure which reporting procedure (simplified or traditional) your state will be reviewed through, you can contact Child Rights Connect at crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org.



STEP 1.

SUBMIT A WRITTEN REPORT WITH INPUTS TO THE LIST OF ISSUES PRIOR TO REPORTING/LIST OF ISSUES (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

This is a key step in influencing the state report. Civil society organisations can submit reports with questions they would like the CRC to include in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting/List of Issues.

Engaging with the CRC at this stage is crucial to advocate for child marriage to be part of the reporting agenda. Civil society information related to child marriage can significantly impact whether this topic will be included in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting/ List of Issues and monitored by the CRC, and whether the CRC will issue recommendations for states to take measures on this issue.



Submit your report **3 months** before the pre-session on the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.



HOW TO: Prepare a CRC written report

Structure of the report:

Follow the structure on p.29.

Civil society organisations' written reports can be comprehensive (up to 10,000 words) or thematic (up to 3,000 words). Reports from child-led organisations can use alternative formats and have no word limit when in writing.

The articles of the Convention are grouped as clusters, which are set out in the reporting guidelines for states. They correspond to the order the discussion will take at the session between the CRC and the state. Following the same order in your report will help the CRC to compare information in the state report with your written submissions, and others.⁷



REMEMBER! You do not have to mention all clusters – only those relevant to child marriage, based on your analysis. Given the relevant articles laid out in the table on p.13-15, your report could focus on these clusters:

- General principles (art. 2, 3, 6, 12)
- Civil rights and freedoms (art. 7, 8)
- Violence against children (art. 24 (3), 28 (2), 34)
- Disability, basic health, and welfare (art. 6 (2), 24)
- Education, leisure, and cultural activities (art. 28)

What to include: Identify emerging trends and highlight key issues you want to see reflected in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting. You can also propose questions with contextual information and statistical data where relevant.

7. For more information on clusters, see the [CRC guidelines](#).



TIP! Use the toolbox of resources on p. * to build an evidence-based report.

Where & how to submit your report:

- Submit your report electronically through the Child Rights Connect [online platform](#). The report should be titled: “[Name of organisation_NGO_Country_PSWG].
- Clearly indicate if your report is confidential or public. Public reports will be posted on the CRC’s website.

When to submit your report:

- Civil society organisations are requested to submit their reports **three months before** the CRC adopts the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.
- The state party is requested to submit its replies (in the state party report) **one year after** the CRC adopts the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.



Deadlines for civil society reports and written submissions – Simplified reporting procedure:

Civil society alternative reports for the adoption of the List of Issues Prior to Reporting	Additional reports for the pre-session
1 Dec <i>February pre-session</i>	1 Dec <i>February pre-session</i>
1 April <i>June pre-session</i>	1 April <i>June pre-session</i>
1 August <i>October pre-session</i>	1 August <i>October pre-session</i>



Deadlines for written submissions – Traditional reporting procedure:

Civil society alternative reports for the pre-session	Additional submissions between the pre-session working group and the session
1 November <i>February pre-session</i>	15 December <i>January session</i>
1 March <i>June pre-session</i>	15 April <i>May session</i>
1 July <i>October pre-session</i>	15 August <i>September session</i>



TIP! Collaborate with other civil society organisations to draft a joint report

Building partnerships and coalitions increases the credibility of the report and the likelihood that the CRC will consider the issues it raises in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting and Concluding Observations.

Engage with *Girls Not Brides* [member organisations](#), communities and girls in your country, and liaise with UN agencies and other organisations working on children's rights. Building coalitions can be an effective tool for sharing knowledge and information, especially when your organisation does not have the expertise, data or resources to advocate with the CRC.

Depending on your organisation's resources and ways of working, you could collaborate with other organisations on the written report in:

- 1. Preparation:** Establish a knowledge-sharing foundation, where civil society organisations are brought together to exchange information and build mutual trust.
- 2. Holding consultations:** Engage with communities and girls – especially those affected by child marriage – through discussions and awareness campaigns. These interactions are crucial for identifying current trends and critical issues that need highlighting in the report.
- 3. Prioritising issues:** Analyse the insights gathered through consultation, alongside data and research from other civil society organisations, governmental sources, independent national entities, and human rights institutions. This analysis should identify priority issues, including the prevalence, causes, impacts and solutions to child marriage.
- 4. Drafting & validation:** Report writing should be a collaborative effort among organisations working on defending child rights, including those addressing child marriage. Girls, boys and adolescents who have been directly impacted by child marriage should be directly included, as should youth-led organisations.

You can collectively facilitate the drafting process by holding regular meetings over a month. Once the report is written, it should be validated by all contributing parties to ensure it accurately represents the collective findings and recommendations, including those you might have contributed around child marriage.



HOW TO: Involve children in CRC reporting

Children and adolescents under age 18 – especially girls affected by child marriage – have unique insights into their rights and can express these through various formats. They are encouraged to submit alternative reports or creative expressions to the CRC, including films, studies or art. If direct submission is not possible, they can contribute to reports prepared by adults. Their participation should align with the CRC's principles for the involvement of children.



See this [Child Rights Connect guide](#) on how to engage children in the CRC reporting process.



IMPORTANT! If you plan to include children and young people in these processes, you must have an appropriate safeguarding procedure in place to ensure their safety. Assess the risks associated with this involvement, especially in countries where there is backlash against human rights defenders.



If you wish to engage girls and young people affected by child marriage, you can use *Girls Not Brides* [safeguarding standards](#) as a guide.



CASE STUDY: Elevating youth voices in CRC advocacy, Paraguay

CDIA – a member of *Girls Not Brides* in Paraguay – started a transformative journey to draft a children’s report for the CRC in 2023. The report was guided by children’s and adolescents’ voices, experiences and understanding of the most important child rights issues in Paraguay.

In the words of one of the project leads:

“This collaborative process, from inception to closure, exemplifies the true essence of child rights advocacy – where children and adolescents are not just heard, but actively participate in shaping policy.”



STEP 2.

ENGAGE WITH THE STATE IN THEIR REPORTING PROCESS (RECOMMENDED)

This is a strategic opportunity for civil society organisations to establish a foundation for meaningful and sustained participation in the reporting cycle.



HOW TO: Engage with the state reporting process:⁸

1. Engage with government officials:

- Reach out to government representatives – especially those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – to check their progress on the state report.
- Remind them of their deadlines and advocate for the inclusion of child marriage in their report.
- Recommend they undertake national consultations with girls and adolescents, community leaders and experts in the field of child marriage to supplement the state report.

2. Formulate a media strategy & promote national discourse: Publicise the state report once it has been submitted, using it as a catalyst to spark national discourse around child marriage.

3. Advocate for girls’ & adolescents’ participation:

- Provide advice on how to involve girls – particularly those affected by child marriage – in the reporting process.
- Facilitate workshops or forums where girls can voice their experiences and recommendations.



IMPORTANT! Remember to do this safely – see the guidance on p.23.



STEP 3.

SUBMIT ADDITIONAL WRITTEN INPUTS TO THE STATE REPORT (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

When the CRC receives the state report, civil society organisations can submit their own reports or comments, questions and proposed recommendations for the state review.



REMEMBER! Civil society organisations can engage at any point in the process, even if they have not done so before.



Submit your additional report **one month before** the pre-session with civil society organisations.

8. For more information on the State report visit: <https://csrcreporting.childrightsconnect.org/srp-state-report/>

HOW TO: Prepare an additional written report

These additional reports can be comprehensive (up to 10,000 words) or thematic (up to 3,000 words). Reports from child-led organisations can use multiple formats and have no word limit when in writing.⁹

They follow the same structure as the civil society organisation reports sent in Step 1 (see p.21-23) and focus on the recommendations civil society organisations would like the CRC to put forward to the state during review.

What to include:

For the simplified reporting procedure, your organisation should prepare their second submission by updating their first List of Issues Prior to Reporting submission, with detailed information about:

- topics
- new developments
- comments on the state report
- policy, legal and or/budgetary gaps
- proposed recommendations for the CRC's Concluding Observations

This ensures the CRC has relevant, accurate and up-to-date information around child marriage and policy related areas.



When to submit your written inputs: One month before the CRC pre-session with civil society organisations.



Request to participate: If you would like to participate in the in-person pre-session in Geneva, make a request to the CRC's Secretariat through the Child Rights Connect online platform when you submit your report.



STEP 4.

ATTEND THE PRE-SESSION IN GENEVA (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF INVITED)

The CRC usually invites a limited number of civil society representatives per country to the pre-session, with around 12 participants.

Invited civil society organisations can share information and express concerns directly to the CRC. Participation in the pre-session is by invitation only, as it is a closed meeting between CRC members and civil society organisations. States do not participate in this session, ensuring both independence and the security of the participants.



You should have made a request to participate when you submitted your report (Step 3), **one month before** the pre-session.



The pre-session takes place **3 months before** the state review session.



HOW TO: Participate in a pre-session in Geneva

Child Rights Connect will guide civil society organisations selected to participate in the pre-session through the whole process, including for registration and other logistics.¹⁰

9. OHCHR. [Information for civil society, NGOs and NHRIs.](#)

10. For more information, see Child Rights Connect, 2020, [Handbook for adults participating in the pre-session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.](#)



Case study: Ensuring children’s meaningful participation at a CRC pre-session in Geneva

After submitting the children’s report (see case study on p.24), CDIA supported the group to select three girls to represent them at the CRC pre-session in Geneva. They made this decision together with the other children and adolescents involved, making sure everyone’s voice was heard and their safety was a top priority.

Before facing the CRC members, the girls were thoroughly prepared to boost their confidence and ensure they were ready for the task ahead. Safeguarding measures were also put in place to protect their security and identities.

Their participation shed light on inconsistencies in the state of Paraguay’s information, and highlighted the vital role children and adolescents play in such important discussions. It was a powerful reminder of the significance of children’s active and meaningful engagement in shaping the policies that affect their lives.

DURING THE REVIEW



STEP 5A.

PARTICIPATE AT THE REVIEW SESSION WITH THE STATE (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)

Although direct speaking roles are reserved for state representatives and the CRC, participating as an observer at the review session provides valuable advocacy opportunities. Civil society organisations can monitor the government’s compliance with its child’s rights obligations, including to end child marriage.



TIP! If you cannot attend the review session in Geneva, there are other ways to engage online:

1. **Follow the review sessions online** through the official UN Webcast and Child Rights Connect’s [social media](#).
2. **Organise meetings** with girls and civil society organisations to watch the live streaming of the session.
3. **Send live comments to your colleagues** attending the session or to Child Rights Connect at crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org.
4. **Share your thoughts publicly** by giving group or individual press interviews, sharing live comments through social media or drafting press releases.
5. **Access recordings and summaries after the session:**
 - All country sessions are recorded and archived by session number on the [UN Webcast](#).
 - A summary transcription – or “summary record” – of each state review is also published after the session on the CRC’s [session page](#).
 - Child Rights Connect also produce their own [summary country reports](#).



STEP 5B.

ADVOCATE DIRECTLY WITH CRC MEMBERS IN GENEVA¹¹ (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)



HOW TO: Engage directly with CRC members

1. **Use breaks during the review sessions** to inform CRC members about your concerns regarding the state’s actions around child marriage, so influencing the ongoing dialogue.
2. **Arrange informal lunchtime briefings** to discuss your concerns with CRC members and advocate for the inclusion of specific issues and questions on child marriage in the dialogue with the state.



TIP! Contact the Secretariat of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at ohchr-crc@un.org

11. Child Rights Connect, 2020, [Handbook for adults monitoring and engaging in a country session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#), pp. 7-8.

AFTER THE REVIEW



STEP 6.

ENGAGE IN FOLLOW-UP ADVOCACY USING THE CRC CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

Now you can use the power of the CRC's recommendations in your national advocacy with government and local authorities.



HOW TO: Use the CRC's recommendations in your national advocacy

- 1. Conduct consultations** with relevant government departments, human rights institutions, Ombudsperson, and other entities to assess the State Party's compliance with its obligations and recommendations under the CRC, focusing on child marriage.
- 2. Share the Concluding Observations:** depending on your organisation's advocacy strategies and the context of operation, you can:
 - Create and distribute simplified versions of the Concluding Observations, emphasising the CRC's recommendations on child marriage and other relevant issues like education and health.
 - Translate these into local languages and publicise them widely, especially in regions where child marriage is prevalent.
 - Consider hosting a press conference to increase public awareness and push for action.
- 3. Advocate for the implementation of the Concluding Observations by collaborating with government bodies:**
 - Involve parliamentarians in debating the implementation of the recommendations.
 - Generate annual reports on progress towards ending child marriage and supporting girls who are – or have been – married or in a union.
 - Involve affected children and adolescents – particularly girls – in the monitoring and advocacy process, if the context allows for meaningful and safe participation.
- 4. Feed back on the Concluding Observations to the CRC:**
 - Focus on the sections addressing child marriage and associated child rights like education and health. Highlight the relevance and precision of the CRC's observations and recommendations.
 - Send (detailed) written feedback on the Concluding Observations to Child Rights Connect at crcreporting@childrightsconnect.org. Use the subject title "Feedback on Concluding Observations – [name of the state concerned] – [number of the session concerned]".



TIP! The toolbox of resources on p.17 should support you to develop evidence-based national advocacy.



CASE STUDY: The benefits of engaging in CRC reporting as a collective, *Girls Not Brides Nepal*

In 2023, *Girls Not Brides Nepal* – the National Partnership to End Child Marriage in Nepal – engaged in the CRC reporting process to ensure child marriage was included in the state report. They recognised the value of reporting as a collective, including:

- Increased recognition of *Girls Not Brides Nepal* as technical experts on child marriage, fostering more visibility among key stakeholders dedicated to addressing child marriage and supporting child rights.
- Forging new partnerships and alliances across various levels, amplifying efforts to end child marriage.
- More opportunities for direct advocacy with national and local authorities to strengthen initiatives to end child marriage.
- A deeper understanding of the CRC's relevance for their work, thanks to capacity enhancement focused on engaging with the CRC report.
- New channels for advocacy with government representatives, leading to the dissemination of report outcomes and furthering comprehensive efforts to address child marriage.



CASE STUDY: Insights on using the whole CRC reporting cycle to boost national advocacy strategies, CDIA, Paraguay

In 2023, CDIA engaged in the CRC reporting process, building on their experience from the 2020 Universal Periodic Review. They submitted three distinct alternative reports:

1. A [comprehensive report on children's rights violations](#).
2. A thematic report on the sexual and reproductive rights of children and adolescents.¹²
3. A report directly from children and adolescents.¹³

Reflecting on their journey, CDIA emphasised several key needs for civil society organisations participating in similar processes:

- Clear guidance on deadlines, steps to follow and available funding.
- Strategies for staying informed about report submissions and connecting with relevant organisations. They identified accessible information and updated guidelines as essential needs, alongside funding support.
- An experienced team to guide the process (Child Rights Connect), especially concerning engagement with children and adolescents.
- Requesting alternative data to counter official state narratives



TIP! Learn from impactful civil society organisation public reports to the CRC


- **England.** Comprehensive report for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting. [England civil society submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to inform its List of Issues Prior to Reporting \(LOIPR\)](#), December 2020, Pre-session no. 88.
- **England.** Comprehensive report for the session. [UK implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Civil society alternative report](#), Session no. 93.
- **Bolivia.** Children-led report. [Alternative report on the rights of the child by Defence for Children International](#), December 2020, Pre-session no. 88.

12. Not published due to safeguarding concerns.

13. Not published due to safeguarding concerns.

HOW TO: Structure & write a CRC written report

Below is an outline structure for a civil society organisation CRC written report, with descriptions of what content to include in each section.

 **TIP!** You can use the resources in the toolkit on p.17 to write an evidence-based report.

1. Title page, including:

- Title of the report, including the state you are reporting on, the treaty and the time period covered by the report. For example, "Civil society written submission to the CRC on [Country name] for the [Number of pre-session or session]."
- Name of the organisation(s) submitting the report.
- Date of submission.
- Contact information.
- If the report is available in more than one language or in a longer version, title of the other/original reports.
- If the report is confidential or not

2. Table of contents.

3. Executive summary, including:

- A description of the main outcomes of your analysis.
- A brief overview of the main developments and challenges.

4. Introduction, including:

- Background, including:
 - The name of the organisation(s)/collective that produced the report.
 - Information about the general situation of child marriage in the state under review.
 - The period of analysis.
- Methodology (a short description). Some possible methodologies include:
 - A desk review of national legal frameworks
 - Review of government programmes and activities
 - Number of stakeholders consulted for data collection and report drafting (if any)
 - Number of children consulted (if any)
 - Methodology for data collection or review (if possible; could be focus groups, workshops, consultations with stakeholders, survey, etc.)

5. Analysis based on clusters:

- As outlined on p.21, you do not have to mention all clusters – only those relevant to child marriage, based on your legal analysis. Referring to the table of CRC articles concerning child marriage on p.13-15, your report could focus on:
 - General principles (art.2,3,6,12)
 - Civil rights and freedoms (art.7,8)
 - Violence against children (24(3), 28(2), 34)
 - Disability, basic health, and welfare (art. 6(2), art. 24, 24(3))
 - Education, leisure, and cultural activities (art. 28-)
- For the analysis:
 - Illustrate any gaps in law and/or practice using case studies or data on child marriage violations that highlight weaknesses which need to be strengthened.
 - Provide information of challenges and policies that may be lacking in the country in terms of child marriage and its impact of child rights.

- For the written submission to the state report, provide comments to the state report, offering the civil society perspective on:
 - Promising state practices
 - Gaps and challenges in the implementation of legislation and policies
 - Brief updates on the implementation of previous CRC recommendations

6. Sources of information. Data can be obtained in many ways, including:

- Primary data collection through interviews, group discussions, consultations with stakeholders, desk review of relevant documents, photographic and recording devices or surveys.
- Secondary sources like government or UNICEF data on child marriage.
- Policy briefs and other materials from UN agencies and civil society organisations working on child marriage. Examples include the Girls Not Brides Child Marriage Atlas and Resource Centre, the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism, Plan International, Human Rights Watch, CARE International, World Vision, and Save the Children etc.

7. Targeted questions/recommendations. Offer a brief list of specific issues, questions or recommendations, tailored to whether it is a written input for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting, or a more comprehensive report for the state report.

3.2 ENGAGING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS BETWEEN CHILD MARRIAGE AND THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Convention) marked a significant milestone for girls' and women's rights movements. It emphasises the principle that girls' and women's rights are human rights, and highlights the importance of gender equality globally.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) monitors the implementation of the Convention, which includes an article specifically addressing the right to marriage and family, and the issue of child marriage, alongside other rights of girls and women, like education, health and the principle of non-discrimination.



TIP! Highlight the Convention articles relevant to child marriage

When engaging with the CEDAW, providing detailed and evidence-based information about child marriage, and connecting this with the most relevant articles of the Convention is crucial. This will guide you in preparing your written reports, and in influencing the monitoring of child marriage in your country. We have highlighted these relevant articles in the table below. You can build an evidence-based report using the resources in the Toolbox on p. 37.

Table 2: Overview of selected Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women articles most relevant to child marriage¹⁴

Convention articles related to child marriage	Relevance to child marriage
<p>Article 1: Definition of discrimination against women.</p> <p>Any distinction, exclusion or restriction, made based on sex, with the purpose or effect of impairing the enjoyment by women of political, economic, social, cultural or civil human rights on equal footing with men.</p>	<p>Child marriage is a clear form of discrimination against girls, given the disproportionate impact it has on them. It violates their fundamental rights and has many negative consequences, including greater health, social, and developmental burdens for girls, compared to boys.</p>

¹⁴ This is not an exhaustive list of articles relevant to child marriage, but rather identifies some key examples that can guide you in effectively engaging with the CEDAW Committee. You can find more details in this summary

<p>Article 2: Policy measure to be taken.</p> <p>Governments condemn discrimination against women in all its forms and will work to end it. This includes abolishing all existing laws, customs and regulations that are discriminatory.</p>	<p>Addressing the root causes of child marriage involves developing and enforcing harmonised legal frameworks, built on a comprehensive, gender-transformative, context-specific approach to girls' rights. Minimum age of marriage laws should be implemented in this context.</p> <p>Laws regulating and facilitating girls' and women's equal access to divorce and the dissolution of informal unions are needed. Laws that prohibit pregnant adolescents from attending school should be reversed, and policies introduced to support married, pregnant and parenting girls to return to school. States should also invest in adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health and rights services, with a focus on girls who are married.</p> <p>Laws should facilitate and ensure girls' equal access to justice, child protection and gender-based violence services, removing the need to be accompanied by an adult. Girls who are/have been married or are displaced/refugees face the greatest barriers.</p> <p>Girls and women's equal rights to land ownership, inheritance, employment, credit, citizenship, alimony, and child custody are crucial to ensuring gender equality and addressing discrimination.</p> <p>Policies to end child marriage should have allocated budgets and targeted activities to address gender inequality.</p>
<p>Article 3: Equality.</p> <p>Governments will take all appropriate actions to ensure the advancement of women and to protect their rights on the basis of equality with men.</p>	<p>Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are worth less than boys and men. In turn, child marriage perpetuates gender inequality across generations. It violates girls' rights to health and education, increases the risk of gender-based violence, and compromises their social, economic and political participation.</p> <p>States should respect, protect and fulfil all girls' and women's human rights and freedoms, including access to education, health and support services. This should be accompanied by targeted policies and programmes to reach those who face the most barriers to enjoying their rights: girls and adolescents who are at risk of child marriage, those who are – or have been – married, displaced or refugees, those with disabilities and those who are LGBTQIA+.</p>

<p>Article 5: Sex roles and stereotyping. Governments will strive to eliminate longstanding practices that perpetuate discrimination and gender stereotyping of women.</p>	<p>Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls are worth less than boys. In many contexts, girls have limited opportunities to gain status in their communities beyond marriage and parenthood. The roles of wife/partner and parent in turn limit opportunities for girls and women, as they take on more unpaid care work. Girls who transgress expected roles may face stigma, exclusion and even violence.</p> <p>Community-level work is key to promoting gender-transformative programmes that engage with girls, families, communities and leaders to transform social norms and increase girls' opportunities to speak, be heard, choose and take action.</p> <p>States must also invest in gender-transformative laws, policies and programmes to address the discriminatory norms that drive child marriage, including across education, health and economic justice at the systemic level.</p>
<p>Article 6: Suppressing all forms of traffic in girls and women.</p> <p>Governments will work to eliminate trafficking in women and the exploitation or prostitution of women.</p>	<p>In some contexts, child marriage fits the definition of human trafficking, starting with recruitment and transportation, which leads to exploitation. It can act as a guise for trafficking and modern slavery with near impunity, particularly during crisis or conflict. The younger a girl is when she marries, the more the risk of exploitation and violence within marriage.</p> <p>Girls and women can be coerced or forced into marriage through abduction, deception, abuse, or situations that put girls at risk, and the receiving of payments or gifts.</p> <p>Leaving a marriage is rarely simple for girls, as they may have no income or home of their own, fear violence or loss of children, be stateless/lack citizenship, or face stigma and exclusion. They also face the greatest barriers to accessing justice.</p> <p>Governments should provide accessible and free/low-cost legal aid for girls, and ensure justice service providers are properly trained and can connect with appropriate child protection services, including across borders and in conflict- and crisis-affected situations.</p>
<p>Article 10: Equal rights in education.</p> <p>Governments will act to eliminate discrimination against girls and women in education. This includes ensuring women and men have equal access to education and vocational guidance; the same curricula, examinations, standards for teaching and equipment; and equal access to scholarships and grants.</p>	<p>Once married, girls are very unlikely to remain in or return to school. Girls who are not in school are also more likely to marry before age 18.</p> <p>Married girls – particularly those who are displaced or refugees – face many practical barriers to education, including unpaid household and care work, stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep them at home.</p> <p>Pregnant and parenting girls may leave or be excluded from school because of national laws, a lack of support for re-enrolment and stigma.</p>

<p>Article 11: Employment.</p> <p>Governments will eliminate discrimination against women in the workplace. Women will have the same employment rights as men as well as maternity leave and special protection against harmful work during pregnancy.</p>	<p>Poverty and a lack of income-generating opportunities for girls and young women drive child marriage in many contexts. Because girls have less access to education – where they can build skills, knowledge and networks – and lower social, political and economic status, they are often economically dependent on men, limiting their freedom and opportunities beyond marriage.</p> <p>Initiatives to build girls' knowledge and skills, autonomy and value in the household, and transition to decent paid work should combine formal and informal education, and take into account their unpaid domestic, care and agricultural work. This means investing in reducing and redistributing care work through efficient infrastructure and service delivery, and addressing workplace discrimination, focusing on girls who are married, parenting, LGBTQIA+, have disabilities or are displaced/refugees.</p> <p>The state should invest in secure, decent, paid employment opportunities for adolescent girls and women, and increase female leadership positions and the visibility of economic opportunities. This should be supported with legislative and policy safeguards like paid statutory and parental leave, and investment in poverty alleviation and social protection focused on those who have been most marginalised.</p>
<p>Article 12: Health care and family planning.</p> <p>Women have equal rights to access health care including sexual health, family planning services and pre- and post-natal care.</p>	<p>Child marriage can limit girls' and adolescents' access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. It also has negative consequences for their mental health, being associated with depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. This is in addition to emotional distress caused by poverty, conflict and crisis, intimate partner violence, isolation, challenges in childbirth, loss of education and childhood and loss of autonomy.</p> <p>As a key driver and consequence of adolescent pregnancy, child marriage negatively impacts on the health and wellbeing of girls and young women, and that of their children.</p> <p>Age of marriage and sexual consent should be treated separately in law; both should be guided by the principle of evolving capacities – that is, the way young people gradually develop the ability to take responsibility for their decisions and actions – particularly in cases of informal unions between consenting adolescents.</p>
<p>Article 15: Equality before the law.</p> <p>Governments will give women equality with men before the law, including rights to enter contracts, administer property, appear in court or before tribunals, and to choose residence and domicile.</p>	<p>Girls who are – or have been – married, and those facing forced marriage experience social and administrative barriers to accessing justice through the legal system. This includes access to rights and services around divorce, matrimonial property, custody, inheritance, child protection and gender-based violence.</p> <p>This may be due to lack of awareness of rights and the law; conflicts between and within age of majority, marriage and sexual consent laws; the fear of social sanctions or punishment of family members; or because minors cannot initiate legal proceedings without the support of an adult.</p> <p>Girls without a legal identity, and those in conflict- and crisis-affected settings face the greatest barriers to accessing justice.</p>

Article 16: Elimination of discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations.

Women have equal rights with men within marriage including family planning, property ownership and occupation. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

This article directly establishes child marriage as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination against girls and women. It further establishes the responsibility of States Parties to address child marriage, indicating specific actions to be taken by States Parties.

Some countries have entered reservations to the Convention articles, particularly to Article 16 on marriage and family relations, which has an explicit reference to child marriage. However, the CEDAW has stated that making reservations to this article is effectively denying women equality, which is the Convention's main purpose. The CEDAW urges states to reconsider and modify or retract their reservations, as no arguments based on traditional, religious or cultural practices should justify violations to the Convention.¹⁵

Relevant CEDAW General Recommendations related to child marriage

The CEDAW develops General Recommendations to offer additional guidance and interpretation about states' obligations under specific articles or related themes of the Convention.

General Recommendations are useful resources for civil society organisations. They provide additional information on how the CEDAW frames and interprets certain issues like child marriage and related policy topics under the Convention. Civil society organisations can also use the General Recommendations to frame their reports and as advocacy tools to further influence states.

The CEDAW has adopted several General Recommendations that are relevant for child marriage.¹⁶ Notably, General Recommendation No. 31 and General Comment No. 18, jointly adopted by the CRC and CEDAW in 2019, offer crucial insights into the rights of children – especially girls – concerning harmful practices, explicitly defining child and/or forced marriage as such.

15. Specific reservations to CEDAW by country are available on the relevant web pages of [UN Women](#) and [UN Treaty Collection](#).

16. The full list of General Recommendations is on the [UN Treaty Body website](#).

Relevant CEDAW General Recommendations related to child marriage¹⁷

- General Recommendation No. 19, on [violence against women](#) (adopted in 1992)
- General Recommendation No. 21, on [equality in marriage and family relations](#) (adopted in 1994)
- General Recommendation No. 24, on [women and health](#) (adopted in 1999)
- General Recommendation No. 29, on the [economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution](#) (adopted in 2013)
- General Recommendation No. 30, on [women in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations](#) (adopted in 2013)
- General Recommendation No. 36, on [the right of girls and women to education](#) (adopted in 2017)
- General Recommendation No. 37, on [gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change](#) (adopted in 2018)
- General Recommendation No. 31 of the CEDAW and General Comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, on [harmful practices](#) (adopted 2019)
- General Recommendation No. 38, on [trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration](#) (adopted in 2020)
- General Recommendation No. 39, on [the rights of Indigenous women and girls](#) (adopted in 2022)

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention [Optional Protocol](#) in 1999. This protocol requires signatory states to acknowledge the authority of the CEDAW to receive and review complaints put forward by individuals or organised civil society groups. Not all Convention state parties have ratified the Optional Protocol.¹⁸

This mechanism provides a robust means of holding states accountable for acts of discrimination against girls and women – like child marriage – offering a complementary accountability measure for those who experience human rights abuses, alongside the submission of alternative reports.

17. This is not an exhaustive list of General Recommendations and paragraphs relevant to child marriage. It includes some key examples.

18. To check which states are parties to the Optional Protocol see: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

ENGAGING WITH THE CEDAW REPORTING CYCLE

“The reporting procedure has been crucial in adapting the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to domestic contexts. The involvement of civil society organisations in this procedure serves as a form of advocacy and empowerment, allowing them to familiarise themselves with the Convention, identify gaps in domestic legislation, analyse structural issues, and propose recommendations to the CEDAW. As a result, state parties are obliged to uphold the human rights of women and girls. The government endorsing gender equality and social inclusion policies, incorporating constitutional provisions regarding rights to lineage, property, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, represents some of the outcomes achieved through engagements with the CEDAW.”

WOREC – Girls Not Brides member in Nepal



TOOLBOX! Resources to ensure your reports are based in the evidence

You can use these resources to build an evidence-based report, and to define what issues and follow-up questions you want to be addressed through the CEDAW review process.

Country-level data:

- The *Girls Not Brides* [child marriage atlas](#) has information on child marriage prevalence, drivers and laws per country.
- UNICEF [child marriage country profiles](#) include statistics on prevalence, characteristics of unions and insights into the lives of married girls by country.
- [Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism](#) showcases global, regional and national-level data and trends, disaggregated to highlight disparities within and among countries based on household wealth, educational attainment, rural or urban residence and subnational region.

Girls Not Brides thematic briefs and evidence reviews:

- Brief and evidence review on the [impact of the law on child marriage and girls' rights](#).
- Brief on how [ending child marriage is crucial to gender equality](#).
- Brief on child marriage and [modern slavery](#).
- Brief and thematic paper on [girls' education and child marriage](#).
- Research Spotlight and poster on [education interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Research Spotlight and poster on [economic empowerment interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Brief and thematic paper on [supporting girls who are married, pregnant and parenting](#).
- Symposium on [child marriage and mental health](#).
- Blog outlining successful approaches and key resources on child marriage in [humanitarian settings](#).

Materials from other organisations:

- South Asian Women's Centre report on forced marriage as a form of [human trafficking](#).

What the CEDAW reporting cycle is

The state reporting obligations outlined in the Convention serve as a key mechanism for girls' and women's rights advocates to monitor state compliance with it. The CEDAW applies the simplified reporting procedure to all States Parties unless they opt out from this and indicate their wish to instead maintain the traditional reporting procedure.¹⁹ The step-by-step guide to engaging, which begins on p.41 follows the simplified reporting procedure.

States must submit reports detailing how they implement the Convention every 4 or 5 years, or whenever requested by the CEDAW. For each session, the CEDAW usually invites eight States Parties to be reviewed.



The CEDAW holds three sessions each year, in Geneva, Switzerland, typically in March, July and October.



Check which states are currently under review on the [UN Treaty Body website](#).

Key moments for engaging with the CEDAW

Civil society organisations play a crucial role in pushing for the enforcement of the Convention by monitoring government implementation, including those articles and provisions relevant to addressing child marriage. The CEDAW frequently requests information from civil society organisations and involves them in report preparation, acknowledging their role as credible sources of information, especially in presenting alternative perspectives on issues concerning girls' and women's rights.

The main goal of engaging with the CEDAW is to ensure it includes child marriage in its questions to the state and its Concluding Observations at the end of the reporting cycle. Civil society organisations can use the CEDAW's recommendations, the outcome of the reporting cycle, in their national advocacy to press governments to adopt necessary laws, policies, and budgets to address child marriage.



This is the **List of Issues Prior to Reporting** under the simplified reporting procedure, or the **List of Issues** under the traditional reporting procedure.

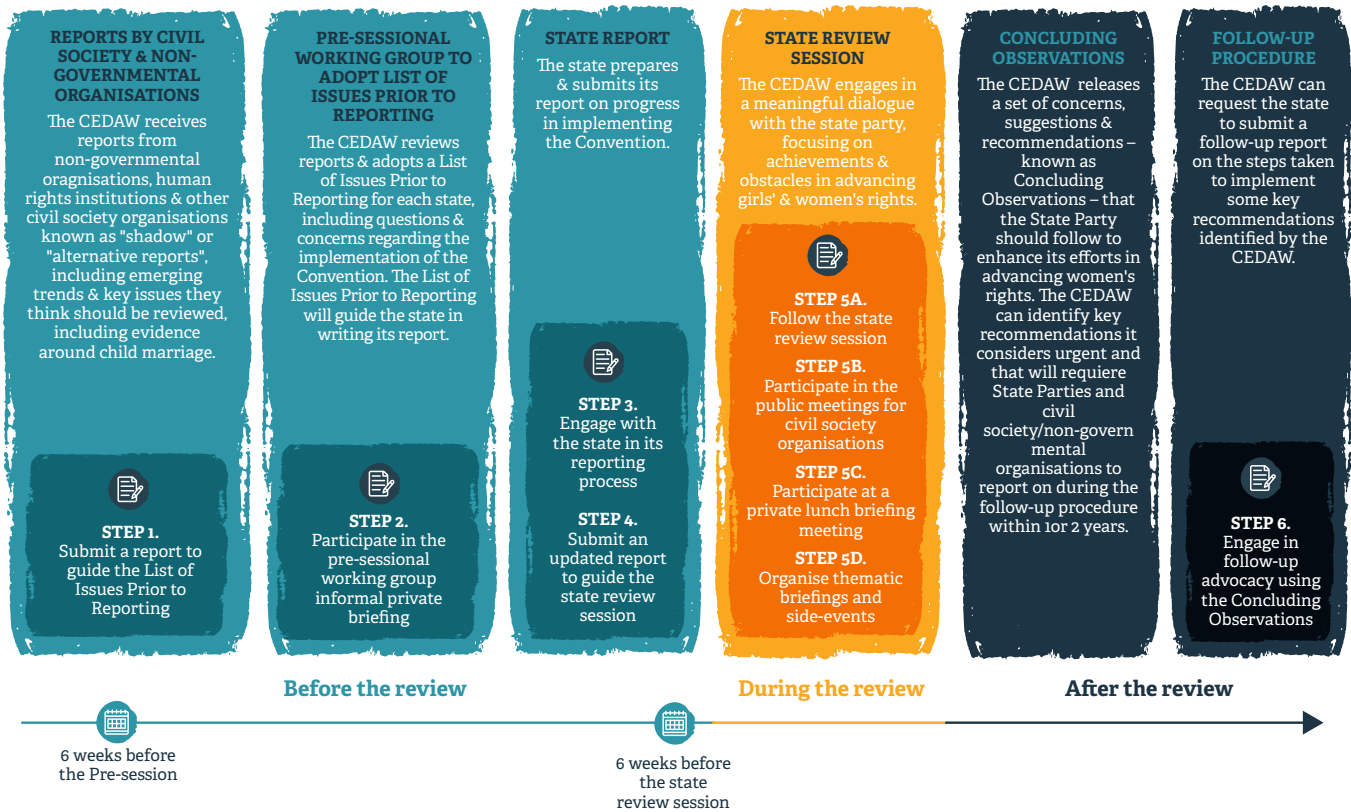
There are three key moments for civil society organisations to engage during the CEDAW reporting cycle: before, during and after the state review:

- 1. Before the review session**, you can push for critical concerns around child marriage to receive due attention and consideration in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.
- 2. During the review session**, you can influence the CEDAW's questions to the state, including on measures taken to address child marriage. Through advocacy with CEDAW members and participation in public and informal meetings, you can push for the Concluding Observations to incorporate child marriage concerns and targeted recommendations.
- 3. After the review session**, you can use the CEDAW's recommendations in your national advocacy, pushing for change at the country level.

¹⁹ Check which states have opted in for the simplified reporting procedure on the [OHCHR website](#).

Figure 4: Key entry points for engaging with the CEDAW

SIMPLIFIED REPORTING PROCEDURE



TRADITIONAL REPORTING PROCEDURE

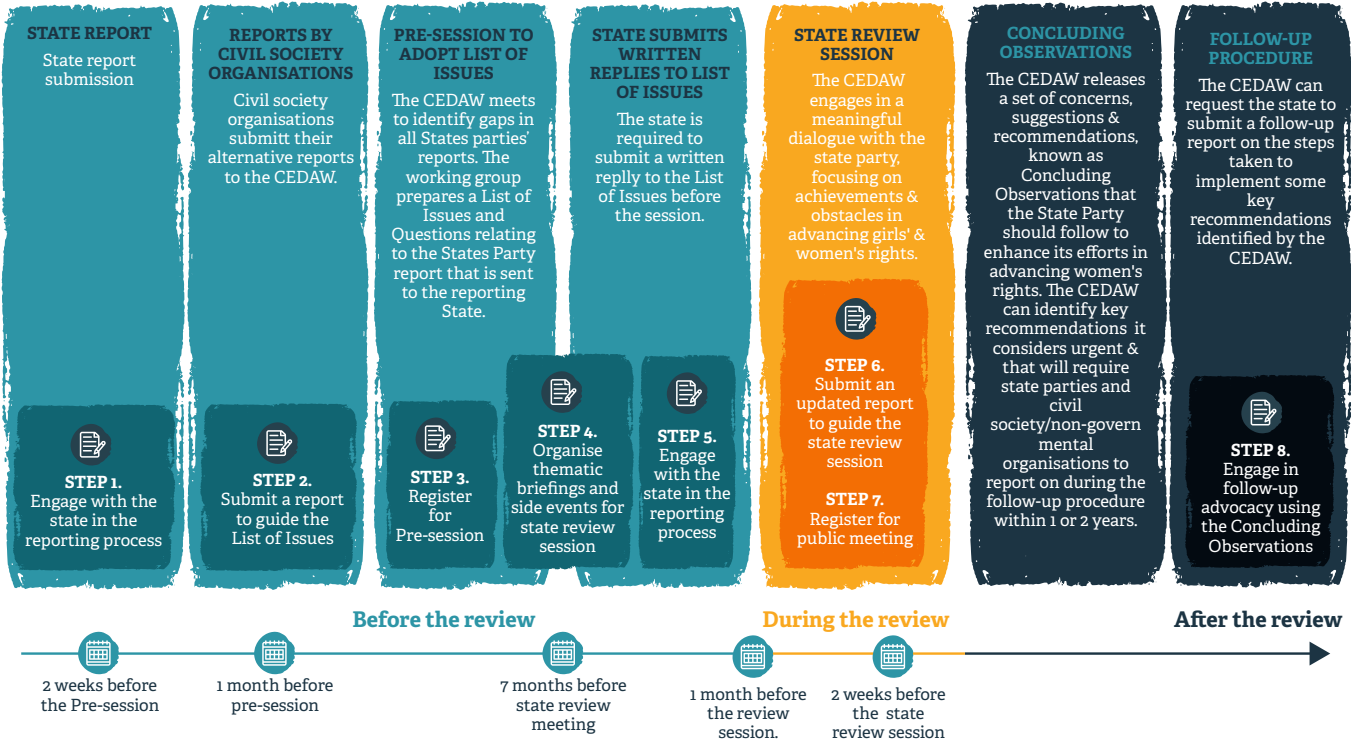


Figure 5: Example CEDAW review timeline under the standard reporting procedure – The Dominican Republic examination



Figure 6: Example CEDAW review timeline under the traditional reporting procedure – The Senegal examination



BEFORE THE REVIEW



STEP 0.

CHECK THE SESSION CALENDAR AND REVIEW INFORMATION RELEVANT TO THE STATE UNDER REVIEW (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



HOW TO: Check when your state review session is taking place

- The CEDAW publishes a public document with timelines, critical deadlines and guidelines on civil society organisation participation for each session on the OHCHR [website](#).
- The document is available for each (past) session under “General Documentation > Information from secretariat > Participation by Non-government organizations (NGOs) > Check CEDAW participation by NGOs”.



IMPORTANT! There is no standard deadline or time for when the CEDAW Secretariat publishes this document, so check the information for each session regularly.



STEP 1.

SUBMIT A SHADOW OR ALTERNATIVE REPORT (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



Submit your report **6 weeks before** the pre-session.



IMPORTANT! Only those who have submitted a shadow or alternative report will have the opportunity to engage directly with the CEDAW during the review process.



TIP! IWRAP Asia Pacific is a feminist organisation that supports civil society organisations in engaging with the CEDAW. They facilitate various platforms for civil society organisations to advocate directly with the CEDAW.



You can contact IWRAP at iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org.

This is a key step as they will provide valuable information, including the timeline, for the whole engagement process.

- Input early, as it helps the CEDAW identify key priorities – List of Issues Prior to Reporting (for the standard reporting procedure), or List of Issues (for the traditional reporting procedure) – for the state to address in its report/written replies. **This is a primary opportunity for your organisation to advocate for child marriage to be addressed during the state review, and then in the Concluding Observations.**
- Include a list of questions regarding the state’s efforts to respond to the Concluding Observations from the previous review, specifically addressing efforts to address child marriage in the country under review.
- After submitting your report – depending on your context – you can issue a statement and publish the report to encourage public debate and draw attention to the ongoing CEDAW review process.



HOW TO: Write & submit a CEDAW report

Format: Word.

Word limit:

- For comprehensive reports (group reports made in coalition with other organisations), maximum **6,600 words** (approximately 12 pages) including footnotes.
- For thematic reports, maximum **3,300 words** (approximately 7 pages) including footnotes.
- For reports under the follow-up to the concluding observations procedure, maximum **3,500 words**.

Language: Reports can be submitted in **English, French** or **Spanish**. If possible, it is highly recommended to submit a full English version of your report, and summaries including your key recommendations in French and Spanish.



Deadline:

- For the simplified reporting procedure, submit your report **six weeks** before the pre-session.
- For the traditional reporting procedure, submit your report **two weeks** before the pre-session.

Submission guidelines:

- Send your report electronically to cedaw@ohchr.org.
- You can also send it to IWRAP Asia Pacific, at iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org. They will distribute electronic and hard copies to CEDAW members.
- You can send an e-mail for details and deadlines to: iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org. Indicate in the subject of the email: "SUBMISSION" and "NAME OF THE COUNTRY" (e.g. "Submission Philippines").



REMEMBER! The CEDAW prepares an information note for civil society organisations wanting to participate in the reporting cycle. It contains guidelines for submitting the shadow report and other important information about the reporting period. Make sure you check this document, available under the information for each (past) session on the [OHCHR website](#): "General Documentation > Information from secretariat > Participation by Non-government Organizations (NGOs)"



STEP 2.

PARTICIPATE IN THE INFORMAL PRIVATE BRIEFINGS DURING THE PRE-SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP²⁰ (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF INVITED)

During the pre-sessions, civil society organisations can participate in an informal private meeting with the CEDAW members. They are invited to deliver an oral intervention expanding on the information they provided in their alternative or shadow report.

This is a valuable opportunity to provide insights, updates and alternative information on child marriage in the state under review, and to shape discussions. This ensures that critical concerns related to child marriage receive due attention and consideration in the pre-sessional working group.



Contact the CEDAW Secretariat **one month before** the pre-session to say you would like to participate.

20. CEDAW, n.d., Rules of procedure and working methods.



HOW TO: Participate in an informal private briefing

- One month before the pre-session, contact the CEDAW Secretariat at ohchr-cedaw@un.org, with a copy to iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org, saying you would like to participate. They will share a meeting link and add you to the speaker list.
- The CEDAW allocates **10 minutes per country** for all civil society interventions. The IWRAW Asia Pacific will help coordinate with other civil society organisations to divide the time for oral interventions and to identify priority areas. They will then compile a final list for OHCHR on behalf of the group of civil society organisations, with names in the order of presentation and with allotted times for speaking as agreed in advance.
- Prepare your oral intervention and send your written statement to ohchr-cedaw@un.org in one of the CEDAW working languages (English, French or Spanish) before the pre-session (dates available in the document with guidelines for civil society organisation participation). You should send it as a Word document.
- You can attend in person or via Zoom. There are interpretation services available. The UN does not fund in-person participation.



STEP 3. GET INVOLVED IN THE STATE REPORT (RECOMMENDED)

By engaging with the state in the CEDAW reporting process, especially with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – which usually coordinates this process – you can bring expertise on child marriage to influence the state to align with CEDAW principles and provisions.

You can also use your channels and networks to share state reports to a broader national audience, addressing potential gaps left by states.



STEP 4. SUBMIT AN UPDATED SHADOW OR ALTERNATIVE REPORT OR PREPARE SPECIFIC REPORTS BEFORE THE STATE REVIEW SESSION (RECOMMENDED)

If your organisation submitted a report before the state review session (see Step 1), you can now submit an update spotlighting new information and presenting alternative insights on child marriage in your country.

Your updated report must directly address the concerns outlined in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting (or List of Issues) and the state report, as this is how the CEDAW prioritises issues for review and aims to fill gaps in the state report.



TIP! You can collaborate with other organisations or submit independently

The approach to developing and submitting a report – in collaboration or independently – depends on your time, resources and relationships with other organisations addressing issues related with child marriage.

Collaborative: A comprehensive report

The CEDAW receives many reports from civil society organisations in the same country, so it might be best to coordinate with other organisations dedicated to addressing child marriage – and broader women's rights and gender equality – to produce a longer, comprehensive report together. The CEDAW can then undertake a comprehensive review process, ensuring all submissions are considered and potentially leading to more effective advocacy that emphasises the need for targeted interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage.

Consider reaching out to civil society organisations addressing child marriage in your country. *Girls Not Brides* can help you connect!

- Find individual organisations working on child marriage in your country through *Girls Not Brides'* [member directory](#).
- Find networks of organisations working together to address child marriage at the national and sub-national level on *Girls Not Brides'* [National Partnership and coalitions pages](#).
- If you are thinking of submitting a report and need information on other organisations' activities or want to find collaborators, email the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat at info@girlsnotbrides.org.



REMEMBER! The word limit for comprehensive reports is **6,600 words**.

Independent: A thematic report

Reaching agreement among civil societies on the report's content can be challenging and time-consuming. If your organisation only focuses on child marriage and has limited time, it might be better to submit a shorter thematic report. This approach allows for more in-depth, specific, data-driven and evidence-based information on child marriage.



REMEMBER! The word limit for a thematic report is **3,300 words**.

DURING THE REVIEW



STEP 5A.

ATTEND THE STATE REVIEW SESSION (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)



Civil society organisations can attend the review session between the CEDAW and state representatives. You will only be there as observers and will not be able to intervene. The OHCHR does not send letters of invitation.



These dialogues usually take place during the **weeks 1 and 2** of the CEDAW session.



HOW TO: Participate at a state review session with the CEDAW

- Register to attend a state review session through the dedicatedd UN online platform for accreditation. The request will be processed in two working days.
-  The link will be available on the [OHCHR web page](#) of the session you wish to attend.
-  More information on the OHCHR [accreditation web page](#).
- You will need to arrange your own travel, accommodation and visas to enter Switzerland. The OHCHR does not help with these matters and cannot provide letters to Swiss authorities for visa applications by observers.
- If you cannot attend in person, you can follow the dialogue online through [UN WebTV](#).



STEP 5B.

PARTICIPATE IN THE INFORMAL PUBLIC MEETING WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)

The CEDAW invites civil society organisation representatives to provide country-specific information on issues relevant to the implementation of the Convention.



Informal public meetings with civil society organisations usually take place on the **first day of weeks 1 and 2** of the session.

Oral interventions during informal public meetings follow the same format as in the private informal meetings during the pre-session (Step 2). The difference is that these meetings are publicly webcasted on [UN Web TV](#).

HOW TO: Participate in the informal public meeting

1. If you want to intervene, **contact the CEDAW Secretariat** at cedaw@ohchr.org. They can then include you in the list of speakers and share access to the connection link if you are attending online.



Do this at least **one month before** the session.

2. **Undertake a safety and security assessment** of the potential risk to you and your organisation if you engage publicly with the CEDAW.
3. **Send an electronic version of your oral statement in Word format** before the pre-session (and public meeting) to ohchr-cedaw@un.org. Here is an example of a joint oral statement from [Malaysia](#). Your statement should be in English, French or Spanish.



STEP 5C.

ORGANISE A PRIVATE LUNCHTIME BRIEFING WITH THE CEDAW (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)

Civil society organisations have a unique chance to privately update the CEDAW in a dedicated country-specific lunchtime briefing before the state review session. Through this, you can address CEDAW member questions from the informal public meeting, and respond to any other emerging questions they may have.



IMPORTANT! Some briefings might be joined by government-affiliated non-governmental organisations, who might report back to the authorities. You should make a security assessment before engaging with the CEDAW.



HOW TO: Organise a private briefing

1. Contact iwraw-ap@iwraw-ap.org to coordinate your participation. IWRAW will arrange online information sessions to explain this process.
2. Complete a security assessment.



STEP 5D.

ORGANISE THEMATIC BRIEFINGS AND SIDE-EVENTS (RECOMMENDED)

Civil society organisations can organise side events in parallel to the CEDAW session, with the participation of CEDAW members.



HOW TO: Organise a thematic briefing or side event

1. Check the state review session schedule on the [OHCHR website](#).
2. Reach out to the CEDAW Secretariat through cedaw@ohchr.org. Specify your intended focus for the side event. The Secretariat will assess the feasibility of accommodating these requests, considering all submissions and the availability of CEDAW members.



Do this at least two sessions – that is, **6 or 7 months** – before the state review.

AFTER THE REVIEW



STEP 6.

FOLLOW-UP ADVOCACY (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

You can use the Concluding Observations to further your organisation's advocacy objectives at the national level, leveraging the authority of the CEDAW's recommendations to influence your state in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention, particularly those concerning child marriage.



HOW TO: Use the CEDAW's recommendations in your national advocacy

During the follow-up stage, your organisation can:

- 1. Conduct consultations** with relevant government departments, human rights institutions, Ombudsperson, and other entities to assess the State Party's compliance with its obligations and recommendations under CEDAW, focusing on child marriage.
- 2. Share the Concluding Observations:** depending on your organisation's advocacy strategies and the context of operation, you can:
 - **Create and distribute simplified versions** of the Concluding Observations, emphasising the CEDAW'S recommendations on child marriage and other relevant issues like education and health.
 - **Translate these into local languages** and publicise them widely, especially in regions where child marriage is prevalent.
 - **Consider hosting a press conference** to increase public awareness and push for action.
- 3. Advocate for the implementation of the Concluding Observations by collaborating with government bodies:**
 - **Involve parliamentarians** in debating the implementation of the recommendations.
 - **Generate annual reports** on progress towards ending child marriage and supporting girls who are – or have been – married or in a union.
 - **Involve affected children and adolescents** – particularly girls – in the monitoring and advocacy process, if the context allows for meaningful and safe participation.
- 4. Feed back on the Concluding Observations to the CEDAW:**
 - Focus on the sections addressing child marriage and associated child rights like education and health. Highlight the relevance and precision of the CEDAW's observations and recommendations.
- 5. Produce an interim report.** The CEDAW requests the state to submit a follow-up report with information on the steps taken to implement some key, priority recommendations within one or two years. These recommendations are identified at the end of the Concluding Observations. You can inform the CEDAW on any progress and challenges in the states' implementation of them.



TIP! Learn from impactful civil society organisation reports to the CEDAW

From *Girls Not Brides* member organisations:

- **Argentina.** Report from a coalition, including the Girls Not Brides member Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM): [Evaluation of compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\) in the framework of the presentation of the fourth periodic report to the Committee](#). October 2016.
- **Nepal:** Report from a coalition, including Girls Not Brides member Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC). [National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders, Nepal in collaboration with more than 100 NGOs/CBOs from all 7 provinces of Nepal](#). September 2018.

From other civil society organisations

- **Belgium.** Report for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting. [Thematic report by the Belgian Disability Forum \(BDF\) on disability rights](#). November 2019.
- **Egypt.** [Joint Thematic Report on Egypt's legal frameworks and practices that enforce de jure and de facto discrimination against women](#). September 2021.
- **Ethiopia.** [Thematic report on CEFMU and FGM](#). February 2019.



HOW TO: Structure & write a shadow or alternative report to be submitted to the CEDAW

Title page, including:

- Title of the report, including the state you are reporting on, the treaty and the time period covered by the report. For example, "Alternative report to CEDAW on [Country Name] for the [Number of pre-session or session]"
- Name of the organisation(s) submitting the report.
- Date of submission.
- Contact information.
- If the report is available in more than one language or in a longer version, title of the other/original reports.
- If the report is confidential or not.

Table of contents

Executive summary (optional), including:

- A description of the main outcomes of the analysis.
- A brief overview of the main developments and challenges identified.

Introduction, including:

- **Background**, including:
 - Name(s) of the organisation(s) or coalition that has produced the report.
 - An overview of the country context regarding the implementation of the Convention. Highlight the positive aspects and then the challenges in the state's implementation of mandated measures to address child marriage.
 - Summarise the topics and relevant Convention articles addressed in the report.

- **Methodology**, including:

- A brief description of the methodology used to write the report. Some possible methodologies include:
 - A desk review of the national legal framework
 - A review of government programs and activities
 - The number of stakeholders consulted for data collection and report drafting (if applicable)
 - The methodology for data collection (if applicable; this could include focus groups, workshops, consultations with stakeholders, surveys, literature review, etc.)

Analysis based on CEDAW provisions:

- Identify the articles in the Convention that address child marriage (see table on p.31-35) and provide a brief context and situation analysis for each article based on your analysis.
- Specify the policy, legislative and institutional measures implemented by the state to address child marriage.

For example, has the state introduced specific laws around child marriage? Are there government-led initiatives to support girls at risk of marriage, and girls who are – or have been – married and/or parenting?

- If the state party has already submitted its report, identify any gaps between the state report and the List of Issues Prior to Reporting or the List of Issues issued by the CEDAW.
- Examine the challenges hindering the effective implementation of identified articles to address child marriage, based on previous recommendations made by the CEDAW. Support this information with evidence, including statistics, testimonies, academic research, provisions of national and local laws, policies and regulations. Ensure appropriate referencing with links to sources where possible.

Targeted questions/recommendations: After looking at each article relevant to child marriage, provide a short list of specific and targeted questions or recommendations:

- To influence the List of Issues Prior to Reporting or the List of Issues: Propose a set of questions to the CEDAW to ask to the government delegation during its presentation of the state report. These could include questions about:
 - The efficacy of existing policies.
 - The allocation of resources for ending child marriage.
 - Collaboration with civil society organisations.

For influencing the Concluding Observations:

- Suggest a set of recommendations to the CEDAW to ensure the complete realisation of the rights of girls at risk of child marriage and girls who are – or have been – married and/or parenting.

For example, advocate for enhanced legal frameworks, increased financial support for secondary education, introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in the school curricula, or culturally sensitive awareness campaigns to address the root causes of child marriage.



TIP! You can find thematic and country-level evidence and data to support your report in the Toolbox of resources on p.37.

3.3 ENGAGING WITH THE UN COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS BETWEEN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS AND CHILD MARRIAGE

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) oversees the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Covenant), one of the most significant treaties of international human rights law. The Covenant lays the foundation for fundamental economic, social and cultural rights – including adequate housing, health, education, decent work, freedom from discrimination, gender equality, consent in marriage, and freedom from child labour.

The CESCR has raised concerns about child marriage, emphasising that it negatively affects the right to health,

education and employment for those involved.²¹ It has recommended raising the legal minimum age of marriage to 18, stating that differences in the legal age of marriage for women and men violate Article 10 regarding the right to give free consent to marry.²²

When engaging with the CESCR, providing detailed and evidence-based information about child marriage, and connecting this with the most relevant articles of the Covenant is crucial. This will guide you in preparing your written reports, and in influencing the monitoring of child marriage in your country. We have highlighted these relevant articles in Table 3.



TIP! Use the toolkit of resources on p.54 to build evidence-based reports and statements for the CESCR

Table 3: Overview of relevant International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights articles²³

Covenant articles related to child marriage	Relevance to child marriage
<p>Article 1: Self-determination.</p> <p>Right to determine political status and freely pursue economic, social and cultural development.</p>	<p>Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and is both a cause and a consequence of girls’ restricted economic, social and cultural participation. In many contexts, girls lack decision-making power, including over if, when or whom to marry, and their roles and opportunities within marriage (especially if their partner is much older).</p> <p>Girls who have no legal identity (if their birth was not registered) or whose legal identify is complicated by displacement (due to conflict, crisis or marriage) may be at greater risk of child marriage and face more limits to their political, economic, social and cultural development within marriage.</p> <p>Married girls also face legal and socio-cultural barriers to land and property ownership and inheritance, and to decent educational and economic opportunities. Once married, they often take on unpaid care work and may have their movements restricted by their partner or partner’s family, reducing their opportunities for economic, social and cultural participation.</p>

21. CESCR [Concluding Comments](#), Sri Lanka, E/C.12/1/Add.24 (1999) para.9.

22. CESCR [Concluding Comments](#), France, E/C.12/1/Add.72, para. 27.

23. The table does not provide an exhaustive list of articles relevant to child marriage, but rather identifies some key examples that can guide civil society organisations on how to effectively engage with the CESCR.

<p>Article 2: Non-discrimination.</p> <p>States must guarantee that the rights enunciated in the Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.</p>	<p>Protection from child marriage should be equally ensured to all children, irrespective of their identity.</p>
<p>Article 3: Equality between men and women in the enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights.</p>	<p>Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and made worse by poverty, lack of education, insecurity and social norms that control and discriminate against girls and women. In many contexts, girls lack decision-making power, including over if, when or whom to marry, and their roles and opportunities within marriage (especially if their partner is much older).</p> <p>In turn, girls who marry before age 18 are more likely to leave school early, so missing out on developing the skills, knowledge, networks and confidence they need to transition into decent, paid work and gain economic independence.</p> <p>They also take on additional unpaid household and care work, and face gender norms that keep them at home, leading to isolation and poor mental health outcomes.</p> <p>Married girls' ability to make and act on their own decisions – and so their movements – may also be restricted by their partner or partner's family, further limiting their opportunities for economic, social and cultural participation.</p>
<p>Article 6: Right to work, including technical and vocational guidance and training programmes.</p>	<p>Once married, girls are very unlikely to remain in or return to school. Girls who are not in school are also more likely to marry before age 18. Pregnant and parenting girls may leave or be excluded from school because of national laws, a lack of support for re-enrolment and stigma.</p> <p>With limited access to education – where they can build skills, knowledge and networks – and lower social, political and economic status, girls are often economically dependent on men, limiting their freedom and opportunities beyond marriage.</p> <p>Initiatives to build girls' knowledge and skills, autonomy and value in the household, and transition to decent paid work should combine formal and informal education, and consider their unpaid domestic, care and agricultural work, especially after they are married. They should engage communities – including parents and teachers – in addressing the social norms that isolate and exclude girls from education and employment, or limit their opportunities in non-traditional training and employment.</p>

<p>Article 7: Right to just and safe working conditions, fair wages, equal opportunities for promotion, paid holidays, and reasonable limitation of working hours.</p>	<p>Because they have lower political and economic status, adolescent girls and women are more likely to be in insecure, poorly paid employment than men. Girls who are married, pregnant and/or parenting may have the most precarious positions because they left school without the required skills and knowledge; have additional household and care work; and may have their movements restricted by their partner/partner's family.</p> <p>This situation is exacerbated in conflict- and crisis-affected situations with limited economic opportunities, legal and structural barriers to access – like language or lack of documentation – and gender norms that favour male employment.</p> <p>The state needs to invest in secure, decent, paid employment opportunities for adolescent girls and women, and increase female leadership positions and the visibility of economic opportunities for them. This should be supported with legislative and policy safeguards like paid statutory and parental leave, and investment in reducing and redistributing care work through efficient infrastructure and service delivery.</p> <p>The state – working with civil society organisations and communities – should address workplace discrimination, focusing on girls who are married, parenting, LGBTQIA+, have disabilities or are displaced/refugees.</p>
<p>Article 9: Right to social security.</p>	<p>Poverty and lack of income-generating opportunities for girls and young women drive child marriage in many contexts. Child marriage can be seen as an economic strategy to reduce the cost of caring for or educating daughters, especially when opportunities for labour participation are limited.</p> <p>Large-scale social protection programmes can delay marriage by addressing financial hardship and protecting against economic shocks at the household level. They should also include those most at risk of child marriage – like orphans – and engage with underlying gender norms.</p> <p>Such programmes can also reduce household tensions/violence and anxiety for married girls if they include newly married adult couples and are provided to female heads of household.</p> <p>State-run cash transfers that are part of social protection systems – with long-term funding (taxes) and national reach – have potential to address the key drivers of child marriage sustainably and at scale, especially when linked to girls' education. They should be supported by investment in social services.</p>
<p>Article 10.1: Free consent for marriage.</p> <p>10.3 Special measures should be implemented to protect children from economic and social exploitation</p>	<p>Child marriage is complex and can take many forms, ranging from self-initiated informal unions between adolescents, to forced marriages between young girls and much older men. They can also involve the exchange of goods or money.</p> <p>Responses, including legal ones, must balance the need for protection – from sexual abuse, coercion and exploitation – with respect for adolescents' evolving capacities and status as rights' holders. They should acknowledge the structural and normative drivers and shapers of child marriage – like gender inequality and poverty – working at the systems level and with families and communities to address them.</p>

	<p>They should be part of a context-specific, gender-transformative approach to promoting girls' rights, opportunities and alternatives to marriage. This also means investing in gender-equitable public services, employment, action on poverty, climate and conflict.</p> <p>Girls facing forced marriage and ever-married girls – especially in conflict- and crisis-affected settings – experience many barriers to accessing justice through the legal system, including lack of registration and the need to be accompanied by a legal adult. Laws, policies and programmes need to respond to their unique experiences and needs, and should intentionally support their access to divorce, justice, child protection and gender-based violence services. Such services should be stigma-free and survivor-centred.</p>
<p>Article 11: Right to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Poverty, lack of education and discriminatory social norms all drive child marriage. In turn, child marriage has lifelong impacts on girls' autonomy, and their educational, economic and social opportunities, and so their health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>Article 12: Right to the highest attainable standard of health.</p>	<p>Child marriage has negative impacts on girls' (and boys') physical and mental health and wellbeing. Girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights are particularly impacted. Married girls face some of the greatest barriers to accessing health care, which often does not cater to their unique experiences and needs.</p> <p>Child marriage is a key driver and consequence of adolescent pregnancy. Married girls tend to have earlier and more frequent pregnancies than their unmarried peers, putting them at greater risk of health complications – and even death – during pregnancy and childbirth. Their children's health also suffers.</p> <p>Child marriage also has negative consequences for girls' mental health, being associated with depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. This is in addition to emotional distress caused by poverty, conflict and crisis, intimate partner violence, isolation, challenges in childbirth, loss of education and childhood, and loss of autonomy.</p>
<p>Article 13: Right to education</p> <p>Article 14: States shall make primary education compulsory and free of charge.</p>	<p>Once married, girls are very unlikely to remain in or return to school. Girls who are not in school are also more likely to marry before age 18.</p> <p>Married and parenting girls – particularly those who are displaced or refugees – face many practical barriers to education, including unpaid household and care work, stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep them at home. Costs beyond school fees – like uniforms, books, exams, transport and childcare – are also a barrier. Displaced and refugee girls may also be excluded if they lack documentation.</p> <p>National-level policies should intentionally include ever-married girls, removing these additional barriers to their education. This may mean blending formal and informal education and training opportunities, and targeting support for girls' transition to secondary school.</p> <p>States should also invest in gender-transformative approaches to schools, curricula and teaching – at the policy and community level – and in long-term economic opportunities for girls and women.</p>

Article 15.1: The right of everyone to take part in cultural life and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress.

Scientific progress and technology can help to end child marriage and advance gender equality, but can also reinforce discrimination and surveillance to suppress girls' agency and women's rights. Positive examples include mobile technology and apps that monitor and respond to cases of child marriage or gender-based violence, and connect girls with the information and services they need.

Girls' lack of access to modern contraception and sexual and reproductive health and rights services is a major driver of child marriage, and an unmet need for ever-married girls.

Increased government and donor investments in green growth initiatives could build women's skills and inclusion in areas like green entrepreneurship, waste management and circular economy interventions, green energy and infrastructure, and eco-tourism.

Relevant CESCR General Comments related to child marriage

[General Comments](#) serve as valuable guides for civil society organisations during the reporting cycle, offering additional insights into how the CESCR approaches and interprets various issues, including child marriage and its impact on the economic, social and cultural rights of girls and young women. You can use these General Comments to shape your reports and enhance your advocacy strategies to influence and hold your state accountable for upholding this set of rights.

Notably, General Comment No. 22 on the right to sexual and reproductive health stresses the state's obligations to enforce the legal prohibition of harmful practices and gender-based violence, including child and forced marriage.

Selected relevant CESCR General Comments related to child marriage²⁴

- General Comments No. 13, [The right to education](#) (1999)
- General Comments No. 11, [Plans of action for primary education](#) (1999)
- General Comments No. 14, [The right to the highest attainable standard of health](#) (2000)
- General Comments No. 16, [Equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights](#) (2005)
- General Comments No. 20, [Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights](#) (2009)
- General Comments No. 22, [The right to sexual and reproductive health](#) (2016)

24. This is not an exhaustive list of General Comments and paragraphs relevant to child marriage. It includes some key examples that can guide civil society organisations on how to effectively engage with the CESCR.

ENGAGING WITH THE CESCR REPORTING CYCLE



TOOLBOX! Resources to ensure your reports are based in the evidence

You can use these resources to build an evidence-based report, and to define what issues and follow-up questions you want to be addressed through the CESCR review process.

Country-level data:

- The *Girls Not Brides* [child marriage atlas](#) has information on child marriage prevalence, drivers and laws per country.
- UNICEF [child marriage country profiles](#) include statistics on prevalence, characteristics of unions and insights into the lives of married girls by country.
- [Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism](#) showcases global, regional and national-level data and trends, disaggregated to highlight disparities within and among countries based on household wealth, educational attainment, rural or urban residence and subnational region.

Girls Not Brides thematic briefs & evidence reviews:

- Brief and evidence review on the [impact of the law on child marriage and girls' rights](#).
- Brief and working paper on [child protection and child marriage](#).
- Brief on how [ending child marriage is crucial to gender equality](#).
- Brief and thematic paper on [girls' education and child marriage](#).
- Research Spotlight and poster on [education interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Research Spotlight and poster on [economic empowerment interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Brief and thematic paper on [supporting girls who are married, pregnant and parenting](#).
- Symposium on [child marriage and mental health](#).
- Blog outlining successful approaches and key resources on child marriage in [humanitarian settings](#).

The CESCR reporting cycle

The CESCR operates differently from other human rights treaty bodies because it was not directly created by its corresponding instrument – the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – to oversee its implementation. Instead, it was established by the Economic and Social Council, the principal organ of the UN dealing with economic and social issues.

As in the CRC and the CEDAW, the CESCR has moved to a simplified reporting procedure to streamline its work to all state parties unless they decide to opt out and indicate their wish to maintain the traditional reporting procedure.



Check which states have opted in for the simplified reporting procedure on the [OHCHR website](#).

States must submit reports detailing how they implement the Covenant every eight years under the simplified reporting procedure, or whenever requested by the CESCR. For each session, the CESCR can invite six or seven States Parties to be reviewed.



The CESCR convenes twice a year, in Geneva, Switzerland, usually scheduled in February/March/April/May and September/October/November.



Check which states are currently under review on the [UN Treaty Body website](#).



Key moments for engaging with the CESCR

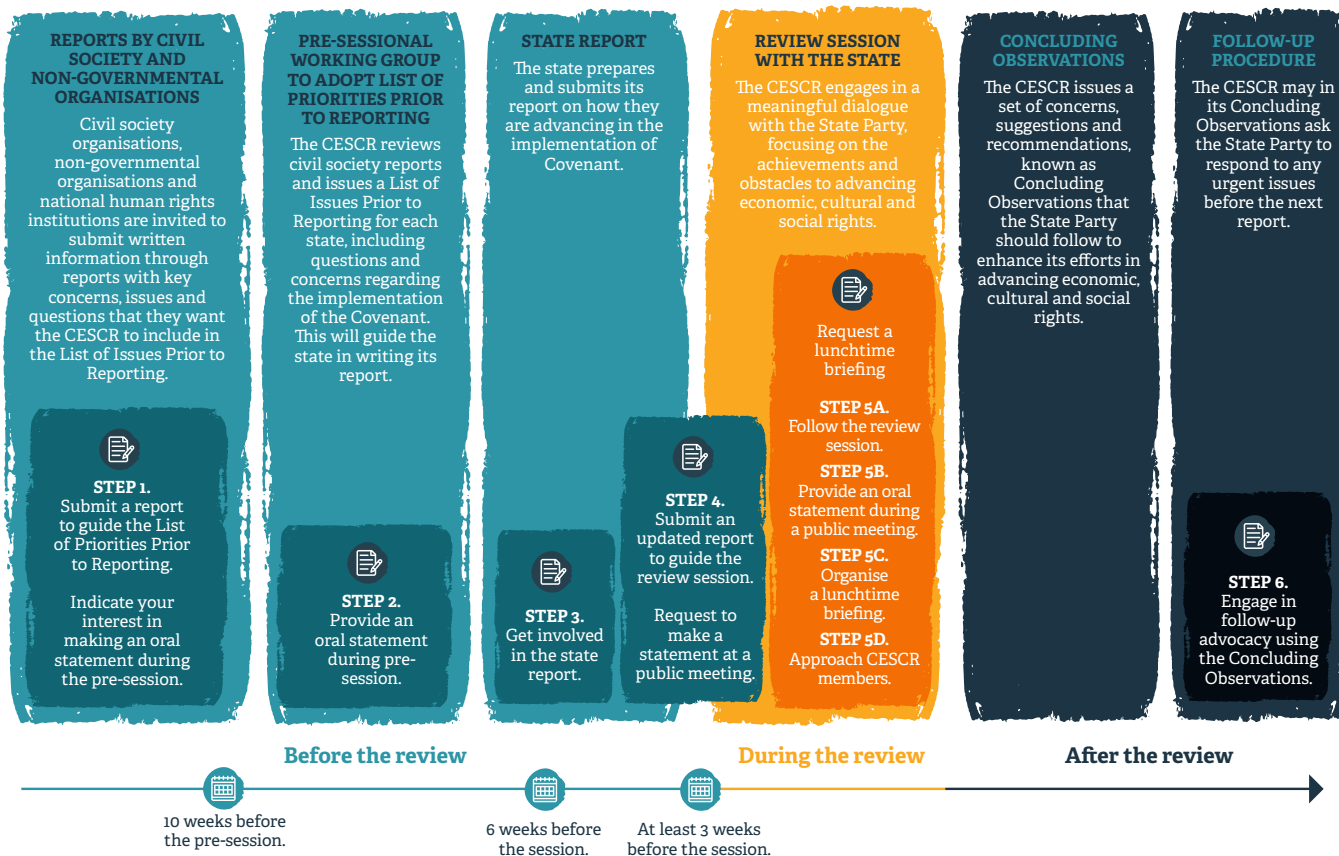
Civil society organisations play a pivotal role in advancing the Covenant's objectives by closely monitoring government implementation. The CESCR recognises civil society organisations as reliable sources of information, and values their involvement and ability to present alternative perspectives, information, evidence and data on matters concerning economic, social and cultural rights.

There are three key moments for civil society organisations to engage during the CESCR reporting cycle:

1. **Before the review session**, you can push for critical concerns around child marriage to receive due attention and consideration in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.
2. **During the review session**, you can influence the CESCR's questions to the state, including on measures taken to address child marriage. Through advocacy with CESCR members and participation in public and informal meetings, you can push for the Concluding Observations to incorporate child marriage concerns and targeted recommendations.
3. **After the review session**, you can use the CESCR's recommendations in your national advocacy, pushing for change at the country level.

Figure 6: Key entry points for engaging with the CESCR

SIMPLIFIED REPORTING PROCEDURE



TRADITIONAL REPORTING PROCEDURE

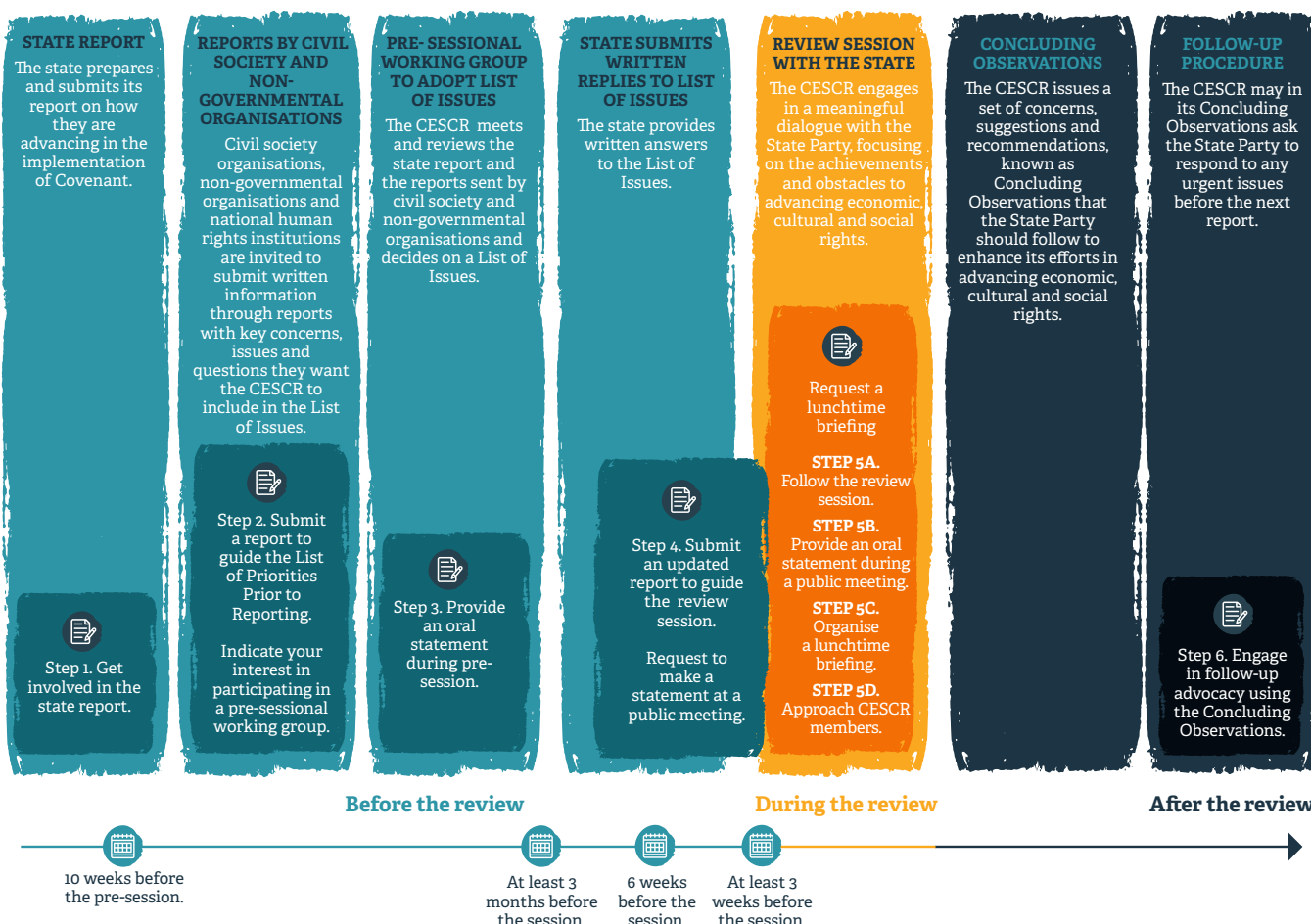


Figure 7: Example of time line for CESCR simplified reporting procedure – the Mongolia examination

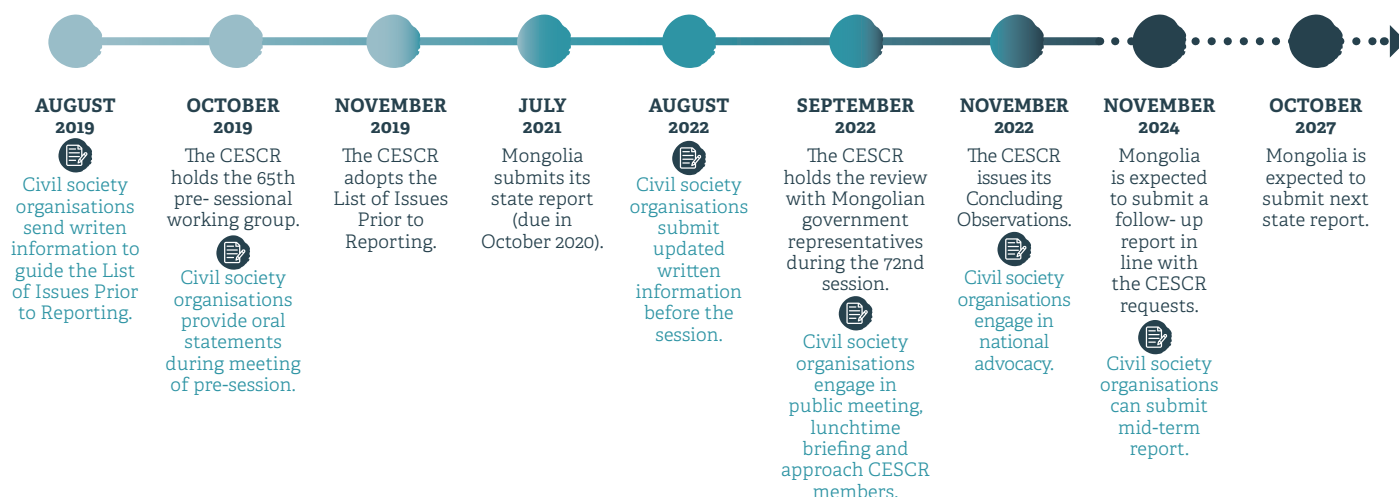
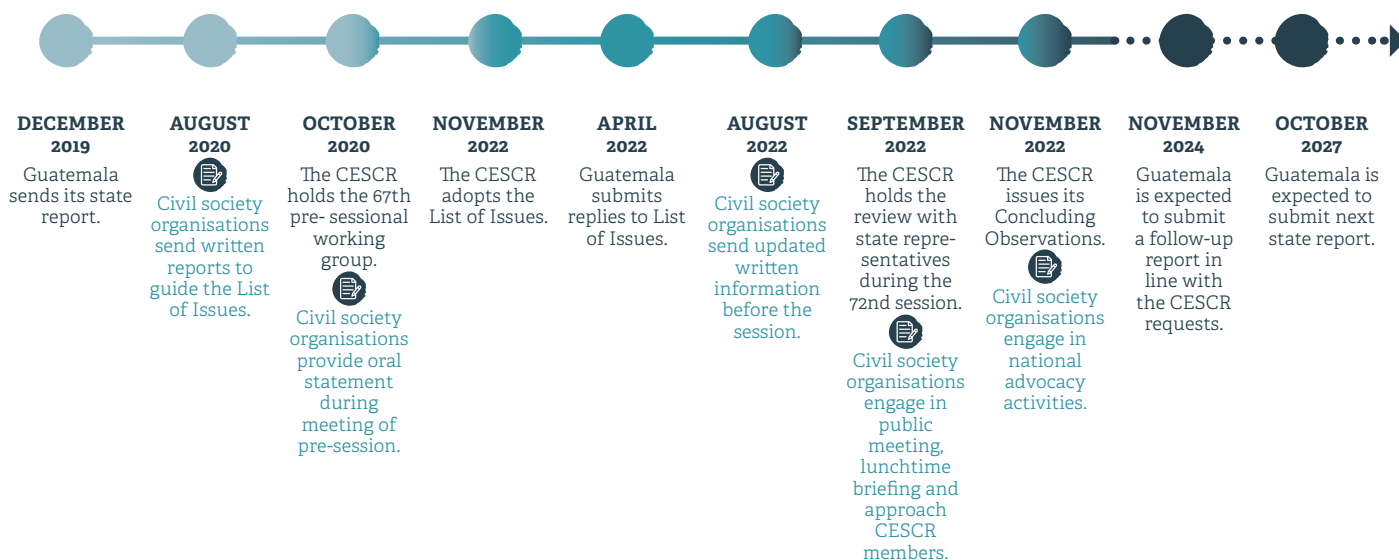


Figure 8: Example of timeline for CESCR standard reporting procedure – the Guatemala examination



BEFORE THE REVIEW



STEP 0.

CHECK THE SESSION CALENDAR AND INFORMATION RELEVANT TO THE STATE UNDER REVIEW (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



HOW TO: Check when your state review session is taking place

- The CESCR publishes a public document with timelines, critical deadlines and guidelines on civil society organisation participation for each session on the OHCHR [website](#).
- The document is available for each (past) session under “General Documentation > Information from the Secretariat > Informative note on participation to CESCR Committee for Civil Society and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)”.



IMPORTANT! There is no standard deadline or time for when the CESCR publishes this document, so check the information for each session regularly.



STEP 1.

SUBMIT AN ALTERNATIVE REPORT (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

This step is a crucial opportunity to guide the CESCR, particularly in the simplified reporting procedure.

This is a key moment for civil society organisations to provide the CESCR with:

1. Comprehensive data on child marriage prevalence (see the Toolbox on p.54).
2. Specific questions to ask the state under review.
3. Recommendations on how the state should address child marriage.
4. Information showing the unique experiences and needs of girls at risk of child marriage, and girls who are – or have been – married.

This will significantly influence if and how the CESCR addresses the issue of child marriage during the state review and in its Concluding Observations.

Your organisation can submit individual thematic reports to only address child marriage concerns, or prepare a joint report with other civil society organisations working more broadly on economic, social and cultural rights.



Submit your report **10 weeks before** the pre-session. If you want to give an oral statement at the pre-sessional working group (Step 3), make your request at the same time.



TIP! Ask for advice on engaging with the CESCR

Unlike for the CRC and the CEDAW, there are no other civil society organisations assisting or acting as intermediaries in the CESCR reporting procedure.

The [Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(GI-ESCR\)](#) is a non-governmental organisation with headquarters in Geneva. They can offer valuable advice on the most effective ways to engage with the CESCR, although they do not directly coordinate civil society engagement.

As soon as your organisation decides to submit a report, email info@gi-escr.org.



TIP! It might be strategic to collaborate on a comprehensive report with other organisations

As with the CRC and CEDAW, the CESCR accepts individual (thematic) and joint (comprehensive) reports. The CESCR receives many reports from organisations in the same country, so it might be best to submit a longer comprehensive report with other civil society organisations.

Consider reaching out to civil society organisations addressing child marriage in your country. *Girls Not Brides* can help you connect!

- Find individual organisations working on child marriage in your country through the *Girls Not Brides* [member directory](#).
- Find networks of organisations working together to address child marriage at the national and sub-national level on the *Girls Not Brides* [National Partnership and coalitions pages](#)
- If you are thinking of submitting a report and need information on other organisations' activities or want to find collaborators, email the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat at info@girlsnotbrides.org.



REMEMBER!

- The page limit for a thematic report is **10 pages**.
- The page limit comprehensive reports is **15 pages**.



HOW TO: Write & submit a CESCR report

Format:

- Word.
- Number all paragraphs for ease of reference.

Word limit:

- Thematic reports (report by an individual organisation): Maximum **10 pages**.
- Comprehensive reports (joint reports made with other organisations): Maximum **15 pages**.

Language: Reports can be submitted in **English, French** or **Spanish**. It is highly recommended to submit a full English version of your report.

Deadline:

- Reports for the pre-session should be submitted preferably **10 weeks** (at the latest eight weeks) before the beginning of the pre-sessional working group.
- Updated reports for the state review session (see Step 4) should be sent preferably six weeks (at the latest four weeks) before the beginning of the session.

Submission guidelines:

1. Go to the CESCR's [online submissions system](#).
2. Create an account.
3. Click on the link "View document" to submit a report.



IMPORTANT! If you want to deliver an oral statement at the pre-sessional working group (Step 3), make a request through the online system now. Indicate if you would like to join in-person or online. The OHCHR cannot help with travel or accommodation.



REMEMBER! The CESCR publishes a public document with guidance on civil society organisation participation for each session, including the timeline and deadlines for submissions and registration. Check this document and information for each session on the [OHCHR website](#), accessible under "General Documentation > Information from the secretariat".



STEP 2.

PROVIDE AN ORAL STATEMENT DURING THE PRE-SESSION (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF INVITED)

If your organisation submitted a written report – and requested and were invited to participate – you can give an oral statement at the pre-sessional working group. In this statement, you can provide CESCR members with relevant and up-to-date information.

Participation for meetings of the pre-sessional working group is by invitation only and the information is shared directly with participants.



Oral briefings usually take place during the **first day** of the pre-sessional working group for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting.



Request participation **10 weeks** before the pre-session.



HOW TO: Participate at the pre-sessional working group

1. Request participation 10 weeks before the pre-session through the online system (you should have done this when you submitted your report in Step 1). Indicate if you would like to join in-person or online.



IMPORTANT! The OHCHR cannot help with travel and accommodation plans. There may be technical requirements and trials for online participation.

2. Register through the [platform Indico](#) with a valid email address.



In December 2014, the Global Initiative for Economic Social and Cultural Rights participated at the 54th pre-session on Chile and provided an [oral statement](#) focused on education, which could help as a template for your oral statement.



STEP 3.

GET INVOLVED IN THE STATE REPORT (RECOMMENDED)

By participating in the state reporting process, you can establish a solid foundation for meaningful and sustained engagement throughout the reporting cycle.



HOW TO: Engage with the state reporting process

1. Reach out to government officials – especially in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – to ensure timely state report preparation.
2. Encourage them to address child marriage in their report.
3. Implement a media strategy to promote the submitted state report and stimulate a national discourse on child marriage through diverse media channels.



STEP 4.

SUBMIT AN UPDATED REPORT (RECOMMENDED)

If you did not initially submit a report to inform the List of Issues Prior to Reporting/List of Issues (Step 1), but still want to participate in the reporting process, you can do so now. In this updated report, you can:

- Provide written information or updates on specific issues highlighted in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting/List of Issues and in the state report.
- Use your organisation's expertise on issues relevant to child marriage – like education, sexual and reproductive health and rights and conflict- and crisis-affected settings – to influence the review session.



Send your updated report preferably **6 weeks** (at the latest 4 weeks) before the beginning of the session. Request to make a statement at a public meeting (Step 5b) at the same time.



See **HOW TO: Write & submit a CESCR report information on p.59**

DURING THE REVIEW



STEP 5A.

ATTEND THE STATE REVIEW SESSION (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)

Civil society organisations can attend the review session between the CESCR and state representatives, if it is feasible and safe to do so. You will only be there as observers and will not be able to intervene. You do not need UN Economic and Social Council status.



HOW TO: Participate at a state review session with the CESCR

1. Register to attend a state review session through the [Indico platform](#) with a valid email address.
2. Arrange your travel, accommodation and visas to enter Switzerland. The OHCHR does not help with this and cannot provide letters to Swiss authorities for visa applications by observers.
3. If you cannot attend in person, you can follow the dialogue online through [UN WebTV](#).



STEP 5B.

PROVIDE ORAL INFORMATION DURING A PUBLIC MEETING²⁵ (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

The CESCR will set aside some time at each session for civil society organisations who have submitted reports to provide oral statements. Following these statements, the CESCR may ask questions on the information provided.

This is a valuable opportunity for you to engage with the CESCR and ensure they consider child marriage. It is also a chance to network with other civil society organisations.

Requests for meetings will be accepted according to the availability of CESCR members.



Request to participate when you submit your updated report (Step 4).



HOW TO: Participate at the public briefing

1. Check the programme of work posted on the relevant session page for details of schedule and deadlines for registration.
2. Request participation through the CESCR's [online submissions system](#) when you submit your updated report (Step 4). Provide a valid email address for them to contact you.
3. If you cannot travel to Geneva, you can engage with the CESCR remotely. Contact the CESCR Secretariat for the technical requirements and to make the necessary arrangements at ohchr-cescr@un.org.
4. Refer to the summary record of the public meeting, available on the information section of each session.

25. ECSR- Net, n.d., [How to engage in parallel reporting](#).



STEP 5C.

ORGANISE A PRIVATE LUNCHTIME BRIEFING (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)

Before a review session begins, at lunchtime, civil society organisation representatives from the relevant country can hold an informal briefing session with the CESCR, lasting about an hour.

During this briefing, you can discuss in more detail the situation of child marriage in your country: its prevalence, progress, setbacks and what the government has done or not done to address it. CESCR members can also ask questions.



Send your request **3 weeks before** the state review session.



IMPORTANT! Some briefings might be joined by government-affiliated non-governmental organisations, who might report back to the authorities. You should make a security assessment before engaging with the CESCR.



HOW TO: organise a private briefing

1. Contact the CESCR Secretariat at ohchr-cescr@un.org.



Do this least **3 weeks before** the state review session.

2. If you miss the deadline:

- Contact the CESCR Secretariat.
- Contact the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at info@gi-escr.org. They have a close relationship with the CESCR and can inform you if there is an opportunity to join an existing informal briefing.

3. Complete a security assessment.



TIP! Coordinate with other civil society organisations to prepare your briefings

- Identify other civil society organisations that have also submitted reports to the CESCR on your country, and coordinate with them to prepare for your briefing(s).
- You can find the reports submitted by other organisations for each session under “Info from civil society organizations”.
- As the pre-session working group and the session take place in Geneva, you could partner with organisations that are already based there, like the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights office, which has extensive experience in engaging with the CESCR.



STEP 5D.

APPROACH CESCR MEMBERS (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)

Civil society organisations can engage with individual [CESCR members](#) in private meetings, providing comprehensive and up-to-date information for their Concluding Observations.

This is particularly valuable in situations where numerous human rights issues **compete for attention** in the state review session. It could be useful if you have had **limited opportunities** to address child marriage during briefings or when CESCR members have shown **limited responsiveness** to the issue during lunchtime briefings.



You can engage during and **up to 48 hours after** the end of the state review session, so the CESCR can include your inputs in their Concluding Observations.

HOW TO: Approach CESCR members

1. Speak to CESCR members during session breaks.
2. Share relevant information via email up to 48 hours after the session ends.
3. In these interactions, you can:
 - a. Respond to statements made by the government delegation.
 - b. Provide additional material on child marriage and related issues.

AFTER THE REVIEW



STEP 6.

ENGAGE IN FOLLOW-UP ADVOCACY (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

This is one of the most important steps.

You can use the CESCR's Concluding Observations to advance your advocacy goals at the national level, leveraging the authority of their recommendations to influence your state in fulfilling their obligations under the Covenant, and to end child marriage.



HOW TO: Use the CESCR's recommendations in your national advocacy

During the follow-up stage, your organisation can:

1. **Have discussions** with relevant government departments, human rights institutions, the Ombudsperson, and other entities to assess the State Party's compliance with obligations and recommendations under CESCR, with a specific focus on addressing child marriage.
2. **Share the Concluding Observations** related to child marriage, including on your social media, in briefings with Parliamentarians, interactions with National Human Rights Institutions, relevant Ministries, and press conferences.
3. **Submit a follow-up report.** The CESCR – as in the CEDAW process – can identify up to three recommendations for urgent action, achievable within 24 months. Civil society organisations are invited to provide a follow-up report on how the state is implementing these recommendations, for example those related to child marriage.



TIP! Learn from impactful civil society organisation reports to the CESCR

From *Girls Not Brides* member organisations:

- **Argentina.** Report from a coalition. [Fourth report of Argentina to the committee on economic, social and cultural rights. Access to abortion in Argentina referring to articles. 12, 3 and 15 of the ICESCR.](#) September 2018.

From other civil society organisations

- **Albania.** Report for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting. [Joint report on Albania's compliance with the CESCR by the Advocates for Human Rights and Human Rights in Democracy.](#) 7 January 2022.
- **Mongolia.** Report from a coalition. [Joint report by LGBT Centre and ILGA World on the rights of LGBTI persons.](#) 29 August 2022.



HOW TO: Structure & write a report to be submitted to the CESC

1. Cover page, including:

- Title of the report, including the state you are reporting on, the treaty and the time period covered by the report. For example, "Civil society submission to the CESC on [Country Name] for the [No of pre- session or session]."
- Name of the organisation(s) submitting the report.
- Date of submission.
- Contact information.
- If the report is available in more than one language or in a longer version, title of the other/original reports.
- If the report is confidential or not.

2. Table of contents

3. Executive summary (optional)

4. Introduction, including:

- Background, including:
 - Brief introduction the organisation(s) making the submission
 - The scope of the report, focusing on the cultural, economic and social rights related to child marriage.



TIP! Use the information in Table 3 on pp.49-53, which outlines the links between the Covenant and child marriage, highlighting the relevant treaty articles and cultural, economic and social rights.

- Methodology used to gather information.

5. Analysis based on Covenant clusters:

- The CESC has grouped the articles of the Covenant into clusters, which are set out in the reporting guidelines for states. They correspond to the order of the discussion at the state review session.
- Use the same clusters to structure your report, so the CESC can easily compare information in your report to that in the state report.
- You do not need to mention all clusters, only those relevant to child marriage, based on your analysis and the table of relevant Covenant articles on pp. 49-53. You could focus on these clusters of articles in your report:
 - Articles 1 and 3
 - Articles 6, 7, 9
 - Articles 10, 11, 12
 - Articles 13, 14, 15
- For the analysis, we recommend referring to national legislation (constitutions, laws, policies) and implementation measures related to child marriage, including prevention, protection, support, prosecution measures, and monitoring systems and mechanisms. Highlight successes and failures in the implementation process.
- If the state has already submitted its report, identify any gaps between the state report and the List of Issues Prior to Reporting issued by the CESC. Information should be supported by evidence like statistics, testimonies of those who have experienced child marriage, academic research, provisions of national and local laws, policies, regulations, programmes, etc.



TIP! You can find thematic and country-level evidence and data to support your report in the Toolbox of resources on p.54.

6. Sources of information: gather information about your country as a reference point. You can check:

- Previous CESCR Concluding Observations for your country.
- Previous civil society and non-governmental organisation reports.
- If the Special Rapporteurs on specific rights related to child marriage have submitted reports. For example, the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, on violence against women and girls, and on education, among others.
- If the state has submitted a report.
- The List of Issues Prior to Reporting.
- The General Comments.
- Concluding Observations related to child marriage of other UN treaty bodies, in particular the CRC and the CEDAW.

7. Targeted questions/recommendations: Offer a brief list of questions or recommendations, tailored to whether you are compiling a report for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting, or a more comprehensive report to guide the Concluding Observations.



REMEMBER! When submitting the report, indicate in the online system if you would like to participate at the public briefing or organise an informal briefing.

3.4 ENGAGING WITH THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS BETWEEN THE UPR AND CHILD MARRIAGE

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process within the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) aimed at enhancing the promotion and safeguarding of all human rights globally. Unlike other UN human rights monitoring mechanisms that focus on specific treaties, the UPR involves all 193 UN Member States, which review each other's human rights records, including efforts to address child marriage.

The main goal of getting involved in the UPR mechanism is to champion the inclusion of child marriage considerations in the UPR state reviews. This can encourage recommendations for the State under Review to improve legislation, policies, institutional practices and budgeting relevant to ending child marriage and advancing girls' rights.

To date, over [400 recommendations](#) related to child marriage have been issued to states through the UPR mechanism. This demonstrates the increasing recognition in the international community of the importance and urgency of addressing child marriage as an essential step in fulfilling girls' and women's rights and development goals. It also highlights the coordinated and persistent efforts of civil society organisations advocating for the prioritisation of this issue.

These recommendations represent a significant achievement and can guide national action and mobilise international support for addressing child marriage across the world. You can use them to advance your national advocacy strategies, pushing for state accountability in meeting their human rights obligations, especially in addressing child marriage.

The UPR reporting cycle – What is it?



The UPR operates on a five-year cycle. The UPR Working Group meets **three times** a year in Geneva, typically in January, May and November.

The UPR reviews 14 countries per session. Although civil society organisations cannot directly participate, they can submit written information and recommendations beforehand. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) then gathers data from UN agencies and civil society reports, producing a UN compilation and a stakeholders' report to inform Member States during the review process.

The UPR Working Group session (state review) consists of a 3.5-hour interactive discussion between the State under Review and other UN Member States:

- The State under Review has 70 minutes to present their report and respond to questions.
- Participating states have 140 minutes to ask questions, offer comments and make recommendations. Questions can also be submitted in writing up to 10 working days before the UPR.

After the review, the UPR Working Group compiles a report with recommendations for human rights improvements. Before adopting the Working Group's report, the State under Review indicates its stance on the recommendations made by other States, categorising them as "Accepted," or "Noted":



A recommendation is considered "Accepted" only if the State under Review explicitly uses the word "accept".

If the State under Review's response does not clearly express acceptance but simply acknowledges the recommendation, it is categorized as "Noted".

Approximately 4-6 months after the state review, the HRC approves the outcome of the UPR for the State under Review in a plenary session.



TIP! The OHCHR provides resources that can facilitate civil society advocacy with states that have undergone the UPR

These include:

- A letter from the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, offering observations considering the UPR cycle's outcome. Here is an example from [Peru](#).
- A matrix of recommendations clustered by themes, providing detailed information for each recommendation, recommending states, and the position of the State under Review. The matrix assists in the follow-up procedure. Here is an example from [Peru](#).
- A UPR infographic highlighting key trends between UPR cycles and linking to key areas for follow-up action. Here is an example from [Peru](#).

ENGAGING WITH THE UPR MECHANISM



TOOLBOX! Resources to ensure your reports are based in the evidence

You can use these resources to build an evidence-based report, and to define what issues and follow-up questions you want to be addressed through the CESCR review process.

Country-level data:

- The *Girls Not Brides* [child marriage atlas](#) has information on child marriage prevalence, drivers and laws per country.
- UNICEF [child marriage country profiles](#) include statistics on prevalence, characteristics of unions and insights into the lives of married girls by country.
- [Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism](#) showcases global, regional and national-level data and trends, disaggregated to highlight disparities within and among countries based on household wealth, educational attainment, rural or urban residence and subnational region.

Girls Not Brides thematic briefs & evidence reviews:

- Brief and evidence review on the [impact of the law on child marriage and girls' rights](#).
- Brief and working paper on [child protection and child marriage](#).
- Brief on how [ending child marriage is crucial to gender equality](#).
- Brief and thematic paper on [girls' education and child marriage](#).
- Research Spotlight and poster on [education interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Research Spotlight and poster on [economic empowerment interventions](#) to address child marriage and support married girls.
- Brief and thematic paper on [supporting girls who are married, pregnant and parenting](#).
- Symposium on [child marriage and mental health](#).
- Blog outlining successful approaches and key resources on child marriage in [humanitarian settings](#).

Resources from other organisations:

Sexual Rights Initiative and the international Planned Parenthood Federation, 2012, [Sexual rights and the universal Periodic Review. A toolkit for advocates](#).

Although the UPR is a state-led process, civil society organisations play a critical role, and have several opportunities to influence UPR outcomes in their countries and internationally – before, during and after the review.²⁶



TIP! Contact UPR Info for support

[UPR Info](#) is a non-governmental organisation located in Geneva, Switzerland. They play a pivotal role in supporting civil society organisations in engaging with the UPR mechanism.

26. UPR Info, 2017, [The civil society compendium. A comprehensive guide for civil society organisations engaging in the Universal Periodic Review](#); OHCHR, 2020, [Universal period review. Tips for engagement at country level for national human rights institutions and civil society](#).

Figure 9: Key entry points for civil society organisations to engage with the UPR

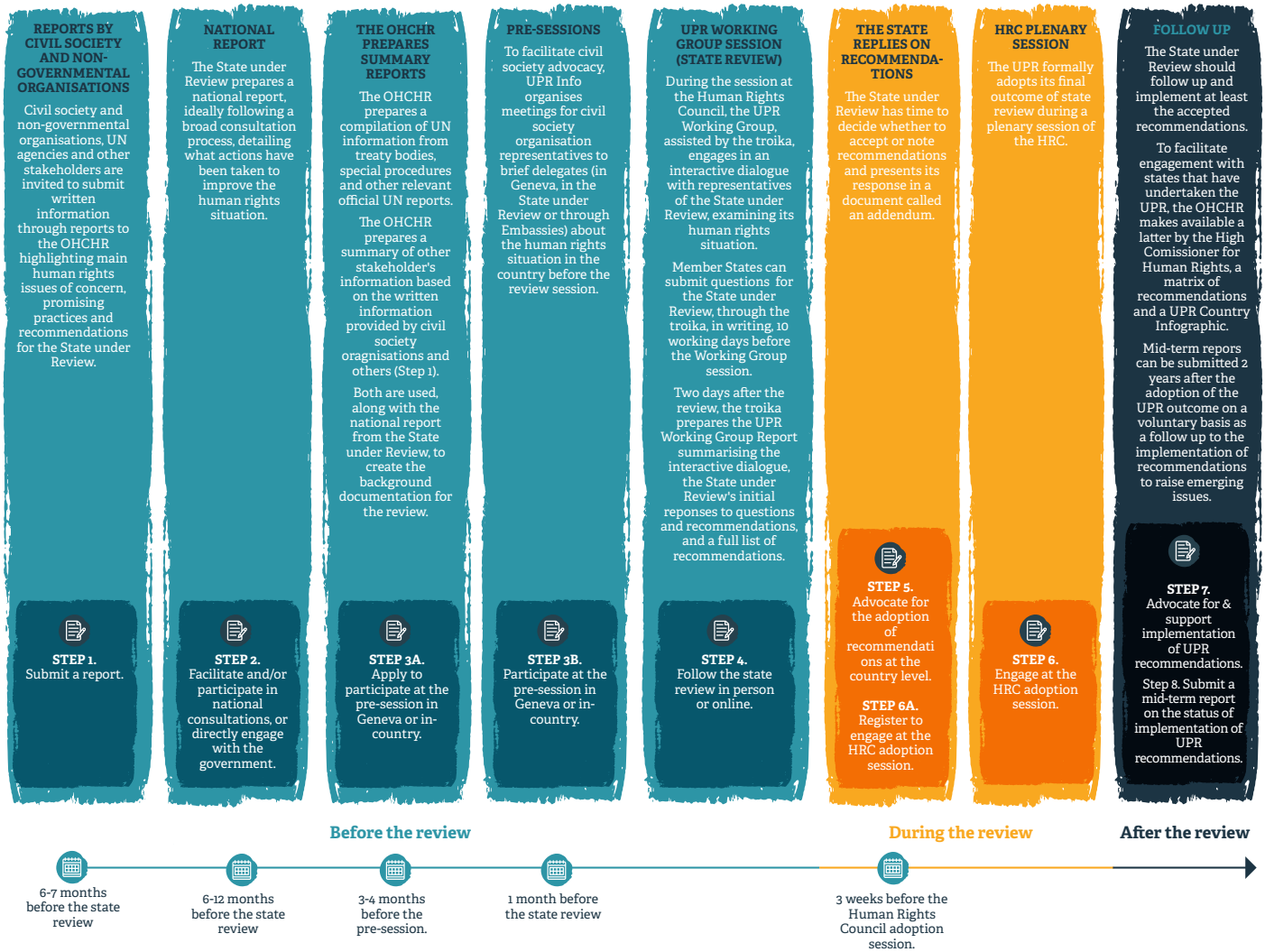
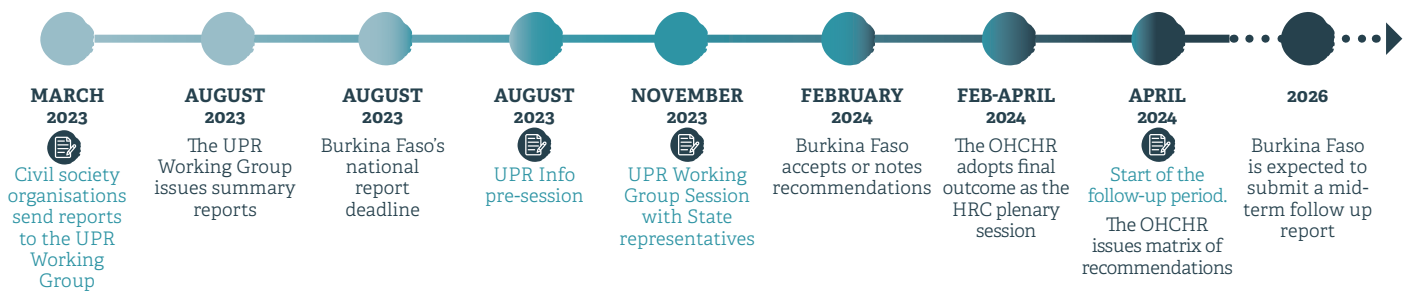


Figure 10: Example of timeline for UPR reporting procedure – the Burkina Faso examination (4th Cycle, 44th Session)



BEFORE THE REVIEW



STEP 0.

CHECK THE SCHEDULED STATE REVIEW AND DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED BY THE UPR FOR EACH CYCLE (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



HOW TO: Check the UPR schedule & documentation

1. Visit the [OHCHR website](#) for guidelines and submission deadlines for civil society engagement.
2. Review previous cycle materials by country – including national reports and UPR outcomes – to understand the State under Review stance on addressing child marriage



You can search for [documentation by country](#) on the OHCHR website.



STEP 1.

SUBMIT A REPORT BEFORE THE STATE REVIEW (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



Submit your report at least **6 months before** the relevant state review.

Submitting a report is one of the most direct and inclusive ways to participate in the UPR process. The OHCHR reviews the information submitted by civil society organisations, and considers it for inclusion in the summary report.

This is a significant opportunity to advocate for child marriage to be prioritised during the state review.

Reports should include:

- Information on the implementation of recommendations from previous UPR cycles.
- Updates on specific issues like child marriage and relevant rights like girls' education, and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Identify challenges and promising practices.
- Draft action-oriented recommendations for the State under Review.



TIP! Strengthen your recommendations by referring to other UN treaty bodies & checking the UPR Working Group recommendations

- You can draw your UPR recommendations from the Concluding Observations of other treaty bodies, or develop your own. The UPR serves to strengthen treaty implementation.
- You can also align your recommendations to other treaty bodies with those from the UPR, ensuring mutual reinforcement between the two mechanisms.
- Look on the [UPR Info database](#) for comprehensive information about UPR recommendations for any given country. You can view the status of recommendations and past responses provided by the State under Review. The database has filters to narrow down recommendations by the State under Review, the Recommending State, UPR cycle, the status of the recommendation, and thematic issues.
- Use the toolbox of resources on p.67 and the tables highlighting the links between the different human rights frameworks and child marriage on pp. 13, 31 and 49 to strengthen your recommendations.



TIP! You can submit an individual or joint report

Civil society organisations can submit individual or joint reports to the OHCHR. You should decide based on how you think you can communicate your concerns most effectively, your resources and your advocacy strategy.

- **Individual submissions** are faster to prepare, allow focus on specific issues and may be more effective if your organisation is recognised by OHCHR. Their word limit is **2,815**.
- **Joint submissions** offer increased visibility and credibility, resource pooling, and enhanced cooperation among civil society organisations. They are more likely to be reflected in OHCHR summaries. Their word limit is **5,630**.

We recommend joining the **UPR Info webinars** for civil society organisations. They focus on how to engage with the UPR, sharing learnings and promising practices from experienced participants. They are also an opportunity to explore collaboration with other organisations.

- Information on webinar dates and registration is in the news section of the [UPR Info website](#) and its social media channels ([X](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)).
- For inquiries, contact stakeholders@upr-info.org.



IMPORTANT! Civil society submissions to the UPR cannot be confidential; they must include the identity of the organisation, individual or group, and will be published online. It is important to assess the risk of backlash if your organisation engages in the UPR process, especially if you do in-person advocacy, including in the pre-session, advocacy with diplomats, delivering statements, etc.



HOW TO: Write & submit a UPR report

Format:

- Word document.
- For ease of reference, number paragraphs and pages.

Word limit:

- **Individual submissions:** Maximum **2,815 words**, excluding cover page, endnotes and annexes.
- **Joint submissions:** Maximum **5,630 words**, excluding cover page, endnotes and annexes.
- Additional documentation can be annexed for reference. Annexes should be submitted and uploaded separately from the report and be clearly identified as such.
- Endnotes should only be used to reference information.

Language: One of the UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), but preferably in **English, French or Spanish**.

Deadline:



Submissions should be sent **at least 6 months before** the relevant Working Group session (state review). The exact deadlines are posted on the [OHCHR UPR website](#).



IMPORTANT! Late submissions will not be considered.

Submission guidelines:

1. Check the OHCHR [guidelines](#) on using the online submissions registration system. There is no formal template for civil society submissions, but the OHCHR has developed a template for its summary. If you present your information using the same headings, it will make it easier for the OHCHR to know which section the information should be included under.
2. Create an organisational profile in the [UPR submissions registration system](#). Approval of this profile can take up to 24 hours.

3. Submit your report through the online system.



If you have any technical issues using the online system, send an email to UPR submissions at ohchr-uprsubmissions@un.org.

Where to find existing written submissions:

- All written submissions are public and can be found on the OHCHR website: UPR Documentation by country > Reports and information > Summary of stakeholders' information.
- Here is an example from [Paraguay](#).
- Most documents are in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian and Arabic.



TIP! You can involve children and young people in the UPR reporting process

Children can participate in the UPR process. If involving children and young people in these processes, you need:

- A safeguarding procedure to ensure their safety at all times.
- To assess the risks associated with this involvement, especially in countries where there is backlash against human rights defenders.



Useful resources:

- If you want to engage girls and young women affected by child marriage, you can use [Girls Not Brides safeguarding standards](#) as a guide.
- The UPR also has a [child-friendly manual](#) to guide children and adolescents through participating in the UPR process, enhancing their ability to contribute meaningfully.



CASE STUDY: Engaging children in the UPR process during the COVID-19 pandemic

“Children’s reports offered a platform to consider the reality and voices of children and adolescents, allowing us to understand their situation in a comprehensive way. It also became a participatory exercise for children and adolescents, enabling us to gather information on their situation over time, and to evaluate our organisation’s impact. We also learned a lot about safeguarding and strategies for creating participatory documents with them.”

CDIA, a member of Girls Not Brides in Paraguay

Using virtual engagement, CDIA brought a group of children from across Paraguay into the UPR process during the COVID-19 pandemic. CDIA supported them to actively participate in the development of a children’s report, collating their voices and experiences, and showcasing their vision of the human rights situation in the country.

Their report [Our rights, our voices](#) provides invaluable insights into the challenges faced by young people in Paraguay.



STEP 2.

FACILITATE AND/OR PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS OR ENGAGE WITH THE GOVERNMENT DIRECTLY (RECOMMENDED)

Organise discussions and facilitate or participate in national consultations that involve exchanges between civil society organisations, national human rights institutions and government bodies.

Ensure that up-to-date data, evidence and information on child marriage are made available during these discussions.



TIP! Use the toolbox of resources on p.67 to find evidence and messaging by country and/or by theme to support these discussions.



STEP 3A. & 3B

PARTICIPATE AT PRE-SESSIONS IN GENEVA OR IN-COUNTRY (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED IF SELECTED)



Pre-sessions happen **1 month** before the state review. You need to register **3-4 months** before the state review.



REMEMBER! Only civil society organisations that have submitted a report can register to be speakers in the pre-session.

Pre-sessions, organised by UPR Info, are a platform for civil society organisation representatives to address specific issues to state representatives, both in Geneva with UN Member State Permanent Mission representatives²⁷ and in-country with Embassy representatives.

Depending on the context, civil society organisations and UPR Info can organise pre-sessions within the State under Review. These sessions, which complement UPR Info's Geneva pre-sessions, offer a broader platform for civil society organisations to voice concerns ahead of the state review.

Diplomats are crucial allies in the UPR process, as they benefit from receiving information and recommendations for use in the review.

If your organisation is chosen by UPR-Info to participate in the pre-session, there is a **greater likelihood that issues related to child marriage will be considered in the summary report**, and that states will make recommendations related to child marriage to the State under Review.

After applying, selected civil society representatives will receive an invitation to deliver a **5-7-minute presentation** to diplomats in Geneva, highlighting the key human rights concerns civil society organisations believe should be included in the OHCHR summary report.



TIP! Follow UPR Info to keep up to date & consider collaborating on a joint report

- Subscribe to the UPR Info newsletter (through their [website](#)) and follow them on social media ([X](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#)) to stay updated on calls for applications to the pre-sessions, and ensure you apply before the deadline.
- UPR Info receive a lot of applications, so they give priority to national coalitions and organisations representing diverse human rights themes. If your organisation is small and focuses only on child marriage, you might want to collaborate on a joint report.
- For questions about the pre-sessions, contact the UPR Info Policy and and Advocacy Programme at: presessions@upr-info.org.

27. A list of Permanent Missions and their contact details are in the [UN blue book](#).

DURING THE REVIEW



STEP 4.

FOLLOW THE STATE REVIEW (RECOMMENDED)



The state review takes place in Geneva, as an interactive dialogue during the HRC sessions held **3 times a year** (February-March, June-July and September-October).

While only UN Member States can speak during these sessions, civil society organisations with UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consultative status can attend and use the platform to network and advocate with the reviewing states, engage with state delegations – particularly those from the troika group – and connect with other stakeholders.

By attending or monitoring these sessions, your organisation can gather first-hand insights on recommendations and state responses, which are crucial for your national-level child marriage advocacy and strategy development.



More information on how to engage in the state review in this [practical guide](#).

Attending sessions in Geneva can be expensive, but you can also do a lot of advocacy remotely or online:

1. Watch the sessions live via the [UNTV webcast](#).
2. Partner with Geneva-based organisations to monitor and attend the sessions on your behalf.
3. Organise a live or pre-recorded viewing of the sessions in your country.
4. Raise awareness through your social media channels and media contacts.



TIP! How to get ECOSOC status or partner for sponsorship

To attend and participate in certain stages of the UPR and HRC sessions, and to deliver oral statements, your organisation must have consultative status with ECOSOC. You do not need this status to submit reports or attend pre-sessions organised by UPR Info, as they will facilitate access to the UN premises for those selected.

To get ECOSOC status, your organisation must submit an application demonstrating their relevance to the work of the ECOSOC, including their aims, activities and contributions to the field of human rights.

Organisations without ECOSOC status can partner with accredited organisations who may be open to sponsoring others so they can participate in HRC sessions. This can be arranged by networking within the human rights community and forming alliances with organisations that have common goals and interests in the human rights arena, including those working on child marriage.



More information on how your organisation can apply for ECOSOC consultative status on the [ECOSOC website](#).



REMEMBER! *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* has ECOSOC consultative status. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations who do not have ECOSOC status and who need assistance accessing the HRC can contact the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat at info@girlsnotbrides.org.



STEP 5.

ADVOCATE FOR THE ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)



During the **4-6 month period** after the state review and before the UPR adopts the final outcome during the HRC plenary session.

Civil society organisations can advocate for the acceptance and implementation of key recommendations on child marriage by the State under Review. This involves **identifying key government actors** and the roles they can play, using tactics like:

- advocacy workshops,
- direct engagement with government officials and international actors,
- letters to ministers.



TIP! Develop advocacy factsheets & presentations to support your advocacy asks

Materials like factsheets and presentations are key tools for advocacy around the UPR process. If your organisation attends the pre-sessions or the HRC session in Geneva, you can share these materials with state representatives in person or via email. This will facilitate the dissemination of information collected by civil society organisations, and ensure that suggested recommendations are synthesised in a coherent document.

These materials should:

- Briefly and clearly summarise civil society organisation reports.
- Provide information on child marriage prevalence in the State under Review.
- Outline the progress and challenges related to specific issues addressed in civil society organisation reports, including child marriage and associated policy areas like education, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Include suggested recommendations.
- Include contact details for relevant civil society organisations.

Some examples:

- CEHURD, 2022, Girls Not Brides member in Uganda. [Factsheet on the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health in Uganda.](#)
- Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh, Joining Forces Bangladesh, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 2023, [Factsheet on child marriage in Bangladesh for the 4th cycle of the UPR.](#)
- Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh, Joining Forces Bangladesh, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), 2023, [Presentation on child rights and child marriage in Bangladesh for the UPR Info pre-session.](#)



TIP! Use the toolbox of resources on p.67 to build evidence-based materials.



STEP 6A. & 6B.

ENGAGE AT THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL PLENARY SESSION FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE FINAL UPR OUTCOME (RECOMMENDED IF IN GENEVA)



Register **3 weeks before** the HRC plenary session.

This is the last step of the review process in Geneva, when the HRC adopts the UPR outcomes and issues the HRC report. A HRC comprehensive discussion on the UPR takes place as part of agenda item 6, after formal acceptance of the UPR reports.

Civil society organisations with ECOSOC consultative status can present their perspectives and insights directly to the HRC, but must register and apply for a speaking slot.



More on how to engage with the HRC session, registration, submission guidelines and deadlines on the [OHCHR website](#).

Through concise 2-minute oral interventions, written statements and side events, civil society organisations can:

- Emphasise the recommendations on child marriage noted by the government.
- Ask about the State under Review's strategy for implementing the accepted recommendations.
- Ask about the role civil society will play in their implementation.



REMEMBER! If you do not have ECOSOC status, or are not in Geneva, you can also follow the session through [UN Web TV](#).



TIP! Monitor which UPR recommendations the State under Review has “accepted” and which ones were simply “noted”, to plan your “after review” national advocacy.

AFTER THE REVIEW

Civil society organisations are instrumental in monitoring the State under Review implementation of accepted recommendations, engaging in advocacy to ensure commitments are fulfilled and raising public and stakeholder awareness of the outcomes and the state's obligations.

This continuous engagement throughout the UPR cycle can amplify the voices of civil society within international human rights mechanisms, and strengthens the accountability mechanisms that underpin the UPR process.



STEP 7.

ADVOCATE FOR AND SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UPR RECOMMENDATIONS (RECOMMENDED)

It is crucial that civil society organisations continue to advocate for the implementation of recommendations, actively provide strategies and support to the government, and (at least) raise awareness of the UPR recommendations.

You can:

1. Use the High Commissioner's Letter and its Annex of Recommendations – particularly those regarding child marriage and related policy areas – to advocate with government ministries and other national stakeholders for the development or enhancement of follow-up action on the accepted UPR recommendations.
2. If child marriage was one of the issues addressed during the state review, and recommendations were put forward by reviewing states, you can **emphasise that many of your policy requests related to child marriage are supported by other UN member states and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** in your national-level advocacy with authorities.



STEP 8.

SUBMIT A MID-TERM REPORT ON THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF UPR RECOMMENDATIONS (RECOMMENDED)

Ensuring continued accountability for human rights commitments made during the UPR requires strategic follow-up on recommendations. When civil society organisations engage more robustly with mid-term reporting, they foster a stronger connection between successive reviews.

A well-documented mid-term report is a crucial repository of information for the global community, and can shape future recommendations to be addressed to the State under Review in the next cycle.

Usually, implementation is categorised into three levels:

- fully implemented
- partially implemented
- not implemented

Your mid-term report should indicate the status of the recommendations relevant to child marriage using these categories.



TIP! Follow a OHCHR template for your mid-term report

- When drafting your mid-term report, you can follow the [suggested templates](#) provided by the OHCHR for each UPR cycle.
- To learn more about mid-term reporting check UPR Info, 2016, [UPR mid-term reporting. Optimising sustainable implementation. Good practices for UPR stakeholders.](#)



CASE STUDY: Engaging in the UPR process for Paraguay

In 2020, [CDIA](#) – a *Girls Not Brides* member in Paraguay – made the strategic decision to actively participate in the UPR process, capitalising on the decision to move fully online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a children's rights observatory, CDIA has vital information and data regarding the implementation of children's human rights in the country. Being a network-based organisation and considering the diverse range of issues its members address, they decided to produce three alternative reports:

1. A [comprehensive report](#) addressing all human rights violations.
2. A [thematic report](#) focusing on the right to education.
3. A [children's report](#) featuring insights from boys, girls and adolescents across the country.

These opportunities were invaluable for enhancing CDIA's capacity in human rights, report writing and engaging in advocacy at the international level.



TIP! Learn from impactful civil society organisation reports to the UPR

“The report added value to the organisation’s work, as it was the opportunity to push the advocacy agenda we have been working on for a long time. Some of the key issues adopted [by Tanzania] include the re-entry of the pregnant girls back to school.”

Children’s Dignity Forum, Girls Not Brides member in Tanzania

From *Girls Not Brides*’ member organisations:

- **Argentina.** Joint report, including *Girls Not Brides* member Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM). [Universal Periodic Review of Argentina. Third Cycle Evaluation. Access to abortion in Argentina.](#) November 2017
- **Tanzania.** Joint report, including *Girls Not Brides* member Children’s Dignity Forum. [Tanzania Civil Society Report on The Status of The Implementation of The 133 UPR Recommendations Of March 2016 Which Were Accepted By The United Republic of Tanzania.](#) March 2021.

From other organisations

- **Indonesia.** Joint report. Indonesian Civil Society Coalition for Abolition of Child Marriage. [Submission to UN Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) of 4th cycle for Indonesia. Joint submission 3.](#) 2022.
- **Zambia.** Individual report. [The UPR Project at Birmingham city University on child, early and forced marriage.](#) Zambia’s Universal Periodic Review, Fourth Cycle, 42nd session of the UPR Working Group. January - February 2023



HOW TO: Structure & write a report to be submitted to the UPR

Outline for submissions based on the [OHCHR guidelines](#)

1. Cover page, including:

- Title containing the State under Review, for example, “UPR submission on [Country Name]”.
- Time period covered, e.g. “4th cycle”.
- Name and acronym of the organisation(s) submitting the report.
- Logo(s) of the organisation(s) submitting the report.
- Date of submission.
- Contact information.

2. Introduction, including:

- Brief introduction to the organisation(s) making the submission.
- The scope of the report, focusing on 5-10 key human rights issues identified during the reporting period, such as human rights violations related to child marriage.



TIP! Refer to the chapters on CRC (pp. *) , CEDAW (pp. *) and CESC (pp. *) for a review of the relevant treaty articles and human rights violations associated with child marriage.

3. Methodology, including:

- Outline of methodology used to gather information, emphasising primary sources.
- Explanation of the basis of joint submissions, if any.
- Information from secondary sources should be cited in endnotes and included only when essential.



IMPORTANT! Priority will be given to first-hand information for the OHCHR stakeholders’ report, including their perspectives, discoveries and conclusions. Submissions mostly or entirely relying on second-hand information will not be considered for the OHCHR stakeholders’ report.

4. Content clustered by key human rights. For each human rights issue identified include:

- A concise definition and contextual background of the situation of human rights in your country, incorporating the state's achievements and challenges. Support your arguments by including facts, evidence relevant to the priority issues and referencing relevant human rights instruments and national legal frameworks.
- An analysis of the implementation status of relevant recommendations from previous UPR cycles:
 - Categorise these as “fully implemented,” “partially implemented,” “in process,” or “not implemented”.
 - Highlight any progress, regressions or promising practices observed.
 - Ensure every recommendation is clearly referenced (HRC report, cycle, paragraph number, recommendation number and recommending country).



You can find the HRC report number at the top right side of the Working Group reports. Here is an example of a recommendation from Guatemala to Paraguay described in the UPR Working Group during the 2nd cycle: [\[A/HRC/32/9\] 2nd cycle, Para. 102.7 \[Guatemala\]](#).

5. Recommendations for each human rights issue identified:

- Formulate actionable and feasible recommendations, echoing prior suggestions where relevant. These recommendations should adhere to the SMART criteria – being Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Result-Oriented, and Time-Bound, and should directly relate to the topics addressed throughout the report.
- For example, as stated in the [report submitted by the Indonesian Civil Society Coalition for Abolition of Child Marriage in 2022](#), “by 2025, ensure that the comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education is integrated into the school curriculum at the elementary, junior and high school levels”; “implement marriage law no. 16/ 2019 and stipulate sub-national administration rights to make derivative policies in the form of regional regulations”.

6. Annex:

- Civil society organisations are encouraged to download their country matrix from previous cycles and complete the right-hand column named “*Assessment/comments on level of implementation*” with their assessment on whether the recommendations have been fully implemented or not.
- Submit the matrix as an annex to your written submission, so it will not affect the word count.
- The specific matrices can be found in the “documentation by country” section under “Matrix of recommendations” once they have been made available on the [OHCHR website](#).

ANNEX. USEFUL REFERENCES

- Child Rights Connect, 2021, [*Together with children, for children. A guide for civil society organisations empowering children in CRC reporting.*](#)
- International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association: Kirichenko, Kseniya & Nolan, Helen, 2020, [*Advocating on Gender Identity and Gender Expression – The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Practical guide*](#) (Geneva: ILGA World).
- Rutgers and ARROW, 2020, A RHRN [*Toolkit for reporting to CEDAW on youth SRHR.*](#) Shadow report template. Utrecht. Right Here Right Now.

**“INTERNATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS
TREATIES ARE
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**LEVERAGING UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE**

**A step-by-step toolkit for civil
society organisations**

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of over 1,400 civil society organisations from more than 100 countries committed to ending child marriage and ensuring girls can fulfil their potential.



The Global Partnership
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