

Education is the Key: Ending Child Marriage in the Sahel

Girls in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger face some of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. This harmful practice is limiting girls' lives and blocking the development of the region.

The consequences of child marriage are lifelong and touch every aspect of a country.

When a girl is married, she is more likely to leave school, to become pregnant and have a child when she is not ready to, to suffer from violence in the home, to have limited decision-making ability and earn less over her lifetime. Child marriage reinforces cycles of poverty. When girls are denied the opportunity to secure a job and develop skills, they become trapped in hardship. Consequences for the country are also alarming: The World Bank estimates the cumulative costs of child marriage between 2014 and 2030 are above \$5 trillion globally.

G7 leaders have an opportunity to accelerate development in the Sahel by taking action on the root causes of child marriage, and ensure that every individual is able to flourish and contribute to the life of the community.

Education is the key that can unlock the future of the girls of the Sahel. The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years. With education, a girl gains the skills and opportunities to lift her and her family out of poverty, and she gains the knowledge and confidence to choose the future she wants.

We are calling on the G7 leaders to:

1. **Double** the overall aid to basic and secondary education in the G5 Sahel countries for a minimum of three years to meet current gaps in education funding.
2. **Recognise** child marriage as a significant barrier to education in many countries, and reflect this in G7 political and financial commitments.
3. **Support** the development of programmes and policies that ensure girls access to safe, quality, primary and secondary education, and commit to increasing assistance to education across Africa, especially in countries with significant girls' education challenges.

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THE SAHEL: CHILD MARRIAGE IN FOCUS

Ensuring access to education for girls must be at the heart of development efforts in the Sahel. By investing in education across the region, G7 leaders can reduce poverty, lower child marriage rates and help girls to determine their futures.

CHAD

Chad has the **third highest prevalence rate of child marriage** in the world: 67% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 30% are married before the age of 15. Displacement across and within borders has led to increased insecurity, driving rates of child marriage. Chadian girls who don't complete their education marry at the age of 16 on average, compared to 19 years for girls who have completed secondary education.

- **Legal context:** The minimum age of marriage is 18, but customary law marriages of girls above 13 years are legal.
- **National Education Action Plan:** Addresses the weaknesses of the education system, including quality and teacher allocation, but fails to reference child marriage as a barrier to education.
- **We call on the Government of Chad to** recognise child marriage as a barrier to education and ensure that education plans recognise the specific needs of girls at risk of child marriage and already married girls.

NIGER

Niger has the highest prevalence rate of child marriage in the world and the 14th highest absolute number of child brides – 676,000. 76% of girls in Niger are married before their 18th birthday and 28% are married before the age of 15. A 2017 World Bank study suggests that **ending child marriage in Niger could save the country more than USD25 billion by 2030**. In Niger, many girls drop out of school, or are excluded, due to poor results and an unsafe environment. This places them at heightened risk of marrying young due to limited alternative options.

- **Legal Context:** The minimum legal age of marriage is 15 years for girls and 18 years for boys. However minors can be married before those ages with parental consent, and the President may grant age exemptions for serious reasons.
- **National Education Action Plan:** Includes reference to early and forced marriage as a barrier to the advancement of women, but implementation and progress in the sector faces challenges limiting progress.
- **We call on the Government of Niger to** follow through on its National Education Action Plan with effective implementation strategies for addressing child marriage as a barrier to education at all levels of the school system. Within this, to ensure that girls are safe at school and have access to quality education.

BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso has the **fifth highest prevalence rate of child marriage** in the world: 52% of girls in Burkina Faso are married before their 18th birthday and 10% are married before the age of 15. A World Bank study shows that **ending child marriage in Burkina Faso could generate \$179 million in earning and productivity**. In Burkina Faso, girls with no education marry at a younger age than those who have completed secondary school or higher.

- **Legal Context:** The minimum age of marriage is 17 years for girls and 20 years for boys. However girls can marry as young as 15 years if it is authorised by civil courts.
- **National Education Action Plan:** Burkina Faso's education plan 2017-2030 has a focus on quality education for all.
- **We call on the Government of Burkina Faso** to reduce inequalities by addressing child marriage as a barrier to education for girls and to ensure girls stay in school.

MALI

Mali has the **sixth highest prevalence rate of child marriage** in the world: 52% of girls in Mali are married before the age of 18 and 17% are married before their 15th birthday. A 2017 World Bank study estimates that **ending child marriage in Mali could result in USD174.8 million productivity gains**.

- **Legal Context:** The minimum legal age of marriage is 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys. However individuals older than 15 years old can marry with the authorisation of the "Chief de Circonscription Administrative" and parental consent.
- **EDUCATION IS KEY:** 50% of women who only completed primary education were married before the age of 18, compared to 18% who had completed the second cycle of secondary education.
- **National Education Action Plan:** Is currently being developed.
- **We call on the Government of Mali** to follow through on its pledge to reduce gender disparities in the education system – a root cause of child marriage and school dropout – and to ensure it includes comprehensive plans for girls' education in its National Education Action Plan.

MAURITANIA

Mauritania has the **20th highest prevalence rate of child marriage in the world**: 37% of girls in Mauritania are married before the age of 18 and 18% are married before their 15th birthday. 43% of women with no education were married as children, compared to only 22% who had completed secondary school or higher.

- **Legal Context:** The minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years with no exceptions. Article 9 and 10 of the Personal Status Code Act 2001 mention that an adult woman cannot be married without both her consent and the presence of her guardian who must be male and Muslim, however, the silence of the woman is taken as consent.
- **National Education Action Plan:** While progress has been made on primary education, there remains low access to secondary education.
- **We call on the Government of Mauritania** to follow through with implementation of universal completion of secondary education as outlined in its National Education Action Plan.