



Child, early and forced marriage in post-2015

Child, early and forced marriage in the post-2015 dialogue

Child, early and forced marriage is a core development and human rights issue, which must be addressed in the new development framework if we are to build a healthier, safer, more prosperous world where no girl is left behind:

- Ending child, early and forced marriage is critical to attain gender equality and women's empowerment. It is a human rights violation that denies girls and women their rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination, and to live free from violence and exploitation, including slavery and servitude.
- Child, early and forced marriage has directly hindered the achievement of six of the eight Millennium Development Goals, and ending the practice will be key to achieving seven of the proposed SDGs. Without serious and comprehensive national attention to ending child, early and forced marriage, the proposed goals on poverty, nutrition, health, education, gender equality, economic growth and reduction of inequality will not be achieved.

There is growing support for a target to end child, early and forced marriage in the post-2015 development framework, however, the target is far from guaranteed.

- **There has been unprecedented attention to child, early and forced marriage as a core human rights and development issue over the past few years:**
 - The 2014 UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution, 2013 Human Rights Council and UNGA resolutions, the Girl Summit and African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage reflect broad recognition that it is a crucial human rights and development issue that holds back girls, their families, and the development of our nations.
- **The importance of ending child, early and forced marriage within the post-2015 framework has been consistently included throughout negotiations:**
 - The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 development agenda recommended a gender goal and that progress on the goal be measured by ending child marriage.
 - The synthesis report of the UN Secretary-General calls for the practice of child, early and forced marriage to be ended everywhere, echoing the 2013 report on the MDGs which stated that "the practice of child marriage must be ended everywhere."
 - In its outcome document, subsequently approved by the General Assembly in September 2013, the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals included a target to end child, early and forced marriage under the gender equality goal.
 - Pakistan first proposed a target "by 2030, end child marriage" under Goal 5, "gender equality and women's empowerment" in the OWG.
 - In subsequent negotiations, the target was subsequently revised to "eliminate all harmful practices, *including* child, early and forced marriage and FGM," and further weakened to "eliminate all harmful practices, *such as*

child, early and forced marriage and FGM.” This dilutes the focus on child, early and forced marriage, and does not commit states to take action.

- Support for the target is broad, but it remains under threat
 - Over 70 member states have supported the inclusion of child, early and forced marriage in the post-2015 development framework.
 - During OWG sessions, some states voiced objections to the target as drafted. Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Iran and India objected to the use of ‘early’ and El Salvador and Egypt raised concerns over the measurability of the target.
 - It has been reported that during the last hours of OWG negotiations, a handful of states made strong efforts to remove the target altogether, and it was retained only by the further weakening of the language from ‘including’ to ‘such as.’

Recommendations to states:

To make real and lasting change in the lives of adolescent girls, we must lead by ending child, early and forced marriage:

- Address child, early and forced marriage comprehensively and strategically in the post-2015 development framework.
- At a minimum, retain the target as currently written. Ideally, revert to previous language, or develop new language, that does not simply list child, early and forced marriage as an example of a harmful practice and makes it clear that states must take action.
- Use the full term ‘child, early and forced marriage’ as it is the most comprehensive formulation of the term and is being used throughout the UN, including in the following:
 - UNGA resolutions 69/156 and 68/148 on child, early and forced marriage
 - Human Rights Council resolution 24/23 on child, early and forced marriage
 - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights report on child, early and forced marriage, HRC/26/22
 - CSW 58th session, agreed conclusions
- Develop comprehensive indicators which can be integrated across multiple goals and targets to ensure progress within the full range of actions necessary to combat the practice, including poverty reduction, economic empowerment, education, SRHR, maternal and infant health, nutrition, etc.
 - There are already mechanisms in place to measure progress towards reducing prevalence: the rates of women aged 20-24 who were married before ages 15 and 18 are currently measured through household surveys (DHS, MICS, etc.), which are undertaken at regular intervals in most developing countries.

Background - About child, early and forced marriage

New data from UNICEF reveals that the scale of child, early and forced marriage is even bigger than we thought. The numbers are staggering:

- Approximately 15 million girls are married every year before they reach 18.¹
- One in four girls alive today globally was married by age 18, and one in 12 was married by age 15, some as young as eight or nine.²

¹ UNICEF, *Ending Child, early and forced marriage: Progress and Prospects*, 2014

² UNICEF, *Ending Child, early and forced marriage: Progress and Prospects*, 2014

- Seven hundred million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. Without concerted action, this number will grow: the total number of women married in childhood could increase to over 1.2 billion by 2050.³

Child, early and forced marriage occurs around the world, and cuts across countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities:

- In South Asia 46% of girls under 18 are married; 39% are married in sub-Saharan Africa; 29% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa; and in some communities in Europe and North America too.⁴
- Child, early and forced marriage is being used as a coping strategy by vulnerable communities during conflict, economic crises and disasters.
- Child, early and forced marriage signifies immediate and long-term disempowerment, violation of rights, and is symptomatic of an entrenched harmful social norm that accords little value to girls.

³ UNICEF, *Ending Child, early and forced marriage: Progress and Prospects*, 2014

⁴ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, Table 9: Child Protection, 2014