



## Brief guide for *Girls Not Brides* members to engage with Parliamentarians

Governments around the world are increasingly demonstrating their commitment to the protection of the girl child. A strong, coherent, and comprehensive legal and policy framework is one of the four strategies<sup>1</sup> identified by *Girls Not Brides* members to end child marriage. While Members of Parliament (MPs) are key players in ending child marriage, they are sometimes overlooked as agents of change.

*Girls Not Brides* developed a toolkit on “[The Role of Parliamentarians in Ending Child Marriage](#)”, aimed at raising awareness among MPs on the practice, and to provide them with concrete recommendations to take action, not only in Parliament, but also in their constituencies and internationally. The toolkit can also support you in providing MPs with an overview of what child marriage is, including its prevalence around the world, key drivers and impact.

With the toolkit and this brief guide we wish to promote collaboration between MPs and our members. We invite you to use this guide to reflect on your current engagement with MPs, and to consider new ways to work with them to end child marriage.

### Why work with MPs to end child marriage?

MPs perform four main functions that are relevant to ending child marriage.

#### 1. Law-making: adopting laws

- Ratify international instruments and harmonise national laws with them when necessary.
- Harmonise religious and/or traditional laws in the case of plural legal systems.
- Assist in developing national plans of action.
- Assist in fulfilling national and international reporting obligations.

#### 2. Oversight: monitoring government performance and spending to ensure accountability

- Push for the establishment of parliamentary commissions or ombudspersons.
- Promote parliamentary debate on child marriage.
- Encourage parliamentary committees to conduct enquiries and to summon government officials to appear before them.
- Establish or support a children or women’s committee or caucus.

#### 3. Budgeting: approving and allocating funds and overseeing government spending

- Advocate for increased budget allocation for areas and institutions providing services for children and women.

#### 4. Representation: representing the interest and concerns of their constituency

- Initiate and engage in community-based projects.
- Organise campaigns and mobilise community support for child marriage related activities.
- Support the participation in parliament of girls at risk and survivors of child marriage.
- Ensure that children and women’s rights are promoted by political parties.

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<sup>1</sup> The other strategies are: Empowering Girls, Mobilisation of Families and Communities, and the Provision of Services.  
<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/reports-and-publications/theory-change-child-marriage/>

## How can *Girls Not Brides* members engage with MPs?

Based on their experience and expertise, *Girls Not Brides* members have much to offer to MPs. Some of the venues to engage with them include:

- Increase the level of awareness of MPs on the issue.
- Organising briefing sessions (seminars, roundtables, lectures, etc.) and field trips to hear from the affected population.
- Provide relevant documentation such as texts of legal instruments, facts, statistics, data, etc.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations on what works to end child marriage in your country.
- Facilitate the participation of affected girls in parliamentary events.
- Push for new legislation as well as the adoption of pending bills.
- Help facilitate draft legislation and/or amendments to pieces of legislation.
- Provide technical expertise so MPs can take informed decisions.
- Support the preparation of reports on national and international commitments.
- Convene stakeholders from government and civil society for dialogue and collective action.
- Inform MPs of ongoing international processes (i.e. Human Rights Council, Post-2015 negotiations).
- Support the creation of parliamentary caucuses relevant to child marriage as well as the appointment of an ombudsperson.

## Tips for engaging with MPs

- **Understand how parliament works.** In order to work effectively with your Parliament, you must understand the composition and working methods of Parliament, as well as the political context in which it operates.
- **Do your research.** Make sure you have a good understanding of where your Parliament stands on international and regional legal instruments (adoption, ratification, reporting, etc.). Have a good knowledge of the laws and policies that have already been adopted and their level of implementation. Always have updated statistics on child marriage and related issues in your country to demonstrate the impact of the practice.
- **Include MPs in your work plan.** Parliamentary support is a long-term process as establishing an institutional relationship takes time. To build credibility and trust, interactions with MPs and parliamentary staff must be frequent, consistent, and well-informed.
- **Identify entry points.** Entry points for cooperation with MPs can include:
  - **Parliamentary leadership.** The leadership of parliament, such as the Speaker of the House, is generally responsible for managing the affairs of parliament. The leadership generally determines the agenda of parliament, assigns the matters before parliament to the relevant committees, and coordinates the proceedings.
  - **Parliamentary committees.** Most parliamentary work is done in committees, which may be standing or ad hoc committees. The role of parliamentary committees is to scrutinise draft legislation, propose necessary amendments, ensure that the legislation is consistent with international standards and evaluate government performance. Most parliaments have committees on different issues related to child marriage, such issues as health, education, children, and women.
  - **Individual parliamentarians.** Targeting individual MPs could prove useful to advancing efforts to end child marriage. You could identify and support individual champions within Parliament and urge them to advocate for the end of the practice.

It is important to ensure a non-partisan approach when targeting individual MPs, so make sure you engage with representatives from different parties.

- **Parliamentary caucuses.** In many parliaments, caucuses (informal groups) bring together members from different parties to address children's issues, women's issues or human rights more generally.
- **Pending bills related to child marriage.** In many countries, bills stand for years without passage. Identify bills already proposed, and use them as an entry point by pushing for their adoption by Parliament.
- **Understand the profile of MPs.** Parliamentarians all over the world have to deal with myriad of issues. Also, MPs are usually generalists who are very short on time. Therefore, clearly articulated demands or positions, with well-packaged evidence are essential to successfully work with them.
- **Judge the course of action or inaction carefully.** While child marriage may be a relatively easy issues for MPs to support, some areas can be politically sensitive (for example, sexual and reproductive health and rights), which means that some parliamentarians will find it difficult to support your cause. Raising an issue related to child marriage at the wrong time or with the wrong audience could be harmful. Conversely, a window of opportunity – for instance a constitutional change or a public commitment to end child marriage by a relevant minister – can provide a push to adopt new legislation and policies.
- **Map and understand your support and opposition.** It is important to initially identify MPs who are favourable towards, or hold neutral views with respect to, ending child marriage. These groups of MPs are likely to be receptive to your message. Yet, it is important to understand the motivations and reasoning held by opposing or non-responsive parliamentarians to refine your advocacy message.
- **Engage with MPs' support staff.** Staff of individual MPs can be more frequent contacts, more accessible and yet highly influential in terms of identifying opportunities, developing tactics and understanding the opposition.
- **Working with a variety of constituents relevant for legislative change.** Officials at the local level, parliamentarians at the national level, and elected or appointed representatives at the regional level, are all relevant for legislative change.
- **Think before engaging the international community.** Consider the opportunities and risks that will come from bringing the support from the international movement to end child marriage. Sometimes too much visibility or external pressure can be harmful rather than beneficial.
- **Engage with the media.** Most people obtain the information of what is happening in their countries from the media. Media can help place an issue on the government agenda, as they can influence the issues people think their government should address.

### Do you need support in reaching out to your MPs?

*Girls Not Brides* counts two networks of MPs as members. With both organisations addressing child marriage, they may be able to support you in your efforts to reach your MPs.

[Parliamentarians for Global Action](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan international network of committed legislators that informs and mobilises parliamentarians in all regions of the world to advocate for human rights and the rule of law, democracy, human security, non-discrimination, and gender equality. As part of their Gender, Equality and Population Programme, they are currently running a [Parliamentary Campaign to Prevent and Eliminate Child, Early and Forced Marriage](#).

The [Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa](#) works in partnership with African parliaments to strengthen democracy in Africa, keep Africa high on the political agenda in Europe, and facilitate African-European parliamentary dialogue. They engage with regional, sub-regional and national parliaments to advance gender issues, and have a [Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting Programme](#). In the framework of a project on child marriage, they are currently working to develop a model law on child marriage together with the Southern African Development Community (SADC-PF).

If you wish to get in touch with these organisations, write to [info@GirlsNotBrides.org](mailto:info@GirlsNotBrides.org)

### **Are Girls Not Brides members in your country engaging with MPs?**

While *Girls Not Brides*' toolkit will be a useful instrument for engaging with your MPs, you need to accompany it with clearly articulated demands and strong evidence to support your asks. We encourage you to reach out to other *Girls Not Brides* members in your country to discuss your potential demands. They could already be engaging with MPs, and your voice could make an ongoing initiative stronger! Write to [info@GirlsNotBrides.org](mailto:info@GirlsNotBrides.org) and we will put you in contact with other members in your country.

### **Useful resources for working with MPs**

- UNICEF, *Handbook on legislative reform: realising children's rights*, 2008  
[http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/LRIHandbook\\_-\\_final.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/LRIHandbook_-_final.pdf)
- UNICEF, *Guide to working with Parliaments*, 2009  
[http://www.unicef.org/thailand/UNICEF\\_Guide\\_to\\_working\\_with\\_Parliaments.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/thailand/UNICEF_Guide_to_working_with_Parliaments.pdf)
- Inter-parliamentary union, *Handbook: a guide to parliamentary practice*, 2004  
<http://www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm#unesco>

**We wish you every success with your engagement with MPs! if you need material on child marriage or support on how to use the toolkit, do not hesitate to contact Sol Pradelli at [Sol.Pradelli@GirlsNotBrides.org](mailto:Sol.Pradelli@GirlsNotBrides.org)**