



Revised toolkit: The role of parliamentarians in ending child marriage A brief guide for *Girls Not Brides* members to engage with parliamentarians

In September 2015 governments around the world pledged their commitment to target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations” by 2030. Governments have a critical role in achieving this 2030 target on ending child marriage. Though sometimes overlooked as agents of change, parliamentarians are key players for advocating and demanding accountability for the implementation of strong, coherent, and comprehensive legal and policy frameworks for preventing and mitigating the effects of child marriage.¹

In 2015 *Girls Not Brides* developed a toolkit on “The Role of Parliamentarians in Ending Child Marriage” aimed at raising awareness among parliamentarians about child marriage, and to provide them with practical recommendations for taking action in parliament as well as in their constituencies and internationally. Global commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals made it necessary to revise the 2015 toolkit, to ensure it was up-to-date and relevant in the post-2015 development context. In its revised form, the toolkit will be useful in providing parliamentarians with an overview of what child marriage is and their role in addressing the harmful practice.

Through the toolkit and this brief guide, we wish to promote collaboration between parliamentarians and our ever-growing numbers of *Girls Not Brides* members. We invite you to use this guide to reflect on your current engagement with parliamentarians in your country, and to consider new ways to work with them to end child marriage and fulfil the commitments they have made to end child marriage nationally, regionally and internationally.

1. Why work with parliamentarians to end child marriage?

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

Law-making: adopting and amending laws

- Ratify international instruments and harmonise them with national laws when necessary
- Harmonise customary, religious and/or traditional laws in the case of plural legal systems
- Assist in developing multisectoral national plans of action on child marriage or integrating child marriage across different sectors
- Assist in fulfilling national, regional and international reporting obligations

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

¹ This is one of four strategies identified by *Girls Not Brides* in “A Theory of Change on Child Marriage”. The other strategies are: Empowering Girls, Mobilisation of Families and Communities, and the Providing Services. Available from: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/reports-and-publications/theory-change-child-marriage/>

- Establish or support a children or women’s committee or caucus

Budgeting: approving and allocating funds and overseeing government spending

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

Representation: representing the interest and concerns of their constituency

- Initiate and implement 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

2. How can *Girls Not Brides* members engage with parliamentarians?

With their in-depth experience and expertise working directly on child marriage, *Girls Not Brides* members are uniquely placed to support parliamentarians to offer insights to the realities of working to end child marriage in communities. Some of the ways to engage with parliamentarians include:

- **Increasing the level of awareness of parliamentarians on child marriage**
e.g. by organising briefing sessions (seminars, roundtables, lectures, etc.) and field trips by parliamentarians to meet those affected by child marriage, including girls at risk of child marriage and married girls
- **Providing evidence and technical expertise on child marriage to parliamentarians**
e.g. by providing relevant documentation such as analysis of legislative frameworks, policy briefs, examples of programmatic best practice on child marriage interventions, data on child marriage hotspots, etc.
- **Facilitating participation of affected girls in parliamentary events**
e.g. by facilitating the participation of affected girls and related stakeholders in roundtable discussions, conferences, consultation processes, etc.
- **Demanding accountability of government to its child marriage commitments**
e.g. by supporting preparation of shadow reports on national and international commitments (reporting for Convention on the Rights of the Child, CEDAW, SDGs, Universal Periodic Review, etc.), supporting creation of parliamentary caucuses relevant to child marriage, inform parliamentarians of international process (i.e. of UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions on Child, Early and Forced Marriage)
- **Advocating for legislative change and reform**
e.g. pushing for new legislation as well as the adoption of pending bills, and help facilitate draft legislation and/or amendments to pieces of existing legislation

3. Tips for engaging with parliamentarians

- **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 (e.g. using country DHS and MICS data, UNICEF *State of the World's Children* report and reports on programme impacts) and related issues in your country to demonstrate the impact of the practice.

- **Include parliamentarians 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 parliamentarians and parliamentary staff must be frequent, consistent, and well-informed.
- **Identify entry points.** Entry points for cooperation with parliamentarians 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 parliamentarians 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 parliamentarians, 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 being passed. Identify bills already proposed, and use them as an entry point by pushing for their adoption by parliament.
- **Understand the profile of parliamentarians.** Parliamentarians all over the world have to deal with a myriad of issues. Also, parliamentarians are usually generalists who are very short on time. Therefore, short, clearly articulated demands or policy positions, with well-packaged evidence, are essential to successfully work with them.
- **Judge the course of action or inaction carefully.** While child marriage is a relatively easy issues for parliamentarians 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 result in harmful consequences. Conversely, a window of opportunity – for instance a constitutional change or a public commitment to end child marriage by a relevant minister – can provide the needed push to adopt new legislation and policies.
- **Map and understand your support and opposition.** It is important to initially identify parliamentarians who are favourable towards, or hold neutral views with respect to, ending child marriage. These groups of parliamentarians are likely to be receptive to your message. However, it is important to understand the motivations and reasoning held by opposing or

non-responsive parliamentarians so as to then be able to refine your advocacy messaging and policy asks.

- **Engage with parliamentarians' support staff.** Staff of individual parliamentarians can be more constant, more accessible and 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 which relates to child marriage or broader gender equality issues.
- **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. The media, if conducting safe, responsible and ethical reporting on child marriage, can help place an issue on the government agenda, as they can influence the issues people think their government should address.

4. Do you need support in reaching out to your parliamentarians?

Girls Not Brides has different affiliations with parliamentary networks. The following organisations may have relevant resources or be able to support you in your efforts to reach your parliamentarians:

[Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) (IPU) is the international organisation of parliaments and the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue. Some of its functions include: fostering contacts, co-ordination, and the exchange of experience among parliaments and parliamentarians of all countries; and promotion of human rights. The IPU also works in close co-operation with the United Nations, whose objectives it shares. The Union also co-operates with regional inter-parliamentary organisations, as well as with international intergovernmental and NGOs which are motivated by the same ideals. In October 2011, the IPU adopted its [Strategy for 2012-2017](#) under the overall title "Better parliaments, stronger democracy".

[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](#). They also have the [Global Declaration to End Child, Early and Forced Marriage](#), a valuable international declaration that is useful for mobilising parliamentarians to address child marriage and demonstrating their commitment to the issue.

[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 sub-regional and national parliaments to advance gender issues, and have a [Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting Programme](#). They worked

closely with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to produce the SADC Model Law on Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already in Marriage, adopted on 3 June 2016.

If you wish to get in touch with these organisations, or wish to share your own experiences from engaging parliamentarians in your work, please write to info@GirlsNotBrides.org

5. Are *Girls Not Brides* members in your country engaging with parliamentarians?

While *Girls Not Brides*' toolkit will be a useful instrument for engaging with your parliamentarians, 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 and if applicable the *Girls Not Brides* National Partnership in your country to discuss your potential demands. They could already be engaging with parliamentarians, and your voice could make an ongoing initiative stronger! Check our [website](#) to find members working in your country, or write to info@GirlsNotBrides.org and we will put you in contact with them.

We wish you every success with your engagement with parliamentarians! If you need material on child marriage or support on how to use the toolkit, do not hesitate to contact info@GirlsNotBrides.org