



Child marriage and girls' education

Advocacy brief

Keeping girls in school – especially secondary education – is one of the best ways of preventing child marriage. At the same time, child marriage remains a significant barrier to girls' access to quality education.

Child marriage and girls' lack of access to quality education are both rooted in gender inequality and driven by the belief that girls and women are inferior to boys and men. Child marriage is a human rights violation, and girls who marry as children face long-term risks to their health, safety, education and economic opportunities, amongst others.

We urge leaders gathering at the World Education Summit to incorporate vital policies, programmes and budgeting to address child marriage into their governments' education strategies.

Child marriage is a barrier to girls' education, and the Global Partnership for Education has identified education as a key force for reducing child marriage: in its Case for Investment, it has set the target of averting 2 million child marriages by 2025. To achieve this target and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) mission to leave no one behind, **Governments must consider the linked implications of child marriage and education to ensure ALL girls can access 12 years of safe, quality education.**

Key facts

- **12 million girls are married every year.** Without significant progress, 100 million more girls will marry as children by 2030; the COVID-19 pandemic has put an additional 10 million girls at risk.
- **Keeping girls in school – especially secondary school – is one of the best ways of delaying marriage.** On average, the likelihood of a girl marrying as a child is six percentage points less for every additional year she stays in secondary education.
- **Access to education affects the timing of marriage more than marriage affects access to education.** That is, rather than dropping out of school *to* get married, most girls drop out of school and *then* get married.
- **Education is one of the most powerful drivers of gender equality** because it can empower individuals and enable them to challenge discriminatory gender norms.

COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic means we are less likely to achieve the SDG targets of ending child marriage and ensuring all girls have access to 12 years of quality education by 2030. UNICEF estimates an additional 10 million girls will marry in this time due to the restrictions of the pandemic: The closure of schools and other learning spaces will have long-term impacts on girls' futures – particularly for poorer and families in more remote locations – as education may become unaffordable due to economic distress, or because girls get married and/or become pregnant.

Call to action

To change the lives of countless girls through increasing access to education – ensuring they have the skills to flourish and thus reduce their risk of child marriage – we need governments to invest in getting girls into school, keeping girls in school, and making sure that school is a safe place to be.

1. Work across sectors to guarantee access to 12 years of quality gender-responsive education for girls at risk of child marriage and married girls.

- **Guarantee access to 12 years of free and compulsory primary and secondary education** for all girls and boys, removing all tuition fees and indirect costs.
- **Ensure domestic financing for education** receives at least 4-6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and/or constitutes at least 15-20% of public expenditure. Given the crisis in education financing – aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic – governments must protect education spending by following the recommendations in the [Global Campaign for Education's One Billion Voices Call to Action](#) and the [GPE 2025 and Financing Campaign](#).
- **Design gender-responsive education systems and sector plans** that address the rights of girls at risk of child marriage and married girls, promoting the active participation of girls in the design of education plans and programmes. These plans must acknowledge the two-way link between child marriage and girls' education.

2. Challenge the drivers of child marriage through the creation of safe and inclusive schools

- **End discriminatory policies and practices that exclude pregnant girls, married girls and young mothers** from school, and fund national strategies that support the re-engagement of young women in education after pregnancy.
- **Support community sensitisation** to ensure that parents, leaders and other community members are aware of the importance of girls' education and of delaying marriage.
- **Ensure that schools are free from violence**, establishing confidential reporting mechanisms, training teachers to recognise and report abuse, and providing safe spaces for adolescent girls – especially those at risk of child marriage and married girls.
- **Support a gender-transformative school environment and curriculum**, developing gender-responsive teaching and learning materials.
- **Provide safe, private toilets and sanitation facilities** and products for girls to manage their menstrual hygiene in school.

3. Ensure girls at risk of child marriage and married girls can enjoy continued and safe access to quality education in crisis situations, including COVID-19

- **Ensure that all children have access to learning – including comprehensive sexuality education – when schools are closed**, investing in inclusive gender-responsive distance education methods and maintaining regular communication between teachers, learners and families to keep learners motivated and prevent girls from dropping out.
- **Support pregnant girls, married girls and young mothers to return to education** when schools reopen. This might involve flexible learning, catch-up courses and accelerated learning opportunities. It may also involve checking school enrolment lists to identify and follow up with those girls who have not returned to school.

4. Funding for education policies and programmes must be made available from both GPE donor governments and GPE partner governments.