



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage



ACCELERATING CHANGE TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

SECRETARIAT STRATEGY

2022-2025

FOREWORD

Working for a world without child marriage where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men, and are able to achieve their full potential in all aspects of their lives.

Over the past decade, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* has had an exceptional journey of growth and progress. From our beginnings as a group of around 60 individuals in 2011, to a global partnership with over 1,500 member organisations present in more than 100 countries, we are stronger than ever and ready to take on the next stage of our journey.

As we reflect on the outstanding gains of the Partnership over the last 10 years – and more recently on our collective response to a devastating global pandemic – we have thought about how, as a secretariat, we can best adapt our work to a changing world. We have grappled with the question of how to better harness the power of our growing movement, support the implementation of hard-won national commitments, and instil a new energy into the global Partnership so that together we can deliver, at scale, change with and for millions of girls.

We believe that this Strategy – borne out of rich and in-depth conversations with member organisations, leaders, decision-makers, experts and *Girls Not Brides* staff – will revitalise the secretariat's approach and strengthen our work. It will reinforce the leadership and collective power of *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, influence a wide range of actors in the movement at all levels and strengthen our collective learning about what works to end child marriage.

With increased emphasis on supporting *Girls Not Brides* National and State (or sub-national) Partnerships and coalitions to lead national movements, and growth of our presence and leadership at the regional level to deliver our vision, we will accelerate all our efforts for change.

Four years from now, we will see that we embody the same values, vision and best practices that we espouse today, but that we are markedly different in how we do our work and deliver change.

We believe this Strategy will accelerate our progress to a world without child marriage. But it doesn't change who we are: a global Partnership standing together to say, "let girls be girls, not brides".

We look forward to working with you on making this a reality.

Anne Gallagher,
Chair of the Board

Dr Faith Mwangi-Powell,
CEO

PICTURED ON COVER: Radha – who was married aged 16 – and her friends wait to sit a national exam in Rajasthan, India. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Allison Joyce

TERMINOLOGY

Child marriage. In this document, we use “child marriage” to refer to all forms of child, early and forced marriage and unions where at least one party is under the age of 18. Understanding the practice in the context of this broader term ensures that all girls affected by the practice are included, regardless of whether they are in a formal or informal union, and that all aspects of the issue – including culturally-specific understandings of childhood and development, and the relationship between age, consent and force – are recognised and expressed.

The *Girls Not Brides* global partnership (the Partnership). The *Girls Not Brides* partnership is made up of over 1,500 civil society member organisations from over 100 countries committed to working together to end child marriage and support married girls. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations work across sectors – including health, education, human rights and humanitarian contexts – and range from small grassroots civil society actors to large international organisations.

In around 30 countries and states, member organisations have decided to work collectively to accelerate progress to end child marriage in their countries or states by forming civil society coalitions. In 12 countries and states, they have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with us and become official *Girls Not Brides* National or State Partnerships. National Partnerships are those that operate across a country, while State Partnerships are those that operate at a sub-national level, often in decentralised or federalised systems such as India.

The *Girls Not Brides* Partnership Strategy (2022-2025) is based on consultations with member organisations and defines the focus areas where the Global Partnership should – the current climate – dedicate its efforts to achieve the greatest impact.

The movement to end child marriage. The movement refers to the informal global network of civil society and grassroots organisations, national and international non-governmental organisations, activists, academics, UN agencies, funders, governments, young people, girls, leaders and champions who are all working towards a different world – one without child marriage, where girls are free to decide their future.

The Partnership Strategy. *Girls Not Brides* Partnership Strategy (2022-2025) defines the focus areas where the full global Partnership should dedicate its efforts to achieve the greatest impact. The *Girls Not Brides* Secretariat Strategy builds on that document, and focuses on the specific role of the secretariat in directly contributing to change.

1. OUR VISION AND CHALLENGE

The shared vision for the global Partnership is a world without child marriage where girls and women enjoy equal status with boys and men and can reach their full potential in all aspects of their lives.

It is a world where girls can access the services they need, and enjoy diverse opportunities to achieve their dreams. We want the underlying gender inequality that fuels and is perpetuated by child marriage – and which robs girls of their rights – to stop holding girls back. We are a long way from this world, and, with the devastating impact of COVID-19, we must urgently accelerate our efforts.

The movement to end child marriage has made significant progress to date. In 2018, UNICEF estimated 25 million child marriages were averted in the preceding decade, and the number of girls married dropped from one in four to one in five.^a However, 12 million girls still marry every year, with a devastating impact on their health, education and opportunities. Declines were quicker in Asia and parts of East and Southern Africa, but rates remain very high in West and Central Africa and static in Latin America and the Caribbean.^b

Within this context, the emergence of COVID-19 and its associated repercussions – including school closures, societal lockdowns, job losses and reduced household incomes – have rolled back hard-won successes for girls' rights.

UNICEF estimates that due to the impacts of COVID-19, 10 million more girls will marry before 2030. That is in addition to the 12 million already married each year.^c Our work focuses on the lives girls are entitled to but are far too often denied.

However, child marriage is about much more than girls' rights. It has a far-reaching impact on children, families, communities and economies. Evidence shows that a girl's potential to earn her own income throughout her life is reduced when she has limited access to education and economic opportunities. This in turn affects her socio-economic status, that of her family, future generations and wider society.

If child marriage had been ended in 2015, when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed, the global economy could have saved \$566 billion by 2030.^d Ending this human rights violation is linked to achieving [almost half of the SDGs](#), including those related to poverty, education, health and inequality.

We urge everyone to join us in working towards our vision of a fairer and better world for all, and crucially for girls.

a. UNICEF, 2018, [Press release: 25 million child marriages prevented in last decade due to accelerated progress, according to new UNICEF estimates](#).

b. UNICEF, 2020, [Ending child marriage: progress and prospects](#).

c. UNICEF, 2021, [10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19](#).

d. World Bank and IRCW, 2017, [The economic impacts of child marriage](#).

2. WHO WE ARE

At the heart of our work is a desire to transform girls' lives through supporting and representing diverse *Girls Not Brides* member organisations, and mobilising the vast potential of their collective expertise and power.

Our [Theory of Change to End Child Marriage](#)^e shows that ending child marriage needs long-term efforts across all areas of girls' lives. The *Girls Not Brides Partnership Strategy* sets out where members of the Partnership should focus their work over the next four years. We know that change must take place within communities, and that collective action is needed to drive, support and influence work at all levels to end the practice, with individuals, families, communities, policies, laws, services and social norms.

A **movement-builder, influencer** and **knowledge hub**, the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat has a unique role to play. We coordinate, rally and support the collective work of the global Partnership and the broader movement, through our staff based

in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. We play three broad roles: we are a central support and coordination body for the largest global civil society partnership working to end child marriage; a representative of and advocate for civil society on work to end child marriage; and an expert resource and central actor in the global movement.

Over the last decade, we have increased our support for emerging and established *Girls Not Brides* National and State Partnerships^f and other civil society coalitions. We help national movements and coalitions to strengthen their collective power, advocacy and actions at the national and state level. We support through a programme of resources, shared learning and tools, and bespoke technical advice.

3. ACCELERATING CHANGE

Over the last decade, *Girls Not Brides* has been at the forefront of ending child marriage worldwide. We played a leadership role in bringing attention to child marriage as a global issue, and growing a strong, diverse and connected movement to address it.

Once a taboo topic with little political or public recognition, child marriage is now the subject of discussions from the community to the international level. In this period, the Partnership has grown to over 1,500 organisations and the *Girls Not Brides* secretariat is established as a "backbone" organisation in the wider movement to end child marriage.

In just 10 years of mobilising the Partnership and movement, as well as through our own direct advocacy, we have ensured that ending child marriage is a political and financial priority in high-prevalence countries and the global community; we have supported *Girls Not Brides* member organisations to influence and advocate for new international, regional and national commitments; catalysed new funding streams and programmes to address child marriage; and increased knowledge and evidence around what works to end child marriage.

Our 2022-25 Strategy will continue to champion many of the approaches and themes that are

e. Our Theory of Change was developed in partnership with over 150 members and partners in 2015; we have recently refreshed it and the updated version will be available soon on our website.

f. National Partnerships are active across a country; State Partnerships operate at a sub-national level, often in decentralised or federalised systems.

central to our work and have yielded these great results to date. We will also expand how we work with the *Girls Not Brides* National and State Partnerships and coalitions leading national movements. Sustainable, self-governing national movements can apply pressure to make sure existing government commitments are resourced and implemented. They can build momentum for stronger work to transform social norms, helping a range of stakeholders to understand the issue of child marriage. Ultimately, these national movements can guarantee girls are heard.

National movements like *Girls Not Brides* National and State Partnerships and coalitions are often under-resourced and depend on volunteers to run. Yet, despite the many challenges they face, we have seen the value of this collective action: advocating with one voice, shaping laws, policies, national strategies and securing domestic resources at the national and

sub-national level. The impressive track record across these 30 countries speaks for itself; now, the global Partnership and the wider movement must turn our collective focus to ensuring these hard-fought-for national and sub-national commitments are implemented.

We must commit much greater support for these groups to catalyse the change in girls' lives that we all want to see.

We believe that we do not need one organisation to take the lead globally. The global Partnership needs hundreds of leaders from communities all over the world to work together, informed by global evidence and their context-specific expertise, to build national movements and mobilise a groundswell of change in girls' lives. The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat will be behind the member organisations leading these national movements.

4. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Our 2022-25 Strategy for how the secretariat will contribute to the Partnership is based on three strategic objectives:

1. **Movement-building.** Leverage the collective power of the global Partnership of member organisations, National and State Partnerships and coalitions for accelerated action to end child marriage.
2. **Influencing.** Galvanize the wider global end child marriage movement to drive change nationally, regionally and globally.
3. **Learning.** Leverage knowledge, learning and evidence to address child marriage across the movement.

Three thematic areas of work cut across our Strategy. The first is a focus on **gender-transformative approaches**. More than delaying the age of marriage, the change we seek and

the approaches we encourage address the root causes of child marriage and ensure girls and women – in all their diversity – can exercise their rights. This will involve working with stakeholders across communities, and including boys and men as allies and agents of change.

The second is meaningful **youth engagement**. We will ensure that diverse young peoples' voices are involved and included in decision-making as we develop programmes together with member organisations, National and State Partnerships and coalitions.

And third, we recognise the impact that **COVID-19** has had on girls' lives and the work of the end child marriage movement, which is now more urgent than ever. We will continue to adapt our ways of working to respond to travel limitations, restricted global and national advocacy spaces and the increased importance of digital engagement.

THE ROLE OF THE SECRETARIAT



FIGURE 1: The three strategic objectives and three cross-cutting themes that drive our 2022-2025 strategy for the secretariat



MOVEMENT-BUILDING

Strategic Objective 1: Leverage the collective power of the global Partnership of member organisations, National and State Partnerships and coalitions for accelerated change to end child marriage

High-level outcome 1: Reduction of child marriage at national level through the collective action of stronger, diverse and well-connected member organisations, National and State Partnerships and coalitions

Outcome 1.1: Expanded and diversified global membership has enhanced capacity to foster national-level change and increase the profile of child marriage

Girls Not Brides member organisations are the powerhouses that work with girls in communities, address decision-makers and keep child marriage as a global issue of concern.

Outside coalition structures, we will support and mobilise the broader Partnership through activities including global campaigns, sharing member stories on our platforms, providing technical support, sharing knowledge and facilitating peer-to-peer learning.

We will ensure that member organisations have up-to-date information and evidence, and are equipped to continue their work to end child marriage in their contexts. We will intentionally diversify our membership – including in selected high-prevalence contexts and in the representation of groups such as youth-led, Indigenous-led and women-led organisations.

Outcome 1.2: Strengthened and resourced National and State Partnerships and coalitions co-create and implement national action plans and collective action to end child marriage

Over the next four years, we will work with a range of *Girls Not Brides* National and State Partnerships and coalitions to support their leadership of national movements and collective action to accelerate national change. We will provide tailored, technical support on topics like coalition governance, movement-building, advocacy, communications, resources and learning, connections and peer-to-peer support, and financial investment.

Moreover, we will support member organisations as they co-create and implement evidence-based action plans, collective programming and advocacy initiatives, including legal and policy reforms, government accountability, social norms change and gender-transformative approaches.

“WE BELIEVE THAT WE DO NOT NEED ONE ORGANISATION TO TAKE THE LEAD GLOBALLY. WE NEED HUNDREDS OF LEADERS FROM COMMUNITIES ALL OVER THE WORLD TO WORK TOGETHER...TO BUILD NATIONAL MOVEMENTS AND MOBILISE A GROUNDSWELL OF CHANGE IN GIRLS’ LIVES.”





INFLUENCING

Strategic Objective 2: Galvanize the wider global end child marriage movement to drive change nationally, regionally and globally

High-level outcome: Increased global and regional commitments and resources to end child marriage achieved through a galvanised global movement.

Outcome 2.1: Increased global and regional policy commitments and funding for ending child marriage

We will mobilise and influence governments, donors, the international community and global and regional high-level institutions and processes to secure increased political and financial commitments.

We will work with the wider global movement to end child marriage through advocating for expanded and implemented intergovernmental agreements. This includes working with Member States on resolutions on child marriage and

gender equality at the Human Rights Council, Commission on the Status of Women and regional intergovernmental bodies.

We will collaborate and coordinate with key donors and other funding mechanisms, such as [VOW for Girls](#) and the [Girls First Fund](#), resulting in more joined-up programming and encouraging increased funding for adolescent girls, and ending child marriage.

Outcome 2.2: Greater integration of child marriage within other sectors

The drivers and impacts of child marriage are related to many different sectors. We will identify and influence those sectors where action on child marriage can deliver change for girls, ensure integrated national, regional and global engagement, and support member organisations in their cross-sectoral work. Our particular focus will be on deepening our work on education and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We will increase the awareness of the two-way link between child marriage and girls' education and expand joint efforts between

the two movements, ensuring that education programming responds to the risk of child marriage as a consequence and driver of school dropout, and reintegrating married and pregnant girls.

We will promote the integration of child marriage into work on the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement—including in intergovernmental spaces and key programmes – and ensure that the needs of girls at risk of child marriage or who are or have been married are reflected in agreements and programming.

Outcome 2.3: Amplified member voices inspire a critical mass of stakeholders and citizens at all levels to advocate for ending child marriage

We will increase the profile of, and public support for, solutions to end child marriage to inspire and catalyse concrete action.

We will strengthen the voices and profile of our strong, dynamic and diverse movement by profiling member organisations across our public channels, and through an agile

and responsive movement-building communications strategy.

We will co-create or support campaigns, media and awareness-raising initiatives that mobilise supporters and contribute to a transformation in beliefs, attitudes and social norms.

**“SUSTAINABLE, SELF-
GOVERNING NATIONAL
MOVEMENTS CAN APPLY
PRESSURE TO MAKE SURE
EXISTING GOVERNMENT
COMMITMENTS ARE
RESOURCED AND
IMPLEMENTED...
ULTIMATELY, THESE
NATIONAL MOVEMENTS
CAN GUARANTEE GIRLS
ARE HEARD.”**





LEARNING

Strategic Objective 3: Leverage knowledge, learning and evidence to address child marriage

High-level outcome: More effective action to end child marriage at all levels enabled through enhanced collective knowledge, learning and evidence.

Outcome 3.1 *Girls Not Brides* secretariat is a highly effective learning and knowledge hub co-creating and sharing collective insights and evidence to drive impact

We will continue to be the “go-to” and trusted source for anybody wanting to know about child marriage, ranging from civil society organisations to experts, interested government or donor officials to students writing about child marriage for school projects.

We will strengthen our role as a global knowledge and learning hub, working with member organisations to document, collate and share information and evidence on what works to end child marriage, and supporting effective action and results within the global Partnership and broader movement.

We will facilitate knowledge exchange with and between member organisations, National and State Partnerships and coalitions and the broader movement.

We will promote the uptake of knowledge, learning and evidence by member organisations to increase the quality and impact of programming and evidence-based influencing.

Outcome 3.2 Stronger coordination of global, regional, and national evidence generation which supports the movement’s efforts to accelerate change to end child marriage

We will play a leading role in coordinating global, regional and national evidence generation through convening diverse stakeholders, identifying evidence gaps and catalysing collective efforts to strengthen the evidence base on what works to end child marriage.

We will amplify member voices, priorities, expertise and influence in the knowledge ecosystem.

We will influence the learning and evidence agendas at global, regional and national level by centring member organisations’ needs.

Outcome 3.3 Strengthened capacity of *Girls Not Brides* secretariat and Partnership to design evidence-based interventions, demonstrate impact, document their learning, and continually learn, adapt and grow

We will nurture a culture of continuous learning and reflection within the secretariat and the Partnership.

We will support member organisations to document, monitor, evaluate and learn, and to use innovation, learning and evidence to increase the quality and impact of their work, and our own.

We will support member organisations to report and showcase their contributions to ending child marriage, and their stories of change.

**“WE KNOW THAT
CHANGE MUST
TAKE PLACE WITHIN
COMMUNITIES, AND
THAT COLLECTIVE
ACTION IS NEEDED TO
DRIVE, SUPPORT AND
INFLUENCE WORK AT
ALL LEVELS TO END
THE PRACTICE.”**



5. DELIVERING OUR STRATEGY

Our values are at the heart of how we work to advance the movement to end child marriage: Collaboration, determination, inclusivity, integrity, pragmatism and respect

The *Girls Not Brides* secretariat is as focused on “how” and “who” will deliver our Strategy as the “what” we will deliver.

We are committed to transforming girls’ lives in a values-led and sustainable way, and centred on *Girls Not Brides* member organisations. In the four years from 2022 to 2025, we will continue to prioritise strong systems, processes and culture around safeguarding girls, charity governance, value for money, risk management and diversity, and will learn from and contribute our expertise to discussions on these topics within the global Partnership and across the multiple sectors within which we – and *Girls Not Brides* member organisations – work.

In this period, we will intentionally expand our regional presence. We support a rebalancing of power and resources from the Global North to the countries with high prevalence of child marriage in the Global South, and while some of this will be through our activities, it will also be borne out through our structures and staffing. Our teams in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean already lead much of our priority work on national movement-building; over the next four years they will have more resources and authority to scale up this work.

We will build on our diversified Board recruitment in 2020-21 by continuing to internationalise and strengthen our Board of Trustees, Champions and advisory committees to harness the full diversity of lived experience needed to support our mandate for ending child marriage.

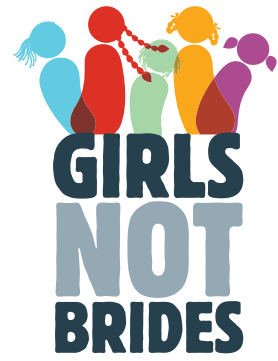


PICTURED: Yohana aged 10 at the Mariposa Centre, Cabarete, Dominican Republic. Photo: *Girls Not Brides*/Fran Afonso

**“WE ARE COMMITTED
TO TRANSFORMING
GIRLS’ LIVES IN A
VALUES-LED AND
SUSTAINABLE WAY”**


SECRETARIAT STRATEGY 2022-2025


***Girls Not Brides* is a global partnership made up of more than 1,500 civil society organisations from over 100 countries committed to ending child marriage and ensuring girls can reach their full potential.**



The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

Published in February 2022 by
Girls Not Brides
Seventh Floor
65 Leadenhall Street
London, EC3A 2AD
United Kingdom

 0203 725 5858

 0207 603 7811

 www.GirlsNotBrides.org

 info@GirlsNotBrides.org

 [GirlsNotBrides](https://twitter.com/GirlsNotBrides)

 www.facebook.com/GirlsNotBrides

Girls Not Brides is a company limited by guarantee (Reg. No. 8570751) and a registered charity in England and Wales (Reg. No. 1154230)