

Submitted on behalf of: *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage* and 124 organisations that work towards ending child marriage (listed in the Annex)

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Towards A Future Without Child Marriage

Written statement to inform the Pact of the Future

CHAPEAU

As the Summit of the Future seeks to respond to current and future challenges, its deliberations, diagnosis of the complex issues our world faces and identification of solutions must prioritise the global issue that child, early and forced marriage and unions (“CEFMU”, “child marriage”) represent.

Every year, 12 million girls are married or in unions worldwide. Despite growing evidence of a decline in child marriage across the globe, there is a pressing need to accelerate such progress to be on track in achieving sustainable development and not passing on the challenge to end child marriage to future generations. Unless we accelerate our efforts, [150 million more girls](#) will marry or enter a union by 2030, and it will take another [300 years to end the practice](#).

CEFMU is a gross violation of human rights and a global issue that crosses borders, cultures, traditions, and religions. The prevalence of child marriage has huge variations across and within countries, negatively impacting girls’ lives, their children’s lives, their communities, and our society as a whole. As a multidimensional and global societal issue, the Pact for the Future must address child marriage and include radical action and investment for the realisation of human rights and gender equality, with a focus on ending all violence against women and girls.

The Pact for the Future must prioritise action to end child, early and forced marriage and unions:

1. Chapter 1: Sustainable development and financing for development

Child marriage must be prioritised to achieve real, long-term, sustainable development. Goal 5 of the SDGs focuses on gender equality and includes a target to end child marriage by 2030. However, the consequences of not achieving this target reach beyond SDG 5. Unless significant progress is made on ending child marriage, we will fall short on at least nine of the SDGs, including those related to poverty, food security, health, education, gender equality, economic growth, climate action, and peace and justice. **This requires consistent, adequate and targeted financial investments in transforming unjust gender norms, ensuring girls’ access to quality education and health services – especially sexual and reproductive health services – addressing the disproportionate unpaid domestic and care work that falls to girls and young women, ending poverty, reducing socioeconomic inequality, and – crucially – increasing financing that is accessible to feminist youth-led organisations, networks and grassroots collectives.**

This generation, and future generations, relies on leaders’ political will to find solutions to conflicts and the climate crisis, which disproportionately impact populations facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. These are challenges that hinder sustainable development; gender equality; the social and economic development of our communities; and the respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights. Young people in particular are disproportionately impacted by these challenges that affect their autonomy – including decisions regarding when and whom to marry – which have implications for the rest of their lives.

2. Chapter 2: International peace and security

Violence against women and girls is a [predictor](#) of how prone a society is to conflict. Addressing child marriage and gender inequality is therefore key to a holistic conceptualisation of peace and security. While child marriage is a global issue, risk factors for child marriage increase significantly in conflict and crisis settings. Child marriage rates are almost double the global average in contexts of fragility and [eight out of ten countries](#) with the highest rates of child marriage are experiencing humanitarian crises. These increases are [caused](#) by the exacerbation of core drivers of child marriage and gender-based violence more broadly. For example, adolescent girls are at increased risk of sexual violence and child marriage in conflict-affected settings, as social norms that discriminate against girls are [exacerbated](#) by rising violence and insecurity. This is compounded by the breakdown of individual, formal and customary support systems in times of insecurity.

The climate crisis also compounds existing inequalities, drives displacement, and increases competition over scarce resources resulting in an increased risk of violence, conflict and child marriage. Girls are disproportionately [affected](#) by the impacts of the climate crisis, with a higher likelihood of dropping out of school and being forced into marriage. Where different crises conflate or where girls themselves face multiple intersecting forms of marginalisation, risks of child marriage further increase, and girls are less likely to access support once married.

Child marriage prevention and response must be integrated across all humanitarian assessment strategies, including conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence prevention, mitigation, and response strategies. Critical advances need to be made to increase the role of women and girls in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding - embedding strategies that will mitigate, prevent, and respond to violence against women and girls and human rights abuses. This requires committed engagement, planning, funding, and monitoring – at the international, national, and community levels.

3. Chapter 3: Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

Enjoying the benefits of scientific progress and its applications is a [human right](#). This includes scientific progress in sexual and reproductive health, yet millions of girls and women around the world cannot enjoy the benefits of modern contraception methods because they cannot access them due to physical and/or financial barriers, stigma, and unequal negotiation power with their intimate partners over their use. This is a major driver of child marriage and represents a major unmet need of girls and women who are already married or in informal unions.

[Nine out of ten](#) adolescent births take place within the context of marriage, and complications related to adolescent pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death for adolescent girls worldwide. In many contexts, adolescent girls who become pregnant are pressured into marrying or entering unions to avoid the stigma associated with having children out of marriage. By improving girls and women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, the health and wellbeing of millions of girls and women can be dramatically improved, adolescent girls' pregnancies can be delayed, and pregnancy can be by choice, thus undercutting one of the main drivers of and barriers for girls wishing to leave a child marriage.

Improving the availability, accessibility, and affordability of modern contraception and sexual and reproductive health services for girls and young women must be a priority for ending child marriage. This must be accompanied by increasing girls' access to STEM subjects and vocational training so that girls stay in school and transition into secure paid employment. To accelerate an end to child marriage, closing the digital divide is a necessity; this will [facilitate](#) greater awareness of this harmful practice and access to support services through reliable channels to obtain real-time and trustworthy information.

4. Chapter 4: Youth and future generations

CEFMU is a global issue rooted in gender inequality, disproportionately impacting girls. Nearly half of girls who are [married](#) or in a union currently live in South Asia, 20% in West, Central, East and Southern Africa, 15% in East Asia and the Pacific and 9% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

By 2050, [more than a third](#) of the world's young people will live in Africa. While such demographic growth comes with great potential for development, it also exposes major risks in protecting young people's rights – particularly those of girls and young women – and especially regarding the right to education and sexual and reproductive health and rights. If the trends of the last ten years continue, it is projected that Eastern, Western and Southern Africa's child marriage prevalence will grow to [41% by 2030, from 35% currently](#).

CEFMU practices look different in various contexts and have changed with time, especially in regions like Latin America and the Caribbean, where the practice most often takes the form of informal unions. Latin America and the Caribbean is [expected](#) to become second to Eastern, Western and Southern Africa in terms of child marriage prevalence. While in many countries girls are forced into marriage and/or unions, in other countries most unions take place between apparently consenting adolescents, though such unions/marriages involving adolescents have severe impacts on adolescent girls' health and access to education, employment opportunities and economic independence. There is an acute need to provide alternatives to girls and young women that enable them to delay early marriage and unions.

As CEFMU practices are evolving and married girls' lived experiences vary, youth voices must be listened to in order to understand their concerns, needs, aspirations and solutions. CEFMU practices must be analysed and addressed collectively, in a gender-transformative way to create alternatives that support girls to continue their education, protect their health, and fulfil their ambitions. Meaningful and inclusive youth engagement and leadership is crucial in ending child marriage and driving positive societal change. Their leadership in changing unequal gender norms and of strong intergenerational and intersectional movements must be included in all levels of decision-making processes.

5. Chapter 5: Transforming global governance

Progress cannot happen at the expense of human rights and gender equality. Global governance systems and institutions must centre respect for and protection of human rights and gender equality in all processes and outcomes.

Through the years, Governments and intergovernmental bodies have made numerous commitments to end child marriage but failed to back these commitments with the necessary resources and investments to fulfil them. The global governance system must undergo a radical change and establish progressive, redistributive, and equitable global financial governance frameworks which prioritise the elimination of poverty and of gendered socioeconomic inequality, and which invest in social services, like education and health, especially sexual and reproductive health services. States must adopt and implement public policies that enhance the capabilities of children and adolescents, starting with the recognition of progressive autonomy as subjects of law that provide them with a diversity of options for the construction of a dignified life.

It is crucial that global governance reform prioritises addressing macro socioeconomic inequalities, which directly and indirectly disproportionately impact girls and drive child marriage, because of consistent underinvestment in social services. At least two aspects are crucial in this context: addressing aggressive tax avoidance, which deprives countries of revenue that could otherwise be redirected into key equitable public services that contribute to reducing child marriage - such as education and health services - and addressing global inequalities that push countries, especially those in the Global South, into massive debt, giving them little option but to cut public spending and further deprioritise girls' access to education and health services.

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