

Learning series session: Child Marriage in Conflict- and Crisis-Affected Settings: sharing evidence and promising practice, 17 June 2025

On 17th June 2025 Girls Not Brides hosted a learning webinar on child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings. This session marked the launch of the *Girls Not Brides* [report](#) on this urgent issue including fresh insights from research and practice across geographies and different thematic intervention areas. *Girls Not Brides* member organisations shared examples of promising practice from their work, and consensus-based recommendations that centre women and local actors.

Notes and related resources

Key takeaways

- **The evidence clearly demonstrates that risk factors for CEFMU increase across all forms of conflict and crisis**, and that risks further increase in settings (such as West, Central, East and Southern Africa and South Asia) where girls face overlapping crises and challenges. Despite this, there is a consistent lack of prioritisation for preventing and responding to CEFMU in humanitarian prevention and response efforts.
- **The evidence base on preventing and responding to child marriage in conflict and crisis-affected settings is nascent but growing.** Multiple stakeholders are committed to strengthening the evidence base on proven and promising interventions, including in under-researched but high-prevalence contexts (such as Francophone Africa and West and Central Africa).
- **Girls' access to safe, quality education** can play a pivotal role in preventing and responding to child marriage, especially in conflict and crisis-affected settings. The likelihood of girls marrying before age 18 is 6 percentage points less for every year spent in secondary school, yet girls' access to secondary schooling and transition from primary to secondary can be especially challenging in humanitarian settings.
- **It is critical that interventions that address child marriage centre the contexts, needs, voices and lived experiences of community members in conflict- and crisis-affected settings**, especially those at risk of or who have experienced child marriage. Interventions should be designed based on an understanding of the context before the crisis started, and also the specific ways in which the crisis – and responses to the crisis – may have impacted girls and their families, peer networks, and ability to access key services.
- **Approaches that amplify community/place-based expertise** and the expertise of civil society organisations, frontline women's rights and feminist organisations, and child rights organisations, should be prioritised in humanitarian response efforts.
- **Girl-centred, gender-transformative approaches (GTA) are necessary to tackle child marriage in conflict and crisis-affected settings.** The power imbalances, harmful norms and unequal social structures that perpetuate gender inequality typically become more entrenched and pronounced in humanitarian settings. GTA can be applied across different intervention areas, including safe space programming, economic strengthening activities, education and social norms interventions. See our *Girls Not*

Brides member [case study](#) and [spotlight](#) to learn more on GTA in conflict and crisis-affected settings.

- **Arts-based interventions** can play an important role in child marriage prevention and response efforts in conflict- and crisis-affected settings as a means of raising awareness and dialogue on the risks and consequences of child marriage in a sensitive and non-confrontational way. These approaches must be rights-based and grounded in the realities of the communities they are targeting, as demonstrated by the [Marriage Is Not a Game](#) by Abaad and documented in our member [case study](#).
- **Urgent, coordinated action at all levels of humanitarian, development, and peace nexus programming** is needed to better understand, recognise and respond to the needs and priorities of girls and adolescent girls – unmarried and ever-married – to prevent and respond to child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings.

Promising practice from focus intervention areas

- **Cash-based assistance and vocational or skills-focused interventions** that are paired with gender-transformative approaches may increase the impact, inclusivity, and sustainability of income and economic strengthening-focused interventions in humanitarian settings – and support girls’ own desires to develop their earning potential.
- **Girls’ education** is a consistent protective factor against child marriage (and is often a priority for girls and caregivers in crisis settings), and may be supported through cash- or in-kind transfers. Supply-side factors (such as safety and quality of education) should also be considered as part of education-focused interventions.
- There is evidence on the benefits of flexible, tailored approaches to **SRH service provision** in humanitarian settings, which may be more effective when paired with norms-based and/or economic support interventions. Addressing discomfort around discussing SRHR (and sexuality specifically) and accessing services is critical to maximising the impact of such interventions.
- Building peer networks and friendships may be critical to girls’ (consistently overlooked) **mental health needs** in crises – particularly for ever-married and displaced girls.
- Designated **safe spaces in humanitarian settings** can be critical for girls and adolescents in terms of building their networks and improving service access and uptake, particularly when part of a multi-sectoral rights-based approach. These spaces may need to be tailored to the specific needs of ever-married girls and adolescent mothers.
- **Girl-centred safe spaces** may work best when contextualised and combined with skills-focused or income-generating interventions, are designed to also address systemic and structural barriers to girls’ empowerment, and include engagement with key stakeholders (including faith leaders, men and boys, and WROs).
- Interventions that clarify and help users to navigate **local legal, health and other registration processes** may prevent child marriage and support ever-married girls and young mothers, particularly in displacement settings. Such interventions should be accompanied by multi-sector training for service providers on gender justice and safe implementation of **marriage laws**.
- **Women’s rights organisations and movements** are chronically underfunded and underrepresented in key decision-making spaces, despite evidence of the role they can play in driving gender equality and the growing body of guidance, recommendations, and good practice examples on how to meaningfully engage and fund such organisations.

Recommendations for tackling child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings

1. Integrate child marriage prevention and response as a priority across all actors and sectors within the humanitarian architecture
2. Address structural and institutional barriers that impact the provision of key services
3. Design, deliver and evaluate multi-sector, multi-component interventions
4. Increase funding to, and integration of, girl-centred and – where possible – girl-designed interventions
5. Commit to multi-year funding for gender-transformative interventions and to pilot promising approaches, including robust measurement, evaluation and learning
6. Increase funding to women-led and community/place-based organisations.

For more information, please see the report [executive summary](#) and [recommendations](#).

Case study – The Uholo Initiative, Zaina Cuna, Pathfinder International, Mozambique

The Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Cabo Delgado project (2020-2024 – known locally as ‘Uholo-Raparigas e Jovens’) aimed to improve adolescent girls’ lives and livelihoods in northern Mozambique. Cabo Delgado is one of Mozambique’s poorest regions with some of the country’s highest rates of early unions and adolescent pregnancy. Since 2017, a violent insurgency in the province has compounded existing social, economic and health challenges, disrupting service provision and livelihoods and increasing displacement and poverty. Adolescent girls face heightened risks of GBV, including early union and adolescent pregnancy, as a result.

The Uholo Initiative took a gender-transformative approach (GTA) to address the root causes of early marriage and unions, namely gender inequality and girls’ and women’s limited socio-economic and political power. It brought together girls, young women, their families, communities, schools, health teams, judicial and law enforcement authorities, in an effort to end early unions together. The Uholo Theory of Change had two main strategies: supporting participatory empowerment, and strengthening local policies and systems.

- Key results included a significant drop in percentage of girls dropping out of school due to pregnancy or marriage in both focus regions; strengthened agency of adolescent girls and young women through social support and increased economic activities; strong participation of young women and their partners in group sessions for first-time parents.
- Key elements of success included taking a rights-based approach that encouraged reflection and dialogue and worked through community-based networks; addressing gender norms at a young age, including through discussion groups facilitated by community members and schools (with appropriate training); and, recognising traditional justice systems.

You can find the full Uholo Initiative case study in the report [here](#).

Case study – ‘Marriage is Not a Game’, Anthony Keedi, ABAAD, Lebanon

Marriage Is Not a Game is a gender-transformative awareness-raising initiative that communicates the risks of child marriage to girls and their communities in crisis-affected regions of Lebanon. The risk of child marriage in Lebanon has increased significantly due to ongoing crises (including a crippling economic crisis) that have had a devastating impact on the provision of public services, including education. These factors are compounded by a high level of stigma and taboo around key issues such as girls’ sexuality and sexual violence

against children, which manifests as victim-blaming and the deprioritisation of girls' needs in humanitarian response approaches.

Marriage Is Not a Game was developed by NGO ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality, in collaboration with UNICEF, with community members able to test and feed into the development process. It is part of ABAAD's broader GBV prevention and response strategy, which includes community-based activities and direct service provision for members of host and refugee communities.

Marriage Is Not a Game uses an animated video and complementary brochure to show the immediate and longer term impacts of child marriage, including on education access, safety (including during pregnancy), and access to decent work in adulthood. These risks are contrasted with the better outcomes available to those who marry after age 18, and to their children. One Marriage Is Not a Game project involves community engagement using puppetry. Puppet shows depict familiar and relatable scenarios developed through research with target communities, each tailored to different groups (e.g. children only, children and women, whole families). These are used to open up discussion about child marriage and whose voices are/are not being heard.

- Key results include the wide reach of ABAAD's broader GBV prevention and response strategy in terms of direct service provision (with 16% of those reached under the age of 18); reaching over 12,400 people through prevention sessions covering issues like GBV and child marriage; and supporting increased case management services, including for child marriage cases.
- Key elements of success include the importance and transformative potential of using art to highlight the impact and prevalence of harmful practice as well as sexual violence against children; the need to address the immediate *and* root causes of GBV (through awareness raising and direct support services); the need to intentionally target the most marginalised; and the importance of integrating community feedback and partnerships to ensure initiatives are culturally sensitive.

You can find the full Marriage Is Not a Game case study in the report [here](#).

Session Q&A

- **Increased cross-sectoral coordination, collaboration, monitoring, and partnerships are critical** to effectively tackle child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings. The evidence base demonstrates that multi-sector and multi-level interventions are often the most effective means of preventing child marriage and supporting the needs of ever-married girls and young mothers in these contexts.
- **Cuts to aid** are already having a significant impact on the effectiveness of gender-transformative approaches, which need at least 1-2 years to demonstrate results. Building GTA into interventions takes time, and requires meaningful bottom-up design in partnership with communities.
- Where evidence gaps exist on tackling child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings, we can **draw on and learn from relevant evidence a) relating to other forms of GBV, and b) from development interventions**.
- It is critical to **support and engage in learning spaces** for sharing evidence of promising practice on different approaches to child marriage prevention and response in crisis settings.