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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Child, early and forced marriage: ending and preventing forced marriage

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 53/23, in which the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare concise and action-oriented guidelines as a set of orientations for States on the effective application of a human rights-based approach to the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 53/23, the Human Rights Council, alarmed by the prevalence, consequences and gendered nature of child, early and forced marriage, requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to prepare concise and action-oriented guidelines for States on the effective application of a human rights-based approach to the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes to prevent and eliminate this harmful practice.
2. The Council requested OHCHR to prepare the guidelines in consultation with States and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, intergovernmental organizations, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other treaty bodies, special procedures, regional human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, young people, academia and other relevant stakeholders, including women's human rights organizations and women and girls who are victims or survivors of child, early or forced marriage.¹
3. Within the constraints posed by the liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations, OHCHR, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), organized a series of virtual regional consultations with experts and rights holders, including girls and boys and survivors of child and forced marriage, in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, as well as an in-person global consultation in Geneva, where States, members of United Nations human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies and special procedures mandate holders, grass-roots organizations, academics and survivors contributed to the elaboration of the present guidelines.
4. OHCHR has prepared the guidelines building on the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms, the findings and recommendations of previous OHCHR thematic reports on the topic to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly² and the lessons learned of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA.³
5. These guidelines are also informed by 59 submissions received by OHCHR from States, United Nations entities, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations, in response to a call for submissions launched on 9 September 2025.⁴

II. The human rights imperative of eliminating child, early and forced marriage

A. Definitions

6. Child marriage is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. "Early marriage" is often used interchangeably with "child marriage" and refers to marriages involving a person aged below 18 in countries where the age of majority is attained earlier or upon marriage, in contrast with international human rights law. Early marriage can also refer to marriages where both spouses are 18 or older but other factors make them unready to consent to marriage, such as their level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychosocial development, or a lack of information regarding the person's life options.⁵

¹ Council resolution 53/23, paras. 17 and 18.

² [A/HRC/52/50](#), [A/HRC/50/44](#), [A/HRC/41/19](#), [A/HRC/35/5](#), [A/HRC/26/22](#) and [A/HRC/26/22/Corr.1](#), [A/79/308](#), [A/77/282](#), [A/75/262](#), [A/73/257](#) and [A/71/253](#).

³ In 2016, UNICEF and UNFPA launched the Global Programme to End Child Marriage in 12 high-prevalence countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, the Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia. For more information, see <https://www.unicef.org/protection/unfpa-unicef-global-programme-end-child-marriage>.

⁴ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-inputs-guidelines-child-early-and-forced-marriage>.

⁵ [A/HRC/26/22](#) and [A/HRC/26/22/Corr.1](#), para. 5.

7. A forced marriage is any marriage which occurs without the full and free consent of one or both of the parties and/or where one or both of the parties is/are unable to end or leave the marriage, including because of duress or intense social or family pressure.⁶ As such, child and early marriages are forms of forced marriage.⁷

8. In line with the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child,⁸ and as outlined in the resolution requesting the present report,⁹ informal unions such as cohabitation or other arrangements that are not formalized, registered or recognized by a religious, customary or State authority are included in the scope of the guidelines.

B. Prevalence of child, early and forced marriage

9. According to data from UNICEF, every year, 12 million girls worldwide are married before turning 18.¹⁰ An estimated 650 million girls and women alive in 2026 had been married before the age of 18.¹¹ Nearly half of child brides lived in South Asia (45 per cent) with the next largest share in sub-Saharan Africa (20 per cent), followed by East Asia and the Pacific (15 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (9 per cent).¹²

10. The practice of child marriage has continued to decline globally. As of 2023, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 years were married as children, versus nearly one in four 10 years before. Progress has been uneven around the world and, despite global advances, reductions are not fast enough. In fact, it is estimated that at the current rate, it will take another 300 years until child marriage is eliminated.¹³

11. It is estimated that 22 million people live in situations of forced marriage, pointing out an increase of more than 6 million since 2016. Over two thirds of those forced to marry are women and girls.¹⁴

12. The 2024 annual results report of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage warns that progress towards ending child marriage by 2030 remains too slow to meet Sustainable Development Goal 5.3. Without accelerated action, over 9 million girls are projected to marry in 2030 alone. The report calls for a gender-transformative, multisectoral approach that empowers girls, strengthens systems and fosters enabling environments through partnerships and community engagement.¹⁵

C. Impact of child, early and forced marriage on girls' and women's rights

13. Child, early and forced marriage have wide-ranging impacts on the realization and enjoyment of girls' and women's rights, with gendered consequences that uniquely affect women and girls. These practices pose serious risks to their lives, security and physical and mental health. These risks include forced or unwanted pregnancy and gender-based violence, including sexual violence and exploitation. The age and power differentials between brides and their spouses undermine the agency and autonomy of girls and young women, often exposing them to physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence, as well as restrictions on their freedom of movement.

⁶ Ibid., para. 6.

⁷ Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019), para. 20.

⁸ CEDAW/C/MEX/CO/10, paras. 61 and 62, and CRC/C/BRA/CO/5-7, para. 29.

⁹ Council resolution 53/23, preamble.

¹⁰ See <http://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>.

¹¹ See <https://childmarriagedata.org/global-trends/>.

¹² See <https://data.unicef.org/resources/is-an-end-to-child-marriage-within-reach/>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ International Labour Organization, Walk Free and International Organization for Migration, "Global estimates of modern slavery, forced labour and forced marriage" (2022), p. 5.

¹⁵ See <https://www.unicef.org/documents/GPECM-2024-ARR>.

14. Women and girls in situations of child and forced marriage may experience conditions that meet the international legal definition of slavery or slavery-like practices.¹⁶ These practices include servile marriage, sexual slavery, child servitude, child trafficking and forced labour.¹⁷ Girls and young women who challenge or are perceived as challenging, the power dynamics within the family are often subjected to severe consequences, including crimes committed in the name of so-called “honour” and other forms of gender-based violence.

15. In the regional and global consultations held by OHCHR, many survivors and front-line advocates described being in a child or forced marriage as being in a state of having little or no choice, burdened with household chores, denied any opportunities for further personal or professional development, with insufficient access to food or healthcare, obliged to submit to unwanted sex and early and repeated motherhood and unable to alter the course of their lives.

16. Child, early and forced marriage is also associated with a range of poor health and social outcomes and other negative consequences.¹⁸ Specifically, early and frequent pregnancies and forced continuation of pregnancy are closely linked to high maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates and can have an adverse effect on girls’ and women’s sexual and reproductive health.¹⁹ Adolescent mothers (aged 10–19 years) face higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis and systemic infections than women aged 20–24 years and babies of adolescent mothers face higher risks of low birth weight, pre-term birth and severe neonatal conditions.²⁰

17. Girls and women who are subjected to child, early and forced marriage are often unable to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. They frequently lack accurate information and autonomy, which compromises their ability to decide on the number and spacing of their children and negotiate contraceptive use, thereby increasing their risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.²¹ This concern was also highlighted in the regional consultations held in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. In the regional consultation in Latin America, participants underscored that this is also true for girls and young women in informal unions and that teenage pregnancy is often a driver of child, early and forced marriage.

D. Humanitarian and conflict situations

18. Child, early and forced marriage and discriminatory norms and practices are significantly exacerbated in humanitarian and crisis settings. In such situations, poverty, insecurity, and the breakdown of social and institutional protections weaken safeguards and reinforce gender inequality, heightening the vulnerability of women and girls to child, early and forced marriage.²²

19. During armed conflict, displacement and natural disasters, the erosion of family, community and legal networks, combined with real or perceived risks of sexual violence plays a significant role in driving child marriage.²³ Fear of sexual violence against women and girls and the associated concern over perceived “damage” to family honour or reputation, is a factor influencing family decisions. In such contexts, marriage is often wrongly viewed as a protective measure, leading families to marry off their daughters at a young age in the

¹⁶ Slavery Convention, art. 1 (1).

¹⁷ [A/HRC/52/50](#), para. 9; and [A/HRC/41/19](#), para. 20. See also Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182); and Anti-Slavery International, “Day of the Girl: 5 ways girls worldwide are being enslaved”, 11 October 2021. See further International Criminal Court, Office of the Prosecutor, Policy on Slavery Crimes, para. 54.

¹⁸ UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage* (2012), chap. 1.

¹⁹ UNFPA, “Giving birth should not be a matter of life and death” (2012).

²⁰ World Health Organization, “Fact sheet: Adolescent pregnancy”, 10 April 2024.

²¹ UNFPA, *Motherhood in Childhood: The Untold Story* (2022).

²² [A/HRC/41/19](#), paras. 8–15.

²³ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

belief that it will protect them and ensure social acceptance.²⁴ High levels of displacement²⁵ have been consistently associated with increased rates of child, early and forced marriage, both in displaced populations and host communities.²⁶

20. Financial pressures and food insecurity may also increase the prevalence of child marriage.²⁷ This was highlighted as a grave concern in the consultation for the Middle East. Without reliable income-generation opportunities, educational opportunities and access to land or support systems, families may feel added pressure to marry off their girls in the hope that the husband and his family will provide for them.²⁸

21. In humanitarian and conflict situations, even where legislation prohibiting child marriage exists, its implementation and enforcement may be hampered by the disruption and collapse of public institutions and services.²⁹ Access to justice can be particularly challenging in such settings, as formal justice systems may no longer exist or function. As highlighted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, barriers already faced by women and girls in gaining access to justice before the national courts prior to the conflict, including legal, procedural, institutional, social and practical barriers, are exacerbated during conflict, persist during the post-conflict period and operate alongside the breakdown of the police and judicial structures.³⁰

III. Guidelines to prevent and redress child, early and forced marriage

A. The human rights-based approach to preventing and redressing child, early and forced marriage

22. In joint general recommendation No. 31/general comment No. 18 (2019), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child defined child and/or forced marriage as a harmful gender-based practice, a form of gender-based violence and a human rights violation that disproportionately affects girls and women.³¹ The Committees highlighted that the practice is rooted in gender inequality and discrimination, stereotyped gender-based roles, the presumed superiority of

²⁴ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, “Action by Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies to prevent and respond to child marriage: Case Study Report” (2019), p. 6.

²⁵ UNFPA, “Child marriage and environmental crises: an evidence brief” (2021). Available at https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/child_marriage_and_environmental_crises_an_evidence_brief_final.pdf. See also Kara Hunersen and others, “Child marriage and displacement: a qualitative study of displaced and host populations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 37, No. 2 (June 2024), pp. 324–335.

²⁶ See, for example, UNICEF, “Child marriage in humanitarian settings: the Rohingya community in Bangladesh”, Policy Brief, June 2021.

²⁷ See Girls Not Brides, “Taking action to address child marriage: the role of different sectors”. Available at <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/432/6.-Addressing-child-marriage-Food-Security-and-Nutrition.pdf>.

²⁸ UNFPA, “Addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings: technical guide for staff and partners of the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage” (2021).

²⁹ For an overview of lessons learned, see UNFPA–UNICEF, “Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen” (2025).

³⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, para. 74.

³¹ The prohibition of child marriage is included in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (art. 16 (2)) and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (arts. 24 (3) and 34), while the prohibition of forced marriage is included in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 23 (3)) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 10 (1)). For a comprehensive overview of the international legal framework pertaining to child, early and forced marriage, see A/HRC/26/22 and A/HRC/26/22/Corr.1, chap. III.

men and boys over women and girls, attempts to exert control over the bodies and sexuality of women and girls, social inequalities and the prevalence of male-dominated power structures.³²

23. In its general recommendation No. 21 (1994) on equality in marriage and family relations, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women emphasized that the State has an obligation to respect women's right to equality within the family and should eliminate any laws, including customary or religious laws, that discriminate against women. The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls has also emphasized that the obligation of the State to protect women and girls' right to equality in the family compels the authorities to prevent discrimination by private actors. It noted that due diligence as a principle of State action should result in a global model of prevention, protection, prosecution, punishment and redress for acts of discrimination and violence against women in cultural and family life.³³

24. A human rights-based approach to preventing and providing redress for child, early and forced marriage recognizes the practice as a violation of multiple, interrelated human rights and a manifestation of structural discrimination and gender inequality. It places girls and women at the centre of the interventions, as rights holders entitled to dignity, equality, bodily autonomy and free and full consent to marriage. It affirms States as duty bearers with obligations to respect, protect and fulfil their rights.

25. This approach requires addressing the root causes of child, early and forced marriage; empowering girls and women and boys and men to act as agents of such change and to contribute to the transformation of traditional cultural attitudes that condone child, early and forced marriage; and strengthening the capacity of communities to support such processes. It emphasizes prevention, protection from harm and the empowerment of girls and women, particularly those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including in humanitarian and crisis settings.

26. The following guidelines should be implemented in close collaboration with rights holders and civil society, placing women and girls at the centre of the interventions; promoting and protecting their rights, autonomy and dignity; ensuring the best interests of the child; and tackling gender and social norms that allow this harmful practice to exist. Such norms operate at community levels, requiring interventions that foster collective shifts, including through engaging communities and traditional and religious leaders, to challenge and transform deeply rooted beliefs around these norms.

27. States must discharge their obligations under international human rights law, ensuring that their interventions, processes and outcomes are fully aligned with international human rights standards and principles. States must create enabling conditions for the meaningful participation of women and girls in the design, implementation and evaluation of legislative, policy and programmatic measures aimed at eradicating child, early and forced marriage. In addition, States must ensure effective remedies for rights violations and ensure monitoring, measuring and reporting on progress towards the elimination of these practices.

28. The guidelines, based on States' human rights obligations, include operational recommendations, key measures for their implementation and examples of States' practices. The measures outlined can be taken concurrently, given their interrelated and interdependent nature.

B. Guideline 1: Establish a human rights-compliant legal framework

29. Operational recommendation: Ensuring a national legal framework in line with international human rights standards, including regarding the age of majority and the legal age for marriage, protective of the rights of adolescent girls and boys, prohibiting forced marriage and requiring birth and marriage registration.

³² Joint general recommendation No. 31/general comment No. 18 (2019), para. 17.

³³ A/HRC/29/40, para. 65.

30. Key measures include:

- (a) Prohibiting forced marriage;
- (b) Establishing the minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys at 18 years;
- (c) Taking legal and policy measures to prevent marriage under the age of 18, ensuring that the principles of the best interests of the child, the evolving capacities of adolescents and the child's right to participate in decisions affecting their life guide the implementation of laws and policies relating to child marriage;
- (d) Granting judges discretion to tailor protective measures and responses on a case-by-case basis based on a detailed understanding of the circumstances involved. This may include granting children over the age of 16 years the agency to remain in or formalize a union involving a consensual relationship between adolescents of a similar age, if there is no evidence of coercion and abuse;
- (e) Eliminating the criminalization of consensual, non-exploitative sexual relations between adolescents of similar age;
- (f) Amending existing laws to remove legal obstacles that hinder girls from accessing the enforcement of national laws on the prevention or prohibition of child marriage and related legal remedies;
- (g) Repealing any laws that, directly or indirectly, enable, justify or lead to child, early or forced marriage;
- (h) Enhancing access to legal aid for girls and women;
- (i) Ensuring that statutory and constitutional laws are human rights compliant and take precedence over customary, traditional or religious laws that allow, condone or prescribe child, early and forced marriage, especially in countries with plural legal systems;
- (j) Removing any legal requirements for formally ending a child or forced marriage;
- (k) Providing access to remedies for those who leave a child or forced marriage, including with regard to property and inheritance, gender-based violence and child and forced labour;
- (l) Adopting laws that require compulsory and free birth and marriage registration.

31. Legal reforms covering minimum age of consent to marriage must be accompanied by strengthened enforcement and monitoring. Enforcement should prioritize child protection, exempt adolescents from liability and connect them to safe spaces and psychosocial support services. Furthermore, child, early and forced marriage laws and policies should be a part of a comprehensive legal and policy framework that addresses the root causes of child, early and forced marriage, including gender inequality, and guarantees support for those wishing to leave a marriage.³⁴

Promising practices

32. Various Member States have reformed their national legislation in line with international human rights standards. Colombia adopted Law No. 2447 of 2025, which prohibits all marriages and unions involving persons under 18 years of age. The law created the national programme on life projects for children and adolescents to promote education and prevent early unions. The Constitutional Court declared underage marriage unconstitutional in 2025 and urged all authorities to design public policies to prevent and eradicate child marriage. The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare must submit an annual report to Congress on implementation, results, and impact evaluation of its policies, including on child marriage.³⁵

³⁴ UNFPA-UNICEF, "A synthesis of what we know works to prevent and respond to child marriage", Evidence Paper for UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, (2024), p. 9.

³⁵ Submission by the Defensoría del Pueblo, Colombia; see also judgment C-039 of 2025 of the Constitutional Court of Colombia.

33. In article 106 (a) of the Criminal Code adopted in 2016, Austria criminalized both the act of forcing someone into marriage, as well as preparatory acts involving deception or cross-border coercion. The Marriage and Partnership Law Amendment Act of 2025 brought Austrian law into line with the revised European Union anti-trafficking directive.³⁶ Law No. 9406 of 2016 of Costa Rica on strengthening legal protection for girls and adolescent women against gender-based violence associated with abusive relationships criminalizes unions with minors and nullifies marriages involving minors or adoptive relatives.³⁷ In Italy, forced marriage is considered a form of gender-based violence and is included in Law No. 69 of 2019, which introduced article 558 bis of the Penal Code criminalizing “coercion and inducement to marriage”.³⁸ In 2024, Sierra Leone passed landmark legislation that sets the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 years with no exceptions and enforces penalties on offenders. The law includes a framework for multisectoral services for affected girls and outlines the institutions responsible for such services.³⁹ Similarly, in 2017, the Kingdom of the Netherlands reformed its civil and family codes to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 years both for boys and girls and removed any exemptions.⁴⁰

34. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Forced Marriage Act enabled the use of forced marriage protection orders to protect individuals at risk or already in forced marriages. In 2017, the Government introduced lifelong anonymity for victims of forced marriage, protecting survivors’ identity in legal proceedings and the confidentiality of the information, in line with a survivor-centred approach.⁴¹

35. The 2024 revised anti-trafficking directive of the European Union,⁴² which classified forced marriage as a form of criminal exploitation and set the minimum legal age for marriage and registered partnerships at 18, abolishing previous exceptions like judicial permission for 16-year-olds, led to 17 out of 28 European Union member States having a specific criminal offence for forced marriage, although in other States the act may be prosecuted under general criminal provisions, such as coercion or trafficking in persons.

C. Guideline 2: Adopt comprehensive human rights-based policies and programmes and appropriate coordination and governance mechanisms

36. Operational recommendation: Establishing national comprehensive and coordinated national approaches, including policies, protection measures, strategies and actions, that are firmly anchored in human rights norms and principles, with the aim of safeguarding the best interests of the child and advancing gender equality, are needed.

37. Key measures include:

(a) Assigning clear roles and ensuring coordination across ministries, including at a minimum the ministries of justice, education, health, social protection and the ministry or government body responsible for gender equality and related matters;

(b) Establishing formal referral systems between the police, the judiciary, social services and the health and education sectors, as well as coordination between national and local governments;

³⁶ Submission by Austria.

³⁷ Submission by Acceder.

³⁸ Submission by ActionAid Italy.

³⁹ UNFPA-UNICEF, “2024 Annual Results Report| Country Profile – Sierra Leone” (2025), p. 6.

⁴⁰ A/73/257, para. 15.

⁴¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forced-marriage-resource-pack/forced-marriage-resource-pack>.

⁴² Directive 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1712/oj/eng>.

(c) Establishing national action plans or strategies, anchored in human rights, guided by the best interests of the child and that are context-appropriate, to end child marriage, early and forced marriage;

(d) Implementing gender-sensitive and survivor-centred training programmes on identifying girls at risk or victims of child, early and forced marriage and on applicable legislation, prevention and care measures for government officials, the judiciary and law enforcement and other State officials, as well as teachers, health and other service workers, including those working with immigrants and asylum-seekers, and other relevant professionals;

(e) Providing adequate financial resources and support to programmes aimed at addressing child, early and forced marriage, including for married girls and those within Indigenous and rural communities;

(f) Strengthening cooperation with United Nations agencies, regional organizations, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders in the area of child, early and forced marriage;

(g) Establishing a national system of compulsory, accessible and free birth and marriage registration and rights-based civil registration processes, including through the use of information and communications technology, to prevent child marriage.

38. A coordinated and human rights-compliant policy framework strengthens State responses to child, early and forced marriage by improving the overall capacity, coherence and effectiveness of policies, services and procedures across sectors.

Promising practices

39. Examples of States' practice include Algeria, where the Ministry of Justice coordinates intersectoral actions to prevent child and forced marriage and support survivors. It organizes human rights training for judges, prosecutors, civil registry officers and social workers on identifying situations that could amount to child and forced marriages and on assessing the child's best interests.⁴³

40. Iraq established the Supreme Council for Women's Affairs in 2009 and the National Directorate for Iraqi Women in 2023, which coordinates women's rights programmes across ministries, including as related to child and forced marriage. Moreover, each ministry includes a women's affairs unit linked to the Supreme Council to ensure consistent implementation of gender-related policies.⁴⁴

41. The Philippines, in its Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage and Imposing Penalties for Violations Thereof (2021), requires the Government to create an enabling social environment to prevent child marriage through comprehensive, coordinated policies, including empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; enhancing girls' access to quality education; providing economic support to girls and their families; and engaging parents and community leaders to discourage the practice.⁴⁵

42. Uzbekistan established in 2023 clearly defined roles and responsibilities across ministries to prevent and respond to child and forced marriage, supported by a coordination mechanism involving the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Court, the Agency for Social Protection, the Children's Ombudsperson and the National Centre for Human Rights.⁴⁶

43. The establishment of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission and the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2015 facilitated the development of targeted policies addressing child and forced marriage and fostered dialogue between governmental departments and community leaders, promoting a cultural shift against child marriage.⁴⁷

⁴³ Submission by Algeria.

⁴⁴ Submission by Iraq.

⁴⁵ Submission by the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines.

⁴⁶ Submission by Uzbekistan.

⁴⁷ Submission by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

44. Some countries have adopted national action plans to prevent and provide redress for child, early and forced marriage, including Austria, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Lebanon, Nepal and the Philippines. States are also increasingly adopting gender-responsive budgeting. Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and Togo, for example, have specific budget allocations to counter child marriage, for example through the allocation of specific funds for girls' education, protection and empowerment.⁴⁸

D. Guideline 3: Strengthen prevention efforts by tackling the root causes of child, early and forced marriage by addressing gender inequality, harmful social norms and practices and systemic barriers

45. Operational recommendation: Addressing the root causes of child, early and forced marriage by tackling structural inequalities that limit women's and girls' access to education, economic opportunities, healthcare, sexual and reproductive health and rights and decision-making. Human rights-based, gender-transformative and community-based interventions should be implemented to address patriarchal social and cultural norms and discriminatory practices that perpetuate inequalities and normalize child, early and forced marriage.

46. Key measures include:

(a) Engaging with girls and boys, women and men, traditional and religious leaders and community leaders to change attitudes, social norms and expectations that are associated with traditional femininity and masculinity and gender stereotypical roles; and working in partnership with them to support personal and social change aimed at eliminating gender inequality;

(b) Promoting girls' access to education, including by providing economic support and social protection measures to girls attending schools and to their families;

(c) Promoting women's economic independence and access to productive resources, including by addressing discriminatory norms and practices and facilitating access to credit and vocational education and training;

(d) Creating safe spaces where girls and women can connect with peers, mentors, teachers and community leaders and express themselves, speak out, articulate their aspirations and concerns and participate in decisions affecting their lives;

(e) Using new technologies to support the establishment of networks to facilitate the exchange of information between girls and young women on child, early and forced marriage;

(f) Ensuring that women and adolescents have access to accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and rights and the impacts of child, early and forced marriage, as well as access to adequate and confidential services;

(g) Removing legal and practical barriers to accessing education for pregnant and married girls;

(h) Ensuring age-appropriate, culturally relevant and empirically based comprehensive education on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and gender equality in schools.

47. Addressing the root causes of child, early and forced marriage requires a principled and multifaceted strategy grounded in human rights, that addresses structural inequalities, harmful social norms and systemic barriers perpetuating the practice. Such an approach seeks to redistribute power and resources, promotes the equal sharing of family and household responsibilities between women and men and girls and boys and empowers women and girls to claim their rights. It further requires challenging discriminatory systems and establishing

⁴⁸ For case studies, see Girls Not Brides, "Civil society and budget advocacy to end child marriage: lessons learned from six pilot projects" (2020).

laws, policies and services that facilitate access to education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, child and social protection and redress for gender-based violence.⁴⁹

48. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child have underlined that prevention can be best achieved through a rights-based approach to changing social and cultural norms, empowering women and girls, building the capacity of all relevant professionals who are in regular contact with victims, potential victims and perpetrators of harmful practices and raising awareness of the causes and consequences of harmful practices.⁵⁰ The effectiveness of these measures has been confirmed by an analysis of existing studies and high-quality evaluations by UNICEF and UNFPA.⁵¹

Promising practices

49. The submissions received for the preparation of this report showcase some promising initiatives. In order to strengthen prevention and enhance community awareness, Austria is implementing projects addressing the root causes of harmful practices – such as gender stereotypes, unequal power relations and limited educational or economic opportunities.⁵² In 2024, the Dominican Republic put in place the project “Transforming cultural norms” and the “Sexuality Education in Community Contexts” initiative, which engage both adolescents and adults to increase awareness of rights and gender equality.⁵³

50. Egypt launched an effective national awareness-raising campaign in June 2022, titled “Marrying her before 18 destroys her rights”.⁵⁴ In Iraq, community police carried out awareness raising campaigns to eradicate child marriage in rural areas in 2024 and 2025, in cooperation with tribal and religious leaders.⁵⁵

51. Other States have undertaken similar initiatives, including Azerbaijan, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, through digital technologies. Community-based mobilization, targeted advocacy and awareness-raising activities for men and community, tribal and religious leaders are also crucial in challenging and changing social norms that support child, early and forced marriage. In Italy, ActionAid has developed since 2016 a network of “community experts” – women and men from affected communities who promote awareness about the human rights impact of child, early and forced marriage and gender equality – showing the central role of civil society in promoting gender and social norms transformation. The network operates in a culturally sensitive manner and functions as a bridge between the community and service providers.⁵⁶ An example is also the “Not in my village” campaign in 2024 in Zimbabwe.⁵⁷

52. In 2021, Sierra Leone adopted the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools, which ensures that schools throughout the country are accessible to and inclusive of all children, including pregnant girls and young mothers.⁵⁸ Since 2022, Uzbekistan has promoted interest-free loans for seven years of schooling for girl students, full payment of university fees by the State for disadvantaged girls and continuation of education for pregnant students.⁵⁹ Among other States, Algeria, India, Malaysia, Panama and Serbia have devised social protection measures for families to ensure that girls can access education.

53. Comprehensive sexuality education and adolescent-responsive sexual and reproductive health services can contribute significantly to reducing child marriage and improving girls’ well-being. In 2023, Mexico included comprehensive sexuality education in the new Mexican school curriculum. It also promoted targeted initiatives in Indigenous

⁴⁹ [A/HRC/26/22](#) and [A/HRC/26/22/Corr.1](#), para. 54 (c)–(e).

⁵⁰ Joint general recommendation No. 31/general comment No. 18 (2019), para. 56.

⁵¹ UNFPA-UNICEF, “A synthesis of what we know works”, p. 3.

⁵² Submission by Austria.

⁵³ Submission by Dominican Republic.

⁵⁴ Submission by the National Council for Human Rights in Egypt.

⁵⁵ Submission by Iraq.

⁵⁶ Submission by ActionAid Italy.

⁵⁷ Submission by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

⁵⁸ See <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Radical-Inclusion-Policy.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Submission by Uzbekistan.

communities through the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples and strengthened the national programme for equality between women and men.⁶⁰ In the United Kingdom, Relationships Education is compulsory in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education is compulsory in secondary schools. The latter covers forced marriage, female genital mutilation, consent, domestic abuse and coercion.⁶¹ In Zambia, integrated outreach and school-based initiatives are helping delay marriage, increase school retention and connect girls to health and protection services.⁶²

E. Guideline 4: Strengthen protection and facilitate access to justice and support

54. Operational recommendation: Ensuring that victims of a child, early or forced marriage receive timely, high-quality and trauma-informed support services, including housing, healthcare, income support and psychological and legal services. Such services must be gender- and child-responsive and adequately resourced and must target survivors or women and girls at risk of child, early or forced marriage.

55. Key measures include:

- (a) Establishing free helplines staffed by trained counsellors, to enable victims and others to report that a child, early or forced marriage is likely to occur or has occurred and to facilitate referral to appropriate protection and services;
- (b) Ensuring that survivors of child, early and forced marriage have timely access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, including in relation to unwanted pregnancy;
- (c) Ensuring access to justice, remedies and legal assistance, including through legal aid and pro bono initiatives for women and girls;
- (d) Exercising due diligence to guarantee and protect women's right to equality in informal plural legal systems that enable child, early or forced marriage, and to provide women and girls with civil law options for remedies and leaving a marriage;
- (e) Ensuring that girls participating in legal processes have access to adequate child-sensitive information about the process and appropriate child-responsive services to safeguard their rights and safety;
- (f) Ensuring that migrant women and children victims or at risk of child, early and forced marriage have safe and equal access to services and protection mechanisms, regardless of their migratory status and are protected from criminalization or other punitive measures based solely on their migratory status;
- (g) Ensuring survivors of child, early and forced marriage benefit from targeted reintegration and empowerment programmes that provide education, economic opportunities, income and housing support, including through social protection measures, and psychosocial support;
- (h) Carrying out community-based interventions to support reintegration and prevent stigma for women and girls survivors of child, early and forced marriage.

56. Women and girl survivors or those at risk of child, early and forced marriage need immediate support services, including safe shelters, income support and food, medical, psychological and legal services, that should be delivered in a trauma-informed manner. Trauma-informed services recognize the impact of trauma, aiming to prevent re-traumatization and foster healing.⁶³ These services should prioritize physical and

⁶⁰ Submission by Mexico.

⁶¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-education-primary> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/relationships-and-sex-education-rse-secondary>.

⁶² Submission by UNICEF, p. 5.

⁶³ See <https://share.stanford.edu/get-help/help-others/supporting-survivors>.

psychological safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment. Trauma-informed protection services require trained and skilled personnel.

Promising practices

57. Austria supports survivors in entering the formal education system, either through reintegration in schools or alternative educational pathways; provides labour market integration, including job orientation, skills training, and language courses; and provides social assistance, emergency financial support and safe housing.⁶⁴

58. In 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina established a programme to support social protection measures and safe houses for victims of violence, including for survivors of child, early and forced marriage.⁶⁵ El Salvador provides educational opportunities, vocational training and healthcare services for adolescent mothers and their children.⁶⁶ Equatorial Guinea has adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health clinics that provided contraception, prenatal/postnatal care and information on sexual reproductive health and rights.⁶⁷

59. Malaysia has one-stop crisis centres for women and girl survivors in public hospitals that provide free, integrated, multi-agency services, including medical services, forensic evidence collection, psychological support and referrals to police, social protection, shelters and legal aid. The centres emphasize confidentiality and survivor-centred approaches to protect the dignity, safety, and rights of the victims.⁶⁸

60. The Centre for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking in Serbia plays a key role in identifying potential victims of forced marriage and taking measures for their protection. The Centre has developed a set of indicators for the identification of victims of trafficking in persons or forced marriage.⁶⁹ The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2024, of Sierra Leone allows those married as minors before the law's enactment to seek annulment and to apply for compensation for harms suffered. This provision opened a statutory pathway for survivors to pursue financial remedies for lasting injury, loss of opportunity or other consequences tied to child marriage.⁷⁰

61. In the United Kingdom, survivors of forced marriage received legal advice, personal safety planning and emergency accommodation. The Government partnered with non-governmental organizations, such as Ashiana Network, Halo Project and Refuge, that provide crisis housing, legal support and counselling. Victims had access to 24-hour national helplines (Karma Nirvana, Freedom Charity and Refuge). Other non-governmental organizations, such as Southall Black Sisters, received grants from the State to support the resettlement of forced marriage victims who are repatriated to the United Kingdom, while Operation Limelight at airports aims at identifying and protecting girls being taken abroad for forced marriage or female genital mutilation.⁷¹ Similar initiatives exist in France and in Switzerland.⁷²

62. Zimbabwe has scholarships in the context of the "Go back to school" programme for girl survivors of child marriage, as well as vocational training programmes and other initiatives to empower survivors economically and reduce their vulnerability.⁷³

⁶⁴ Submission by Austria.

⁶⁵ Submission by Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁶⁶ Submission by El Salvador.

⁶⁷ Submission by Equatorial Guinea.

⁶⁸ Submission by Malaysia.

⁶⁹ Submission by the Serbian Ombudsman.

⁷⁰ Parts IV and V of the Act: see https://sierralii.gov.sl/akn/sl/act/2024/5/eng@2024-07-11#part_V.

⁷¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/forced-marriage-resource-pack/forced-marriage-resource-pack>. See also <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-limelight-instructions-to-police-and-border-force-staff>.

⁷² See <https://www.womenforwomenfrance.org/en/our-resources/safety-planning-and-protection-orders/protection-orders/know-what-to-do-in-case-of-forced-marriage-or-risk-of-forced-marriage>; and <https://www.ebge.admin.ch/en/get-help-violence>.

⁷³ Submission by Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

63. Government and civil society coalitions can play a vital role in providing support services and ensuring that they reach the most marginalized. Across multiple countries, including Bangladesh, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the United States, the global non-governmental partnership Girls Not Brides worked with Governments to coordinate national coalitions addressing child marriage. These partnerships were instrumental in aligning government service delivery with grass-roots outreach, strengthening advocacy for better laws, enhancing support systems and sharing resources, data and training between States and non-governmental organizations.⁷⁴

64. The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage is a multi-partner initiative in which national governments work alongside non-governmental organizations, community organizations and other stakeholders to deliver support services to girls at risk of, or affected by, child marriage. The programme emphasizes community outreach, peer support, life skills training and referral pathways to counselling and child protection systems. Governments often provide institutional frameworks, such as child protection structures and schools, while non-governmental organizations implement community-level programming and follow-up. For example, as part of this programme, the Government of Sierra Leone is working with partners to provide life skills education, safe spaces and empowerment sessions to help adolescent girls make informed decisions and recover from the impacts of child marriage. These services are designed to be holistic and community-based, involving families and communities to support reintegration and prevent stigma.⁷⁵

F. Guideline 5: Collect data, monitor progress and ensure accountability

65. Operational recommendation: Adopting a human rights-based approach to the regular collection, analysis, dissemination and use of quantitative and qualitative data on child, early and forced marriage, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, geographical location, socioeconomic status, education level and other key relevant factors, to monitor progress and ensure accountability.

66. Key measures include:

(a) Using a human rights-based approach to data collection, focused on participation, data disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy and accountability.⁷⁶

(b) Collecting disaggregated data on the prevalence, drivers and outcomes of child, early and forced marriage;

(c) Monitoring the enforcement of laws, policies and programmes and their impact on the rights of women and girls, including their access to remedies;

(d) Establishing an institutional mechanism to ensure that the data collected informs effective and evidence-based policy and law reforms;

(e) Establish indicators and benchmarks for examining progress, stagnation and retrogression.

67. Collecting disaggregated data on the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage and monitoring the implementation of relevant laws and policies is essential to promoting accountability and transparency and turning commitments into measurable results. Disaggregated data enables an assessment of the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage, the identification of the groups most affected and evaluation of whether laws and policies are effectively enforced and successful in preventing and responding to this harmful practice. It also supports tracking progress, stagnation or retrogression over time, identifying gaps in protection, ensuring resources are used effectively and informing evidence-based law and policymaking.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/our-partnership/national-partnerships-coalitions>.

⁷⁵ See <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/en/topics/child-marriage-0>.

⁷⁶ See <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Joint general recommendation No. 31/general comment No. 18 (2019), paras. 37–39.

68. For example, data collected regularly allow comparison across years, locations, population groups and institutions, allowing the assessment of whether rates of child, early and forced marriage are decreasing, whether prevention programmes are expanding, if budget allocations are being used effectively or whether certain communities are being neglected. Such information should be public, so that governments and institutions can be evaluated on their efforts to end child, early and forced marriage by civil society, national human rights institutions, and United Nations human rights mechanism, among other actors, as well as in the context of the commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Promising practices

69. In Colombia, the Defensoria del Pueblo conducted a mapping exercise to identify areas with the highest incidence of child marriage and early unions to inform State's policies. Law No. 2447 of 2025 requires the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare to issue an annual report to Congress on the actions taken, the achievements made and the impact assessment of the law and implementation of programmes required under the law.⁷⁸

70. Denmark had established a national data partnership for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, including Target 5.3 on eliminating all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. The data partnership involves government institutions, academia, civil society and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. It follows human rights-based principles (participation, disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy and accountability) in its data-collection ecosystem and draws from a variety of data sources, including citizen-generated data, to generate statistics that are more inclusive and representative of marginalized populations.⁷⁹

71. El Salvador maintains a continuously updated information system on children and adolescents. It also conducts a household survey every year, which collects data on family composition and adolescent unions. In addition, since 2019, El Salvador has published studies and maps on adolescent pregnancy every two years in collaboration with UNFPA.⁸⁰ Under the national strategy to combat violence against women in Iraq, provincial data collection teams have been established to track cases of gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage.⁸¹

72. In Bangladesh, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs reviewed government progress on ending child marriage, using statistics generated by the police and courts, as well as data on the implementation of social protection programmes.⁸²

73. To monitor laws and policies, Kenya established a framework, bringing together the Ministries of Education, Gender and Health, as well as civil society and statisticians to track progress on ending child marriage. The task force reviews data trends, including regional disparities, and assesses how government programmes, such as programmes to promote school retention or ensure social protection, align with legal protections. Its annual reports inform the parliament and the public about progress and gaps. Monitoring links legal enforcement with social services and statistical tracking.⁸³

74. Nepal had piloted community scorecards, where local councils and civil society groups reviewed data on child marriage rates, school attendance and service delivery.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Submission by the Defensoria del Pueblo, Colombia.

⁷⁹ See <https://www.humanrights.dk/projects/partnering-citizen-data#:~:text=Together%20with%20partners%2C%20the%20Danish,defenders%20to%20do%20the%20same.>

⁸⁰ Submission by El Salvador.

⁸¹ Submission by Iraq.

⁸² See www.unicef.org/media/160486/file/2023%20Country%20summaries_EN.pdf.

⁸³ See <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/framework-national-child-protection-system-kenya>.

⁸⁴ See <https://nepal.tracking-progress.org/indicator/5-3-1-a-women-aged-15-19-years-who-are-married-or-in-union>.

75. In Serbia, the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings systematically collects and analyses data for the prevention of child and forced marriages and strengthening of institutional cooperation.⁸⁵ In the United Kingdom, the government's Forced Marriage Unit regularly publishes detailed annual statistics on cases it responds to, including age groups, sex of victims, referral sources and the nationalities involved. While these data are administrative rather than survey-based, they provide consistent, disaggregated insight into forced marriage incidents reported or supported, helping guide policy and services and show trends over time.⁸⁶

76. In 2024 and 2025, countries in the Southern African Development Community were developing an interactive digital dashboard and monitoring framework to track child marriage indicators across member States. This initiative aimed at providing disaggregated data from national surveys and government records through a dashboard that legislators and advocates could use to monitor implementation of laws and progress.⁸⁷

77. The UNICEF Child Marriage Data Portal compiles data from national surveys and population censuses into an interactive country profile system, where users can explore trends and disaggregate by wealth, education level and subnational regions. This facilitates access to data for policymakers, researchers and civil society to identify the most affected populations and the areas where progress is lagging.

IV. Conclusions

78. **Child, early and forced marriage is a human rights violation that requires strong and urgent action. Women and girls cannot wait another 300 years to see its elimination.**

79. **Building on a wealth of evidence-based information on successful interventions to eradicate child, early and forced marriage – some of which are included in this report, the work of United Nations human rights mechanisms, of States, regional organizations and civil society and the long-standing thematic work of OHCHR, these guidelines can meaningfully inform local, national and regional efforts and international cooperation initiatives aimed at eradicating this harmful practice.**

80. **The guidelines can also help States prepare for their national reviews by United Nations treaty bodies and the universal periodic review and can serve as a useful framework to assess States' progress in promoting gender equality and non-discrimination.**

81. **OHCHR stands ready to support States in the implementation of these guidelines and encourages the Human Rights Council to keep its focus on the issue of child, early and forced marriage, including by ensuring a follow-up process to the guidelines. This could include the development of specific tools for policymakers linked to each guideline, as well as the consolidation of States' good practices.**

⁸⁵ Submission by Serbia.

⁸⁶ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2022#forced-marriage-unit-statistics>.

⁸⁷ See <https://www.observer24.com/na/sadc-finalises-tool-to-boost-fight-against-child-marriage/>.