

Breaking Vows:

Early and Forced Marriage and Girls' Education



Plan

Because I am a Girl

"My father made the decision to marry me off and I was not given any say at all. In fact, I did not even know about my marriage. It wasn't until a woman came to my home, giving me money and a dress, and said, 'you are now my daughter,' that I realised what was happening. I was shocked, but my sisters advised me to stay silent."

Sabina, Pakistan¹

"I was so sad when my friend Limya who was studying seventh grade was suddenly married. She cried a lot. Though her parents promised her that she could continue her studies after marriage, it did not happen. There are many girls in my area who drop out from school due to early marriage."

Noha, 16, Sudan²

"I was forced to leave school in order to get married. I was very young then. I was divorced after eight months of my marriage. I wish other girls don't suffer like me."

Madina, 14, Sudan³

Plan UK's *Because I am a Girl* campaign aims to ensure millions more girls in the world's poorest countries can access a quality education. An education that will contribute towards breaking the cycle of poverty for generations to come.

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Photo: Jenny Matthews



Plan works around the world to reduce rates of early and forced marriage and increase girls' access to their rights. Our aims are:

- To reduce the social pressure that motivates families to favour early marriage by working with boys, girls, men, women and their communities to change attitudes, beliefs and behaviours about the practice.
- To provide educational opportunities for all girls through formal schooling and alternative or vocational training.
- To build girls' leadership skills through empowerment and building of socio-economic capabilities as well as to facilitate the creation of social networks for girls and increase their participation in political and civic action.
- To train and support community leaders and organisations to design and carry out advocacy and awareness activities that promote and protect the rights of girls.

Defining early and forced marriage⁴:

Marriage is a formalised, binding partnership between consenting adults. Child marriage, on the other hand, involves either one or both spouses being children and may take place under civil, religious or customary laws with or without formal registration. Children are people under the age of 18 years old and references to 'girls' throughout this report mean females below the age of 18.

Early because girls marry before the age of 18

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.'

Marriage before the age of 18 years old should not be permitted since children do not have the 'full maturity and capacity to act,' as recognised by the expert body that monitors the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its General Recommendation 21.

Forced because girls rarely give their free and full consent to marry

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that marriage should be 'entered only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.' In the majority of child marriages, however, there is often an element of coercion involved: parents, guardians or families put pressure on children or force them into marriage. Early marriage is accepted as the norm in many countries and girls may give their consent as a duty and sign of respect to their family and community. However, where one of the parties in a marriage is under the age of 18 years old, consent cannot always be assumed to be 'free and full' and is rarely in the best interest of the girl.

Early and forced marriage and boys

While this report is focused on the impact of early and forced marriage on girls and girls' education, we recognise that there is a need to also address its impact on boys and young men. While early and forced marriage directly impacts boys on a much smaller scale, for those that it does affect, it can have profound psychological consequences and is no less a violation of their rights.

Equally, we recognise that boys have a powerful role to play in ending early and forced marriage. Plan works with boys around the world who have recognised the negative impact that the practice is having on their friends, their families and communities, and who have taken action against it. Far from seeking to marginalise boys in the debate on early and forced marriage, we regard them as important development partners with perspectives that should be understood and opinions that should be respected.

In the time it takes to read this foreword, 40* girls under the age of 18 in some of the poorest countries in the world will have been coaxed, coerced, or forced into getting married.

Foreword

This report explores the issues behind the ten million girls a year who experience early or forced marriage. Married young, girls are frequently taken out of school, are at a higher risk of HIV infection, early pregnancy and health conditions such as obstetric fistula. If she survives childbirth her children are less likely to grow up healthy and go to school, continuing the cycle of poverty for generations to come.

Why is the international community so silent when one out of every seven girls in the world's poorest countries is married before their fifteenth birthday? This is an abuse of human rights that ignores their best interests, their views and undermines efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Child marriage is a practice imbedded in many cultures and traditions, is exacerbated by poverty and too often increases after natural disasters and emergencies. For the girl it is a rapid transition from childhood that too often harms her education and health. Early and forced marriage harms boys too, albeit on a much smaller scale.

But tackling the causes of early and forced marriage can and must succeed. Just as child marriage crosses cultures, so must those working to end it span religions and traditions.

We welcome the move by The Elders group of eminent global leaders to form an alliance against early marriage and this report gives many success stories; from Bangladesh where the friends of fifteen year old Samina successfully lobbied their union council to stop her wedding and return her to school; to the Imam's of Egypt and the Mayan workers in Guatemala who with Plan support are persuading their communities to value a girl's right to an education and the opportunities that it brings; to Jasvinder Sanghera who has used her childhood experience of forced marriage to campaign against its practice in the UK.

Building on this work we outline in this report what more can be done by the British government to strengthen its role in preventing early and forced marriage and supporting those who have fled or survived it.

Plan UK is committed to raising the voices of the millions of girls married young against their will. We ask you to support these girls and join the growing number of campaigners against early marriage across the world.

For more information and to join Plan UK's Because I Am a Girl campaign, visit our website at www.becauseiamagirl.org

Marie Staunton

Marie Staunton, Chief Executive, Plan UK

* Assumes two minutes to read foreword

Executive Summary

10 million girls under the age of 18 marry each year.⁵

That's around ...

• 833,333 a month • 192,307 a week

• 27,397 a day • 19 every minute

or, around one girl every three seconds.

One in every three girls in the developing world is married by the age of 18.⁶ One in seven marries before they reach the age of 15.⁷ In countries like Niger, Chad, Mali, Bangladesh, Guinea and the Central African Republic (CAR), the rate of early and forced marriage is 60 per cent and over. It is particularly high in South Asia (46 per cent) and in sub-Saharan Africa (38 per cent).⁸

Early and forced marriage is most prevalent where poverty, birth and death rates are high, there is greater incidence of conflict and civil strife and lower levels of overall development, including schooling, employment and healthcare.⁹

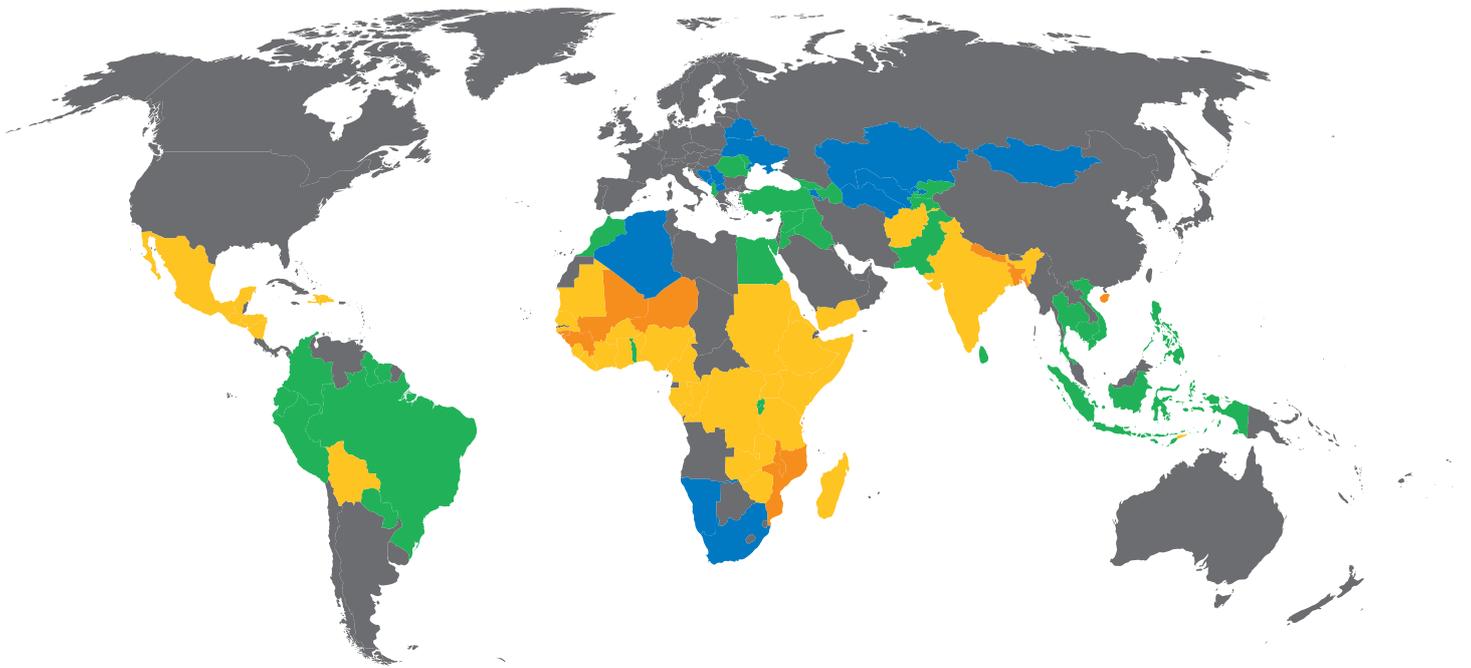
Although the average age at first marriage is gradually increasing worldwide, the pace of change is slow. In Nepal, Guinea and Bangladesh, for instance, the average age at first marriage for girls still remains below 18.¹⁰

Early and forced marriage discriminates against girls and abuses their rights on an unimaginable scale. In this report, Plan UK calls upon the UK Government to increase its efforts to end early and forced marriage through enhanced cooperation across Whitehall, an increase in Department for International Development (DFID) programming in developing countries, and by using its influence to push for effective international policy and action. We believe that implementing the recommendations set out here will enable the Government to meet its existing commitments and will ensure that:

- Early and forced marriage is raised up the international agenda to strengthen global commitment to girls' rights.
- All countries ensure girls have legal protection from early and forced marriage and actively prosecute perpetrators.
- Funding is increased for programmes that encourage families and communities to prioritise girls' education over marriage.
- Government and donors invest in the support services for girls wanting to escape marriage.
- Increased scrutiny strengthens monitoring and reporting of global early and forced marriage.

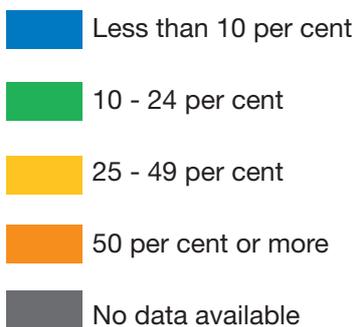
Plan UK believes that improving education and school retention for girls in the poorest countries plays a crucial role in eliminating early and forced marriage. Educated girls are more likely to have the skills, knowledge and confidence to claim their rights. Supporting girls to enrol in school and benefit from free, compulsory basic education (a minimum of nine years), in an environment that supports them to realise their rights, enables them to broaden their choices in life. This in turn works towards achieving the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Prevalence of Early Marriage around the world



Sources: UNICEF, www.childinfo.org/marriage_countrydata.php, and PRB analysis.

Per cent of women aged 20 - 24 married by age 18



Countries with the highest proportion of Early Marriage

Niger	75 per cent
Chad	72 per cent
Mali	71 per cent
Bangladesh	66 per cent
Guinea	63 per cent
Central African Republic	61 per cent
Mozambique	52 per cent
Nepal	51 per cent
Malawi	50 per cent

2 Early and forced marriage causes and consequences



Photo: Plan

Causes

The causes of early and forced marriage are complex, interrelated and dependent on individual circumstances and context. The practice is driven by factors that include gender inequality, poverty, negative traditional or religious norms, weak enforcement of law, and the pressure caused by conflict and natural disasters.

Gender inequality

Across the globe, women and girls continue to occupy a lower status in society as a result of social and cultural traditions, attitudes and beliefs that deny them their rights and stifle their ability to play an equal role in their homes and communities.

Although gender roles differ between cultures, and generations, and vary in relation to other factors - including economic status, class, ethnicity, caste, sexuality, religion, HIV status or disability - gender norms generally work to the disadvantage of women of all ages.

In many societies a young woman's place is seen as in the home. Yet, she is doubly disadvantaged because her youth reduces her status within her household and community. Because she does not have the same standing as her male peers, she is not perceived to have the same skills or capabilities, and so there is less value in educating her. This inevitably contributes to the view that a 'good marriage' is the most important way to secure a girl's wellbeing.

Gender inequalities also contribute to early marriage through their impact on formal legal systems. A number of the countries with the highest rates of early marriage, including Niger and India, also have unequal laws of consent for boys and girls, reinforcing the idea that it is suitable for girls to marry at an earlier age than boys. At the local level, patriarchal customary laws and traditions give women and girls less negotiating power around marriage and sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

Poverty

A chronic lack of income severely impacts on household decision-making and may result in girls being viewed as an economic burden. The high costs of raising children and the perception of girls' potential to earn an income as comparatively poor, pushes girls out of their homes and into marriage.

For families facing chronic poverty, marriage often seems like the best way to safeguard girls' futures and lighten their economic burden. One mother in contact with Plan Egypt told us: "If my daughter gets married to a rich man or even a craftsman, he will take care of her. He will feed her and she will be well dressed. This will give me the opportunity to take care of the other siblings".¹¹ Parents often feel they have no other option than to see their daughters marry and these ideas are communicated to their children. In one study in 36 villages in Niger, Plan found that the strongest argument girls themselves made in favour of early marriage was that it would improve their economic situation and increase their social status.¹²

"My mother decided my marriage because we were homeless. My father died, my mothers' in-laws kicked her out of their home and her parents had died. My marriage helped my mother reduce her responsibilities."

Girl interviewed by Plan Pakistan¹³

Negative traditional or religious practices

Negative social and religious norms perpetuate and can help to justify early and forced marriages. For myriad cultural, religious and practical reasons, in many countries the importance of preserving family 'honour' and girls' virginity is such that parents push their daughters into marriage well before they are ready. Girls may also be married early to older men in the belief that a husband will provide a safeguard against 'immoral' or 'inappropriate' behaviour.¹⁴ Equally, where girls become pregnant, either through consensual sex or rape, the stigma attached can lead families to view the girls' rights and wellbeing as secondary to the preservation of family 'honour'. Early and forced marriage can also be seen as a strategy for punishing or controlling girls who rebel against their family or communities' expectations.¹⁵

A number of 'traditional' practices surrounding early and forced marriages are essentially a means of consolidating relations between families or a way of settling disputes or sealing deals over land and property. In Pakistan, the Watta Satta or exchange marriage is a common way of exchanging girls between families in order to strengthen familial ties. Another practice, known either as vani or swara, involves girls being offered as appeasement or compensation for a wrong done to one family, tribe or clan, by another.¹⁶ Dowry or bride-price systems, in which gifts or money change hands in exchange for a bride, can offer powerful financial incentives for families to consider early marriage.¹⁷

It is important to differentiate between situations in which 'tradition' or religion are the drivers of early marriage and those in which cultural justifications are attributed to decisions that are, at heart, economically driven. Family income and rural as opposed to urban location can cause significant variation in early marriage practice amongst families with the same cultural traditions and practising the same religions.

Failure to enforce laws

A failure to enforce legislation means that in some areas families are not even aware that in marrying their daughters they are breaking the law.¹⁸ Girls themselves may also not be aware of their rights and legal status. In states in Nigeria that have legislation abolishing early marriage there is much more awareness amongst girls in the last year of primary school of the importance of abolishing early marriage.¹⁹

In countries such as Malawi, Bangladesh and Niger, most girls will be married before the age at which they can legally do so, and yet prosecutions are seldom brought, contributing to a belief that such marriages are acceptable and penalties are unlikely. Equally, marriage brokers and others who actively perpetuate the problem are seldom prosecuted, meaning that the financial rewards from brokering a marriage continue to outweigh the legal risks.

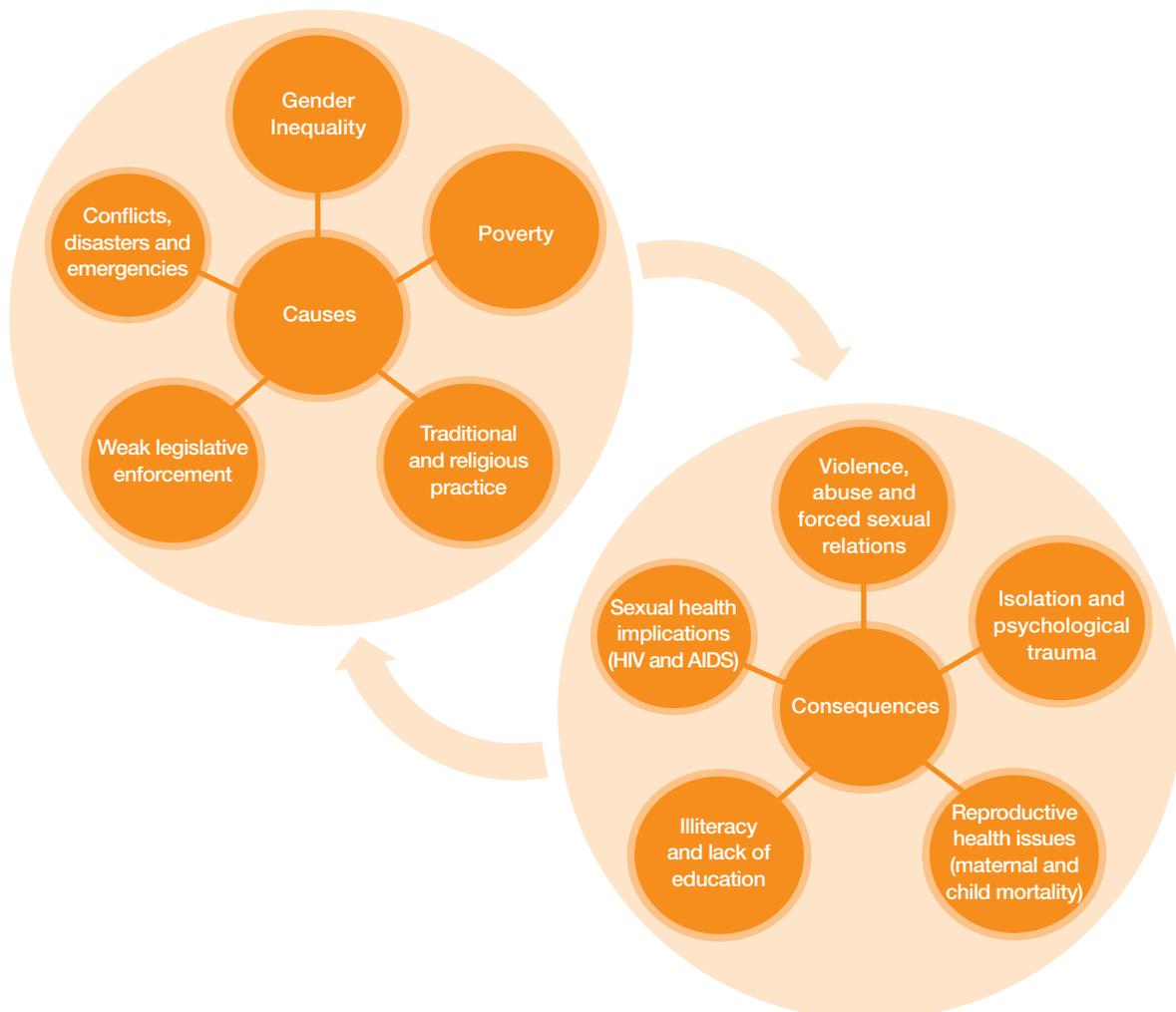
In many countries, young people still do not have legal protection from early and forced marriage. Countries across Africa, the Middle East and Latin America have legal ages of marriage as low as 14 years old. Girls who have been married often find it difficult to dissolve their marriages as they try to negotiate legal systems that are not designed to meet their needs.

Conflicts, disasters and emergencies

Disasters and emergencies increase economic pressures on households and many families that would not previously have considered early marriage turn to it as a last resort. Food insecurity in Kenya has led to the phenomena of 'famine brides',²⁰ drought and conflict in Afghanistan have forced farmers to arrange and receive money for the early marriage of their daughters,²¹ and girls in Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka have been pressed into marriages with 'tsunami widowers', in many instances doing so to receive state subsidies for marrying and starting a family.²²

Often, the pressures caused by disasters and humanitarian emergencies are not only economic. Early marriage increased in Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami as families in refugee camps saw it as the only protection for their daughters from rape²³ and in Sri Lanka, where rates of early marriage are normally relatively low, girls have been married to protect them from recruitment into militia.²⁴

The early and forced marriage trap – the cyclical relationship between causes and consequences



Consequences

Without question, early and forced marriage contributes to driving girls into a cycle of poverty, ill health, illiteracy and powerlessness. Girls married early are more likely to experience violence, abuse and forced sexual relations, reduced levels of sexual and reproductive health, and lower levels of education with corresponding high rates of illiteracy.

Violence, abuse and forced sexual relations

Abuse is a daily reality for many married girls. Women who marry younger are more likely to be beaten or threatened and to believe that a husband might be justified in beating his wife.²⁵ Even where girls are not physically abused, the psychological impact of early and forced marriage is hard to quantify. Young brides are often marginalised from society with few support systems. This contributes to a lack of confidence and low self-esteem which in turn increases their powerlessness and vulnerability to poverty.

Sexual and reproductive health

The sexual and reproductive health of married girls is significantly poorer than that of their unmarried counterparts. Girls and women who marry early and with little or no schooling often have limited awareness of their rights and lack the knowledge and confidence to negotiate safer sex, including condom use. Young married girls are more likely to contract HIV than their unmarried counterparts as a result of their heightened sexual exposure, often with an older spouse who by virtue of age is more at risk of being HIV positive (the average age difference is between five and nine years).²⁶

Girls who marry early have their first children at a younger age. Early childbearing contributes to pregnancy-related deaths and birth complications, which are the leading cause of mortality for girls aged between 15 and 19. Between one-quarter to one-half of girls become mothers in developing countries before the age of 18.²⁷ Compared with women over 20 years old, girls aged between 15 and 19 are twice as likely to die giving birth. For girls aged between 10 and 14 the risks are five times greater.²⁸ Infant deaths are twice as likely amongst babies born to teenage mothers.²⁹ In addition, the risk of obstructed pregnancy and conditions such as obstetric fistula is much higher for young girls.³⁰

Illiteracy and lack of education

Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory period before marriage or at the point of union and transfer to the marital home, which affects their ability to access the benefits of education. When Plan Egypt carried out a baseline study in four rural communities, they found that early marriage or marriage of school-aged girls was considered the main barrier to achieving universal primary education (MDG 2) and promoting gender equality (MDG 3) for girls and boys in rural communities.³¹



Photo: Finbarr O'Reilly

"Getting a girl married at an early age is the best protection for her."

Mother, Egypt³²

"I don't want to get married and have children, at least not anytime soon... I want to work and study. I don't want to be like another girl I know who is 13 years old and already pregnant." Yuleni, 13, Venezuela³³

Ending Early and Forced Marriage is a prerequisite to the successful realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Early and forced marriage often marks the end of a girl's schooling and the beginning of a life at home. She will have few opportunities to find work, and if she does, her lack of education means it will be poorly paid, making it almost impossible to break free from poverty.

The children of mothers with lower levels of education who live in poverty are more likely to be malnourished.

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education.

Early and forced marriage limits a girl's opportunity to go to school or benefit from alternative or vocational education. In turn, the children of mothers with low levels of education are less likely to be educated themselves.

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

Early and forced marriage reinforces and exacerbates inequality between men and women. Women married at a younger age have a lower status and less decision-making power within their households than those who marry later.

MDG 4: Reduce child mortality.

Young brides become young mothers. Babies born to girls in their teens are more likely to be premature and less likely to survive than those born to women in their twenties.

MDG 5: Improve maternal health.

Early and forced marriage has a significant impact on a girl's reproductive and maternal health. A girl in her teens is twice as likely to die in childbirth as a woman in her twenties. If she gives birth before the age of 15, her risk is five times higher.

MDG 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Early and forced marriage heightens a girl's risk of HIV infection, since she is less able to negotiate safer sex with her often older partner.

3 Education and early and forced marriage



Photo: Plan

Girls tell Plan repeatedly that they do not want to be married early and that their right to schooling is compromised when they are forced to do so. Yet, the education sector – donors included – has been slow to identify and understand the impact of early and forced marriage on girls' opportunities to enrol in and complete a full cycle of nine years of free, good quality, basic education.

Instead, there has been a tendency to focus debates on specific developmental issues, like health, maternal mortality, HIV and AIDS, resulting in a failure to develop a nuanced response to address the complex challenges of early and forced marriage.

Girls have the right to choose when and whom to marry and this should be seen as indivisible from other rights, including the right to education. Approaches to early and forced marriage should take account of the importance of education in creating an environment that understands and promotes this right.

The impact of early marriage on girls' education

The view that once a girl is married she has crossed the threshold into adulthood and no longer needs an education is sadly commonplace.³⁴ Plan's programme experience around the world tells us girls who are forced into early marriage are most likely to miss out on school.³⁵

Where age of marriage laws are in place and strictly enforced there appears to be a clear positive impact on girls staying in school. One study in Bangladesh determined that legally restricting marriages below the age of 17 would increase average female schooling by a minimum of nine per cent. The same study found that a one-year postponement of marriage between the ages of 11 and 16 increases adult literacy by 5.6 per cent.³⁶

Because it is illegal in most countries, early marriage tends to go under-reported as a cause of school drop out. School management teams may not be aware of it, or if they are, may be reluctant to engage with an issue seen as a private, 'cultural' and family matter. In countries where early and forced marriage is most prevalent, there can be a gap of several years between leaving school and marriage, which means the link between the two may not be recognised. One study in Mali found that girls were dropping out not to go directly into marriage, but instead to go to the city to work as a maid and earn enough money to fund their marriage trousseaux.³⁷ This time lag means that the impact of early and forced marriage is likely to be underestimated. Studies have begun to take a broader view of the relationship between school drop out and marriage, but the issue deserves far greater attention.

Even where educational opportunities are available, the cost, quantity, quality and content of schooling has an impact on whether girls are forced to drop out and marry early. The number of years a girl stays in school depends on a range of complex social, economic and educational factors. Girls must be able to acquire and apply skills and knowledge in ways that benefit their further learning, health, wealth and wider economic and social development. A recent Plan Egypt baseline study on early marriage showed that the primary reasons for school drop out cited by community members in addition to early marriage were the poor quality of schooling – primarily overcrowding and unqualified teachers – gender-based violence in schools and that girls were not learning the skills they needed for work.³⁸ These factors together can reduce the incentive to attend school and increase the viability of early marriage as a likely alternative.

The value attributed to girls' education is equally important. The expectation that they will marry and not work impacts on the standard of education they receive. Their teachers may give them less attention and they may have less access to learning materials than their male peers. Fabiola, 17, from Cameroon told Plan staff that early marriage affects girls' chances to study science and technology and that, when girls had a chance to use one of the five working computers in her school, the boys would say: "Why are you holding a computer mouse when you will just end up holding a baby's napkin?".³⁹ In order to undermine gender discrimination and break the cycle of early and forced marriage, a rights-based approach to education planning and delivery is crucial - that is, translating 'human rights into educational strategy and practice, and moving beyond equal access to education and equality in education, to education for equality'.⁴⁰

Early marriage also impacts on a household's perceptions of the affordability of education. Where it is felt that either girls will not need their education following their marriage, or that they will take their education to their marital home, families may view girls' education as a less sound investment.⁴¹

Again, supporting girls to complete a cycle of quality basic education is best achieved by focusing on girls' rights, adopting approaches to make education 'girl friendly' and taking action to ensure learning environments are:

Safe

- Ensuring pupils can get to and from school safely
- Providing a secure school environment that respects the rights of and is sensitive to the needs of its female pupils
- Enforcing penalties for teachers who sexually abuse students

Accessible

- Ensuring educational opportunities are available and free
- Offering cash incentives to persuade families to keep girls in school
- Building schools close to communities
- Making sure there are separate sanitation facilities for girls
- Providing secure in-school accommodation and in-school childcare facilities where appropriate
- Developing flexible education opportunities for girls who have left school
- Involving parents and communities in running schools
- Conducting communication campaigns on the importance of girls' education

Inspiring

- Ensuring girls are taught by qualified teachers, especially female teachers
- Training teachers to understand girls' rights and gender equality
- Supporting curricula for girls that are relevant to their needs, emphasise their abilities, equip them with skills to find work and manage their finances and include teaching on issues like sexual and reproductive health

"In our community, we don't allow a girl to continue her education when she is married because of her responsibilities. She doesn't have any spare time to continue her education. Her in-laws and home should be her priority." Women's focus group, Pakistan⁴²

The impact of girls' education on early marriage

Getting and keeping girls in school may be one of the best ways to foster later, consensual marriage, while also contributing to delayed sexual initiation, lower rates of HIV and AIDS and other morbidities, and greater gender equality.⁴³ One study in rural Bangladesh highlighted that when marriage is delayed, girls are much more likely to stay in school for longer, and be literate.⁴⁴

There is a strong association between higher age at marriage and higher education levels. A global analysis of data by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) determined that girls' education is 'the most important factor associated with child marriage'.⁴⁵ Another study found that in 29 countries, women who married at the age of 18 or older had more education than those who married at a younger age. Differences in duration of school careers by age at first marriage were evident both in countries with low levels of overall education, such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Mali, and in countries with higher levels of education such as South Africa, Peru and Zimbabwe.⁴⁶

Timely enrolment and duration of education – specifically transition to secondary level – is also critical if schooling is to protect girls from early and forced marriage. Estimates have put the length of schooling needed to make a difference to a girl's ability to have a say in the timing of her marriage and the selection of her partner at between 7⁴⁷ and 10 years.⁴⁸

"I said no to early marriage and I'm very proud that my family understood that and let me continue my education. I'm at higher secondary school now." Rugaia, 17, Sudan⁴⁹



Photo: Rose-Carmille Jéudy

Education-based interventions delay and prevent early and forced marriage:

- Funded by Plan, USAID and MBOSCUDA, the Girls Scholarship Programme in Cameroon provides scholarships and mentoring support to primary and secondary school girls, particularly in regions with lower enrolment rates and to the most marginalised groups, such as young, married girls. The project educates parents and their communities on the importance of girls' education through workshops and debates organised by student mentors. The project has contributed to a drop in pregnancy and marriage rates and a change in the behaviour of mothers who often opposed their daughters' education and who now advocate to see their children - both sons and daughters - go to school. Girls themselves feel more empowered and raise their voice against parental decisions to give them away in marriage – previously a taboo in the Mbororo society.⁵⁰
- The Ethiopian Ministry of Youth and Sport, working with regional and local governments and international partners, initiated the Berhane Hewan ('Light for Eve') programme in 2004. The programme aimed to prevent early marriage and support married adolescent girls by focusing on three areas: mentorship by adult women, continuation of school, and employment training for girls who were not in school. Over the course of two years the programme, which targeted girls aged between 10 and 19 in the Amhara region, increased girls' school attendance, age at marriage, friendship networks, and knowledge of reproductive health and contraceptive use. The intervention owed its success to the attention it paid to the complex challenges of the girls' social isolation and economic disadvantage.⁵¹
- Alternative education and training programmes in Kenya for girls who have missed out on schooling led to a fall in early marriage and helped women assert themselves.⁵²
- In India, education programmes have been shown to reduce the frequency of early marriage when issues that deny girls their right to education are addressed along with dowry matters. The same pattern has been observed in Guatemala, Thailand and Mali.⁵³

4 The global impact of early and forced marriage



Photo: Plan

Globally, the countries with the highest early and forced marriage prevalence rates are Niger (75 per cent), Chad (72 per cent), Mali (71 per cent), Bangladesh (66 per cent), Guinea (63 per cent), CAR (61 per cent), Mozambique (52 per cent), Nepal (51 per cent), Malawi (50 per cent), Ethiopia (49 per cent), Sierra Leone (48 per cent), India (47 per cent), and Uganda (46 per cent). Twelve of the 20 countries with the highest prevalence are members of the Commonwealth.

Region	Per cent of women aged 20-24, married or in union by age 18	Number of women aged 20-24, married or in union by age 18 (millions)
South Asia	46	32.6
Sub-Saharan Africa	39	14.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	25	6.3
Middle East and North Africa	18	3.5
East Asia and the Pacific*	19	5.6
CEE/CIS	12	2.2

*Excludes China

Source: UNICEF 2011⁵⁴

South Asia

Half the world's child brides live in South Asia, accounting for more early marriages than in any other region. While early and forced marriage is significantly more likely to affect girls, in India and Nepal, the rate for boys is 10 per cent or higher.⁵⁵ In Bangladesh, 32 per cent of women aged between 20 and 24, were married by their 15th birthday; the rate is 13 per cent in India and 10 per cent in Nepal.⁵⁶ In all three countries, between the ages of 15 and 18, these rates more than double, and in Nepal specifically they increase fivefold.

Case Study: Bangladesh

Two thirds of girls in Bangladesh are married before the legal age of 18. As in other countries, Plan has found that girls can be powerful advocates for their own rights, and has created spaces for boys and girls to come together and discuss issues that concern them. Plan ensures these children have an opportunity to share their views with adults so that their voices affect decision-making. As Shobna, 17, explains: "At home no one listens to a child, but when we work together people listen."

When one group found out that their friend 'Samina' was to be married, they went to her family on her wedding day and asked that the wedding be stopped. When Samina's father became angry and asked them to leave, rather than give up, the children immediately went to lobby their local union council and took the members down to the wedding venue. The wedding, already in progress, was interrupted and eventually stopped. Samina was able to go back to school and is now very happy to be studying at college. She is very thankful to her friends for stopping the marriage.⁵⁷

Case Study: India

In India, roughly half of girls are married before their 18th birthday – a staggering figure given the size of the country's population.

Savitha, from a village in Andhra Pradesh, was pulled out of education and forced to marry her sister's husband because her sister could not bear children. When her husband died when Savitha was pregnant, her local village youth club took up her cause, and convinced her sister and parents to let Savitha continue her education. They allowed her to resume her studies and she rejoined school. She passed 10th grade at the top of her class.⁵⁸

Deeply ingrained beliefs about marriage and girls' honour make tackling the issue of early and forced marriage extremely difficult. As an example of the scale of the problem, at the Hindu festival Akha Teej hundreds of girls, some toddlers, are married off to grooms in collective ceremonies. Police officers are often aware of these festivals and it is not uncommon for local politicians to be present to bless the couples.

Sub-Saharan Africa

At 39 per cent, sub-Saharan Africa has the second highest rate of early and forced marriage. A total of 14.3 million girls are married in the region before they reach the age of 18. The prevalence of early marriage varies across the continent with West and Central Africa at 43 per cent and Eastern and Southern Africa at 36 per cent. Among the countries where the rate of early and forced marriage exceeds 70 per cent – Niger, Chad, and Mali – adolescent fertility and maternal mortality rates are also high.⁵⁹ Civil unrest and natural disasters, including droughts and famine, further contribute to high rates in the region.⁶⁰

In countries where the legal age of marriage differs by sex, the age for women is always lower. In Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, Mali, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the legal age of marriage is 18 for males and only 15 for females.⁶¹

Case Study: Malawi

Brenda, from Kasungu in central Malawi, was kidnapped on her way to school and was held against her will for three months. She was just 15 years old.

Brenda was a victim of a form of bride kidnapping called Mpenjele Kuno. Across the region, when families cannot attract the wives and daughters-in-law they want, either because they lack sufficient social standing or are unable to afford the bride-price, they resort to abducting them. Once a girl has been kidnapped, even if returned to her family she will be less desirable to other potential husbands and will often have no choice but to marry the man who has kidnapped, abused and often raped her. Often, in areas where kidnapping is prevalent, families will marry off their daughters early because they fear that if they wait, their daughters are more likely to be kidnapped.

In regions where bride kidnapping is accepted as customary, families often fail to report it, further adding to the problem. Plan Malawi was instrumental in the fight to bring Brenda home and she is now back with her family and has returned to school. Plan Malawi partnered with local Government and the communications company Celtel Malawi to introduce a toll-free community helpline for youngsters in need of help and advice. The helpline gives young people at risk of abduction or other violence access to professional child counsellors and paralegals able to give anonymous support and advice. Referrals can also be made to police Victim Support Unit officers.⁶²

Middle East and North Africa

The overall prevalence of early marriage in the Middle East and North Africa has been recorded at 18 per cent, though national statistics for this region remain sparse making estimates difficult. Based on available data, Sudan (34 per cent) and Yemen (32 per cent) appear to have the highest prevalence of early marriage in the region.⁶⁴

In the Middle East and North Africa, legislative provisions protecting girls from gender discrimination either do not exist or remain weakly enforced. For example in Yemen, which has ratified the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, along with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 32 per cent of girls marry before their 18th birthday. The legal age for marriage in Yemen is 15 years old for both males and females.

While CEDAW has been ratified by most countries within this region, with the exception of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Sudan, patriarchy remains entrenched in many aspects of society. For example in Saudi Arabia, an unmarried adult woman is the ward of her father, a married woman is the ward of her husband and a widowed woman is the ward of her sons. In a male-dominated and tribal society, it is not uncommon for women to be at risk of honour crimes.⁶⁵

Case Study: Egypt

In Egypt, Plan is working to stop girls becoming 'Gulf brides'. Although marriage under the age of 16 is illegal, girls are removed from school usually between the ages of 13 and 15, in preparation for marriages to men who travel into Egypt from the Gulf States in search of young wives. The transactions are facilitated by brokers and once money has changed hands, the girls are taken out of Egypt. Many are returned a few months later, often pregnant, when their husbands have grown tired of them. Other girls are kept in their new homes as slave labour, often working on the orders of their husband's other wives. Some girls may be married four or five times, effectively falling victim to sex trafficking. In 2008, Egyptian authorities intervened and brought in a law decreeing that the age gap between spouses should be no more than 25 years, to prevent the marriage of a 92 year old man to a 17 year-old Egyptian girl.⁶⁶

Plan Egypt holds awareness sessions for parents and children about violence against women and girls. By working with communities to create plays and performances, they are encouraged to discuss and consider early marriage and children's rights. Plan also trains teachers to work with families to keep girls in school in order to protect them from early marriage practices.

Case Study: Sudan

Young people in Sudan's White Nile area, where early marriage is a common practice and girls and boys are regularly married before the age of 15, have been working with Plan to promote girls' education and end harmful traditional practices.

In such a poor area, customary payment of bride-price in the form of money and gold to the bride's family, combined with the belief that marrying girls at a younger age will ease the financial burden on their family, acts as a powerful financial incentive for early marriage. It is also felt that early marriage often leads to more children and larger families and that younger wives are more obedient. Families take pride in marrying their daughters at very young ages.

Plan has encouraged young people to involve community and religious leaders, teachers, parents, children and government officials in workshops, debates, discussions, and open days in order to emphasise the importance of education for girls and the duty of families and communities to protect children from early and forced marriage. The young people used songs, plays, posters and films to deliver their messages. Youth group members report that they are now able to discuss early marriage openly in their homes, schools and communities, which would not have been possible before, and that they have witnessed a change in the attitudes of their parents and elders.

Ahmed, 16, told Plan: "We are so happy and proud to play a role in this initiative. I am glad to say that many families are convinced to stop this practice. They now allow their girls to continue their schooling."⁶⁷



Photo: Adam Hinton

Latin America and the Caribbean

More than one in four girls in Latin America and the Caribbean marry before they are 18 years old.⁶⁸ This figure masks the diversity of rates within the region, as the average age at marriage appears much higher in Caribbean nations, with lower ages elsewhere. Although available data for the region is incomplete, some countries stand out as having particularly high prevalence rates, including the Dominican Republic (40 per cent) and Haiti (30 per cent), especially when considered in comparison to their neighbours Jamaica (9 per cent) and Trinidad and Tobago (8 per cent).

The age at which girls marry among rural indigenous people tends to be lower than in urbanised areas. In Guatemala, for example, research indicates that indigenous Mayan girls experience higher rates of early marriage, coinciding with their spending fewer years in school. By the age of 18, almost 40 per cent of Mayan females in Guatemala are married, which is nearly twice the rate of Ladina females of the same age.⁶⁹ In this region, the legal age of marriage ranges vastly from 14 to 21, indicating there is little legislative coherence on this issue and that despite international legal provisions, child protection remains at the mercy of national governments.

Case Study: Haiti

Life was exceptionally challenging for young people in Haiti, even before the 2010 earthquake. Girls, in particular, faced high rates of early marriage and low literacy. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster these problems were exacerbated by the destruction of schools. As part of their contribution to the recovery efforts, Plan and UNICEF surveyed 1,000 boys and girls and found that what Haitian young people wanted most was to have an education and get back to school. In response, Plan worked to return them to school as soon as possible. Our work included launching the Back to School campaign to convince educators, parents, and students not to undervalue education since it is more important than ever in times of emergency.

In February 2010, Plan's *Because I am A Girl* campaign and work on girls' education was endorsed by the deputy mayor of Croix-des-Bouquets, Marie Dumay Miracles. Marie is proof that investing in girls' education offers excellent returns for communities. Marie grew up in Croix-des-Bouquets as one of nine children of small-scale farmers. With Plan's support, she and her siblings completed their education and Marie is now a civil engineer. She specialises in building roads and large buildings – valuable skills in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake. She was also actively involved in coordinating the Government's earthquake relief efforts, which included distributing food, water, tents and thousands of family survival kits.

Case Study: Nicaragua

Nicaragua has one of the highest rates of early marriage in Latin America, despite extending legal protection for girls up to the age of 18 and boys up to the age of 21. Even when civil laws have been put in place to prevent child marriage, it can be very hard for those involved to be brought to justice if the girls affected cannot verify their age. In 2005, Plan launched *Count Every Child*, a global birth registration campaign that uses mobile registration services to record the births of millions of children around the world, even in remote areas. In some countries, Plan's efforts have led to registration fees being waived and the law being changed to assist parents and guardians to register boys and girls as quickly and efficiently as possible.

After two years of Plan working in alliance with local partners in Nicaragua, more than 40,000 boys and girls were registered. By collaborating with the National Assembly, parliamentarians and the Commission for Population, Development and Municipalities, Plan successfully contributed to addressing the root causes of the country's birth registration problem. These included changing a 100-year-old law that limited access to children's basic right to a name and a nationality.



Photo: Jenny Matthews

Europe

Rates of early and forced marriage remain high in many European countries, with the highest rates in Central and Eastern Europe where 2.2 million girls have married before their 18th birthday.⁷⁰ Countries with the highest rates of early and forced marriage include Georgia (17 per cent), Turkey (14 per cent), and Ukraine (10 per cent). At least 10 per cent of adolescents marry before the age of 18 in Britain and France.⁷¹ The prevalence of early and forced marriage in the UK and other industrialised countries confirms that this is an issue of global concern.

Country Case Study: United Kingdom

The UK has ratified the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, and has been proactive in addressing early and forced marriage through domestic legislation (Forced Marriage Act, 2007). The UK's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) brings together the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office to support British individuals who are being coerced into marriage in the UK and overseas. In 2010, the FMU gave advice or support in 1,735 instances, of which 86 per cent were female and 14 per cent male.⁷²

The motivations for early and forced marriage in the UK outlined by the FMU include⁷³:

- Controlling sexual behaviour, including perceived promiscuity or homosexuality, and substance use (alcohol and drugs)
- Protecting religious and cultural ideals
- Mitigating relationships outside of the family's religion, ethnic group, or caste
- Strengthening ties with other families
- Pressure from peers and other family members
- Financial gains, including keeping property and land within the family
- Strengthening claims to UK residence and citizenship

In 2007, the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act was introduced. Under the Act, forcing someone to marry is a civil and not a criminal offence. Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) can be used by individuals, friends or local authorities to stop a person being married against their will and taken abroad. The FMPOs can also demand that perpetrators stop any intimidation, reveal the victim's location and hand over passports, or face imprisonment. While a person convicted of forcing someone to marry can be jailed for up to two years, many argue that the law does not go far enough and that forcing people to marry should be considered a criminal act.



5 International human rights standards and early and forced marriage

Early and forced marriage is addressed in a number of human rights instruments, notably the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Some human rights instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are broadly relevant to forced and early marriage. For example, Article 12 of the CRC highlights the rights of children to participate in decisions that affect them and Article 16.2 of the UDHR states that spouses should give their full and free consent to marriage.

However, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and certain regional instruments such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, more specifically, address early and forced marriage and the underlying gender equalities which contribute to this practice. CEDAW specifies the need for full consent to marriage, the need to protect children from early marriage, for States to specify a minimum age for marriage and make registration of it compulsory. The Committee set up under CEDAW is specific in its Recommendation:

"In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, States are urged to repeal existing laws and regulations and to remove customs and practices which discriminate against and cause harm to the girl child. Article 16 (2) and the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child preclude States parties from permitting or giving validity to a marriage between persons who have not attained their majority. In the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". Notwithstanding this definition, and bearing in mind the provisions of the Vienna Declaration, the Committee considers that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both man and woman. When men and women marry, they assume important responsibilities. Consequently, marriage should not be permitted before they have attained full maturity and capacity to act. According to the World Health Organization, when minors, particularly girls, marry and have children, their health can be adversely affected and their education is impeded. As a result their economic autonomy is restricted. This not only affects women personally but also limits the development of their skills and independence and reduces access to employment, thereby detrimentally affecting their families and communities. Some countries provide for different ages for marriage for men and women. As such provisions assume incorrectly that women have a different rate of intellectual development from men, or that their stage of physical and intellectual development at marriage is immaterial, these provisions should be abolished. In other countries, the betrothal of girls or undertakings by family members on their behalf is permitted. Such measures contravene not only the Convention, but also a women's right freely to choose her partner. States parties should also require the registration of all marriages whether contracted civilly or according to custom or religious law. The State can thereby ensure compliance with the Convention and establish equality between partners, a minimum age for marriage, prohibition of bigamy and polygamy and the protection of the rights of children."*

In addition, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child require States to take action to set legal standards and prevent early and forced marriages.

As of 20 June 2011 186 countries are party to CEDAW. Signatories to CEDAW and other conventions have made commitments, but do not always ensure they are implemented and enforced at national level. Statistics demonstrate clearly that the use of treaties and law alone as a means of regulating or preventing early marriage is inadequate without proper enforcement. In addition, there is a pressing need to raise awareness amongst girls and young women of their rights under international law, accompanied by domestic and international pressure to ensure enforcement.

*CEDAW - CEDAW General Recommendation 21 (Equality in marriage and family relations).

6 The role of the UK Government in ending early and forced marriage



Photo: Connely La Mir

As a signatory to key international human rights treaties, a vocal supporter of girls' and women's rights and the third largest bilateral donor to basic education, the UK is uniquely placed to champion girls' right to remain in education and to enable them to choose when and whom they marry.

The issue is already gathering attention across Whitehall and a reduction in early and forced marriage will provide a vital catalyst to achieving existing Government commitments to advance human rights and development goals.

DFID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Home Office (HO) have all pledged to work on aspects of early and forced marriage or are already doing so:

DFID is globally recognised for its commitment to girls' rights as a result of its work to increase girls' educational opportunities, reduce maternal mortality and delay the age at which girls first become pregnant, all of which depend on a reduction in early and forced marriage.

- The FCO's Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) works with governments around the world to ensure the safe return of young UK nationals taken abroad to marry, and the FCO and the Home Office have pledged to work together to extend similar services to non-UK nationals.
- In November 2010 the Home Office Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Equalities and Criminal Information was appointed Ministerial Champion for tackling violence against women and girls overseas. The post-holder is required to actively encourage the FCO, DFID, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and other relevant ministries to use their influence in their domestic, European Union (EU) and international engagements to drive forward efforts on violence against women and girls.

The Home Office, FCO and DFID must work together to co-ordinate enforcement of international treaties and laws, directly at home and via their overseas development assistance, and indirectly via peer pressure and international and bilateral advocacy. An integrated, coherent approach to addressing early and forced marriage is essential if joint working is to have a tangible impact.

"I got an opportunity to attend a camp on the issue of child marriage, child rights and child labour. Having participated in the meeting as well, I encouraged my older sister to attend the camp and group meetings. My father was bent upon fixing up my sister's wedding this year. When my sister and I shared what we learnt about the implications of early marriage with him, he changed his mind with an assurance to wait until my sister was 18 years old. We sisters are extremely delighted with this decision!" Ranjana, 13, India⁷⁴

Current departmental commitments and action on early and forced marriage

Department for International Development

The first pillar of DFID's Choices for Women Framework for Results for improving reproductive, maternal and newborn health (December 2010), is to empower women and girls to make healthy reproductive choices, as part of which the Department has pledged to work towards 'locally-led social change of norms that constrain women's choice, control over resources and body (e.g. early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), violence, cultural preferences for sons).'

DFID's recently issued Strategic Vision for Girls and Women (March 2011) outlines plans to support efforts in 17 countries to eliminate child marriage and create an environment that enables girls and women to realise their rights, including work to strengthen legal frameworks and 'the implementation of laws that enable women and girls to own, inherit and control productive assets, realise reproductive rights, and provide protection from violence, FGM, early marriage and other harmful traditional practices.'

Both strategies repeatedly emphasise the importance of girls' education beyond the primary level, with the Strategic Vision pledging that DFID will 'increase the numbers of girls in primary and secondary school in all 23 country programmes where we give support to education, and will assist girls to stay in school beyond primary level to ensure they get the full benefits from education which will transform their lives and opportunities.'

Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office

The new UK Action Plan on ending violence against women and girls commits the FCO and Home Office to working together to improve the international - including EU - response to forced marriage. It contains a pledge to 'build links with partners/governments overseas to encourage them to adopt a co-ordinated response to forced marriage' with the aim of ensuring that nationals of their countries are afforded similar assistance, both in their country of residence and overseas, to that given to UK nationals by the Forced Marriage Unit.

In addition, the Action Plan commits the Home office to leading efforts to enhance the UK's international leadership on tackling violence against women and girls overseas.

Forced Marriage Unit

Sitting within the FCO, the Forced Marriage Unit commits to work with embassy staff abroad to rescue those who may have been held captive, raped, forced into a marriage or into having an abortion, and in the UK to assist those at risk of or undergoing forced marriage, as well as professionals working in the social, educational and health sectors. The work of the FMU will benefit from improved child protection systems within developing countries, but also by education efforts in communities to which UK nationals are likely to be taken to convince them to turn their backs on the practice.



Photo: Plan

We recommend the UK Government prioritise the following actions:

1. Cross-Whitehall and DFID co-ordination

Tackling early and forced marriage effectively requires a cross-sectoral response, co-ordinated between Whitehall, DFID's Human Development Group, and with DFID's health and education teams working closely together. The Government should:

- Develop cross-Whitehall coordination on early and forced marriage through the establishment of a central action plan and indicators to ensure that DFID, the Home Office, the FCO, the Government Equalities Office, and the Departments for Education and Health collaborate to strengthen their response to early and forced marriage in the UK and internationally.
- Improve joint working on early and forced marriage and girls' education within DFID's Human Development Group, ensuring that Education, Maternal Mortality, Nutrition, Equity and Rights and HIV and AIDS teams initiate and strengthen cooperation to tackle early and forced marriage with the help of centralised monitoring systems to promote coordination and coherent policy-making.
- Ensure DFID's proposed Girls' Education Challenge initiative addresses early and forced marriage and gives priority to creating an environment that promotes the realisation of girls' rights.
- Mandate DFID's Education and Health cadres at country level to raise early and forced marriage in policy dialogue via bilateral processes and sector monitoring and review mechanisms. Ensure co-ordination of efforts between embassies, high commissions and DFID country offices.
- Enable young women's voices to inform DFID programmes and policy by seeking their input into their design, monitoring and evaluation.

2. Bilateral programmes

Policy and advocacy dialogue around the issue of early and forced marriage must be understood in relation to gender inequality. Responding to the issue should become part of DFID's policy on education and violence against women and girls, and not be limited to health, including HIV, nutrition and maternal mortality agendas. Interventions, which address complex and negative socio-cultural norms, attitudes and behaviours, will be most successful. Work to tackle early and forced marriage should be built on a foundation of support for girls' education and DFID should:

- Create and encourage the conditions necessary in partner countries for the education of girls and women through political leadership, advocacy and targeted Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- Draw upon the aid budget to invest in mechanisms to prevent early and forced marriage and offer protection and support services for girls at risk, including help for families, psycho-social support, child protection resources and legal assistance. Work with partner governments to develop in-country support networks for women and girls who seek to escape from early or forced marriages.
- Include early and forced marriage indicators in UKAid education programmes, Country Operational Plans, Education Portfolio Evaluation Frameworks and through a revised Gender Equality Action Plan. Provide cross-departmental indicators and monitoring systems.
- Work with development partners to strengthen the enforcement of birth registration and implement laws governing the minimum age for marriage, and incorporate measures to prevent early and forced marriage into other government sector initiatives, such as health, education, employment and domestic wealth creation. In tandem, strengthen laws compelling families to keep boys and girls in school and enforcing a compulsory education age and build the capacity of schools to report cases of marriage before the legal age.
- Ensure bilateral programmes incorporate work with power brokers on the need to toughen or enforce legislation on violence against women and girls. Develop training for law enforcement agencies on gender equality and human rights.
- Seek accountability for the provision of compulsory, free education for girls. At community level, build an understanding and acceptance of girls' rights among caregivers.
- Fund and publicise existing good practice by civil society and women's organisations on early and forced marriage and the promotion of girl's voices in advocacy for their rights and the building of girl-friendly governance and accountability mechanisms.
- Invest in strengthening the evidence base on the relationship between early and forced marriage and girls' education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the collection of age and sex disaggregated data. In particular, fund research into the role of education in preventing or delaying early and forced marriage.
- Ensure early and forced marriage interventions are included in planned piloting of new approaches to prevent violence against women and girls.

3. Multilateral relationships and international influence

DFID expertise and advocacy on education and early and forced marriage should be shared through engagement with key multilaterals such as the World Bank, the EC and UNICEF. We urge the UK government to honour its commitments as a signatory to international human rights frameworks to lead action to bring early and forced marriage to an end and increase girls' access to education. In particular, we call on the Government to:

- Influence partner governments to improve enforcement of international human rights instruments - in particular CEDAW and the Beijing Platform For Action (Strategic Objective L1) - and regional frameworks - in particular the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.
- Lobby UN Women to address early and forced marriage as a priority issue and work in partnership with other UN agencies, in particular UNICEF.
- Take advantage of international lobbying opportunities to leverage influence that leads to action against early and forced marriage. In particular, raise the issue at Fast Track Initiative Board and Partnership meetings, in EC education dialogue, at upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, UN MDG Summits, and UN Economic and Social Council meetings.
- Support young women affected by early and forced marriage to have their voices heard and acted upon at the international level through mechanisms such as UN Women.
- Lobby the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on Discrimination Against Women in Law and in Practice to conduct a global scrutiny of laws impacting on early and forced marriage and identify ways to co-operate with states to fulfill their commitments.

"Now I'm 19 and have two children. I suffer a lot. I ask other young girls who aren't yet victims of child marriage to remain vigilant and to speak out against such an old-fashioned practice. At the time, I didn't have any information on NGOs which fight against this sort of thing."

Marie, 19, Benin⁷⁵

"In our village, a young girl of 15 years old was forced into marriage. We investigated the case and then reported it to the police officer in charge of child protection in our area. Appropriate action was taken and finally, the girl was freed. Sadly she later felt that she could not resume her classes at school because she felt very ashamed."

Léocadie, 16, member of her local youth committee, Benin⁷⁶

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