



# Combating Child Marriage

Reducing the incidence of child marriage and addressing the needs of married children globally



## Introduction

Globally, 1 in 5 girls around the world are married before the age of 18. That's 23 girls every minute. (Additionally, an estimated 1 in 30 boys around the world are married as children.) Child marriage is a form of gender-based violence and a violation of children's rights. While the pathways into child marriage are diverse and complex, the practice is rooted in gender inequality and perpetuated by poverty and harmful social norms. In addition to its impact on generations of girls, their families, and communities, child marriage also inhibits the achievement of other U.S. global development goals.

## Why it matters

Child marriage has lifelong consequences for girls, often curtailing their education, minimizing their economic opportunities and earning potential, increasing their risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, and threatening their health. Sadly, complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls and 90% of adolescent pregnancies in the developing world occur within marriage. Unless we accelerate our efforts, 150 million more girls will be married by 2030—a number that will be much higher due to the secondary impacts of COVID-19. Now is the time to catalyze action to end child marriage.

Child marriage perpetuates the cycles of poverty, poor health, illiteracy, and violence that have negative impacts on overall global development, prosperity, peace, and stability. Congress should fund the [Combating Child Marriage account](#) at no less than \$30 million to reduce the incidence of child marriage and address the intersecting needs of already married girls around the world. In addition, Congress should include robust funding for the [Maternal and Child Health Account](#) to better serve the needs of young married girls and young mothers.

## About the issue

> Child marriage rates are increasing due to the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures, including school closures, limited livelihood opportunities, food insecurity, restrictions on movement, and disruptions to essential protection and health services for girls. World Vision estimates that as many as 4 million additional child marriages will occur in the next two years if we do not act quickly.

> Overall, the proportion of women who were married as children decreased by 15% in the last decade as a result of increasing rates of girls' education, government investments, and strong public messaging around girl's rights. However, to end the practice by 2030—the target set out in the Sustainable Development Goals—progress must be accelerated. Without increasing investments, more than 150 million additional girls will marry before their 18th birthday.

> Since 2014, the U.S. government has provided dedicated funding to the Combating Child Marriage account. The amount has incrementally increased over the years, but it is still not sufficient to meet the global need.

> With funds from this account, USAID has supported a diverse range of interventions that reduce the incidence of child marriage and address the needs of married children, including:

- Promoting girls' education
- Access to health services, including information about healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies
- Strengthening the enactment and enforcement of laws and policies that delay marriage
- Building community outreach efforts to shift norms and attitudes that perpetuate the practice

## Quick facts

- If all girls were to finish secondary education by 2030, the GDP of developing countries could increase by 10% on average over the next decade.
- Every \$1 spent on girls' empowerment and education generates a \$2.80 economic return.
- Girls from poor families are three times more likely to marry before the age of 18 than girls from wealthier families.
- Stillbirths and newborn deaths are 50% higher in mothers under the age of 20 than in women who give birth later.
- Globally, girls who marry before 15 are twice as likely to face physical or sexual violence from a partner.
- 9 out of 10 countries with the highest child marriage rates are fragile or extremely fragile states.

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## > The Power of Girls' Voices in Advocating for Change



When Dola was only 12 years old, “matchmakers” in her community came to her family’s home, believing she would make a good wife. Her own mother was married when she was 13 to an older man and soon after had children and became responsible for managing her household. Fortunately, Dola’s parents turned the matchmakers away, deciding to keep Dola in school instead.

Not all girls are so fortunate. Bangladesh has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world—59% of girls in Bangladesh are married before their 18th birthday and 22% are married before the age of 15.

“In Bangladesh, 18 years is technically the minimum age of marriage,” says Dola. “Unfortunately, the law is rarely enforced.”

Moved by her mother’s experiences, Dola became one of several young activists in Bangladesh working to educate parents across the country about the harms of child marriage. With training from World Vision, she has been part of a team advocating for an end to this form of violence against children. These young activists have stopped more than 600 child marriages in the past two years alone.

“In my country, some parents, especially from traditional communities, believe that child marriage is a way of protecting their daughters,” Dola says. “Families often do not know the negative and harmful effects of child marriage.”

“Child marriage is a very big problem and deprives girls from their education, health, and safety. ... To create a better and safer world for children, we—the government, donors and the public—must take more actions to prevent child marriage.”

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World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.