

Ending child marriage in Kenya

This brief highlights key learnings and puts forward evidence-based recommendations for the Government of Kenya to take action for preventing and addressing child marriage.

CURRENT STATE

Progress towards ending child marriage in Kenya

World Vision believes that the government of Kenya, in collaboration with civil society organisations (CSOs), communities, faith leaders, girls and boys and the private sector can bring an end to child marriage in Kenya. World Vision also recognises the significant efforts and progress already made by the Government of Kenya over the last decade towards achieving SDG 5.3—no child marriage.

These efforts include Kenya’s implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children and the National Plan against the Sexual Exploitation of Children; alongside laws and regulations to protect children under 18 from child marriage including the Children’s Acts of 2022, the 2011 Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act, the Marriage Act of 2014, the Sexual Offences Act of 2006 and the Children’s Act of 2001. Kenya has also participated in numerous international resolutions against child marriage.¹

Despite the Government’s actions, intentions and relatively strong legal framework to combat child marriage, the practice still persists. Kenya currently ranks eighteenth in the world—and tenth in Africa—for the highest absolute numbers of child marriages.² **According to demographic data, 23% of girls under the age of 18 in Kenya are**



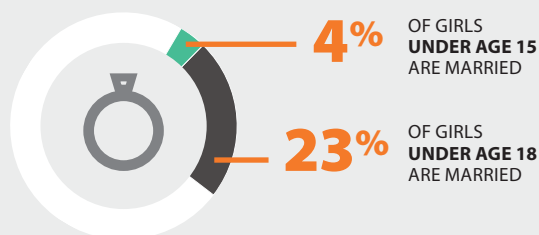
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Abigail escaped child marriage and has dreams of becoming a nurse or doctor.

already married, including 4% under 15.³ Existing laws are insufficiently enforced, and gaps persist in community awareness, social and behavioural norms and lack of commitments to keep children safe. Additionally, most cases of child marriage taken to court for prosecution of violation of the laws are delayed or not completed because of corruption of community and religious leaders.⁴

While Kenya has experienced rapid economic growth and achievement of lower-middle income status over the last decade, Kenya still faces significant development challenges including high levels of poverty, food insecurity and gender inequality⁵—all drivers of child marriage.

According to studies, the primary factors contributing to Kenya’s child marriage prevalence include poverty,



inadequate education, harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), early pregnancy and socio-economic vulnerabilities worsened by climate and conflict-related insecurities.⁶ Evidence also demonstrates that child marriage in Kenya is driven by deep-seated gender inequalities and harmful cultural norms that diminish the value of girls compared to boys. Child marriage disproportionately affects girls in the lowest wealth brackets, those with limited access to education, and those living in rural or fragile areas experiencing disasters, conflict or displacement.⁷

Without substantial intervention to curb child marriage prevalence rates, the number of child marriages in Kenya is expected to increase, given that nearly 45% of Kenya's growing population of 55.4 million is under the age of 18.⁸

Eliminating child marriage in Kenya by 2030, and achieving SDG 5.3, will require **significant acceleration of commitment to address root causes comprehensively and ensure effective implementation of existing laws and policies.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence-based recommendations to take action against child marriage in Kenya

World Vision believes the Government of Kenya can make significant progress in ensuring all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential without the threat of child marriage. Therefore, World Vision and its partners urge the government to renew its commitment to ending child marriage by adopting evidence-based, INSPIRE-aligned pledges at the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children and beyond. These commitments also should be clearly and measurably reflected in the forthcoming National Action Plan for Children.

World Vision is confident that, in partnership with civil society organisations, the Government of Kenya can effectively combat child marriage and protect the rights of children, in the present and for their futures.



Students at St Elizabeth Secondary School in Morpus, West Pokot, Kenya.

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We call on the Government of Kenya to commit to ...

FUND – TO FUNCTION

1 [need text]

- A. **Provide the funding for the implementation of two plans:** National Plan of Action on Child Marriage and National Positive Parenting Programme.
- B. **Invest resources** for community-based child protection reporting and referral mechanisms.
- C. **Fund full operationalisation** of the toll-free reporting number (116).



EVIDENCE

These recommendations are supported by the evidence as follows:

- » Field experience demonstrates that the effective implementation of national plans and locally driven social norms initiatives is essential to accompany improved legal frameworks, as the latter alone remain insufficient.
- » In recent years, World Vision's global child protection team has carried out numerous Quality Improvement and Learning exercises to assess the implementation quality of World Vision's Child Protection & Advocacy project model in relation to the Implementation Quality Assurance standards. These exercises demonstrated the effectiveness of Response and Referral (R&R) in enhancing and strengthening child protection systems at the local, municipal and district level by bringing together formal and informal R&R processes. Demonstrated successes include the work done by World Vision Kenya; as well as local CP committees, mandated by government, who are collaborating with traditional chiefs and community leaders. Together, they have collectively mapped out protocols and mechanisms for managing various child protection cases, such as children dropping out of school or experiencing sexual abuse.⁹
- » Funding the full operationalisation of the toll-free number 116 can significantly help address child marriage by providing an accessible, anonymous and reliable channel for reporting cases of abuse, including child marriage. The helpline serves as a critical resource for children, families and community members to report incidents of child marriage and other forms of violence. Once reports are made, the helpline links individuals to relevant child protection services such as legal aid, counseling and rescue operations. This network ensures that cases are addressed swiftly, reducing the risk of further harm to the child.¹⁰
- » The helpline also enhances community awareness by providing information on how to respond to and report child marriage, thus encouraging public participation in combating the issue. By operationalising this service fully, the helpline can maintain 24/7 availability, extend its reach and improve its response times, increasing the chances of intervention before marriages occur or escalate further.¹¹



Implementation and enforcement of laws

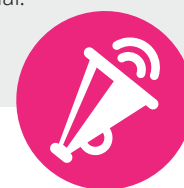


Response and support services

CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS – TO TRANSFORM THE NORMS

2 In collaboration with CSOs, scale up the empowerment and integrated social norm shifting initiatives including:

- A. **Expand the current community-based initiatives** to prevent, report, and address child marriage, including the involvement of faith leaders and local communities.
- B. **Sustain and scale up programs** that provide life skills, empowerment opportunities, and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education for both girls and boys.
- C. **Establish long-term partnerships** with CSOs in engaging male relatives in behavior change, enhancing efforts to prevent child marriage.
- D. **Sustain and scale up the joint initiatives** focused on social norms change and improving livelihoods, to tackle the underlying drivers of child marriage. A socio-ecological approach is critical to address the multiple intersecting drivers of child marriage. While these drivers differ in each context, interventions are more effective when they address barriers and enablers at all levels: individual, family, community, societal and institutional.¹²



EVIDENCE

These recommendations are supported by the evidence as follows:

- » Faith leaders play a critical role in tackling child and forced marriage. They can use their holy books, and their sphere of influence to change attitudes and provide solace to survivors. Additionally, they can also conduct advocacy for stronger action to address forced and child marriage in Kenya.¹³
- » Globally, there is strong evidence supporting that ensuring adolescents, both in and out of school, having access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a crucial tool to ending child marriage and preventing adolescent pregnancy.¹⁴ CSE also gives girls the tools to push back against early marriage in their families and helps both boys and girls identify abuse and coercion.¹⁵
- » Additionally, for humanitarian settings, there is a growing body of evidence on promising practice for delivering flexible, context-based sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for adolescent girls in humanitarian settings. A 2021 evidence review highlights examples of promising practice for SRH delivery, including the use of mobile SRH clinics and camps, which typically remain in communities for up to four days and can therefore make contact with more marginalised adolescents.¹⁶
- » Menstrual health education and menstrual hygiene management training for girls significantly contributes to keeping girls in school,¹⁷ decreasing the percentage of adolescent girls that married early.¹⁸
- » Learnings demonstrate that for girls and boys, the benefits from education and life skills programmes include a high chance to become empowered adults, which is significant in reducing early marriage.¹⁹
- » The positive and informed engagement of men and boys—including brothers, fathers, uncles, future husbands, future fathers-in-law, and community and religious leaders, among others—can help to advance more gender equitable relationships, norms and behaviours. It is particularly important to ground male engagement programmes and strategies in gender-equitable approaches that specifically aim to empower women and girls.²⁰
- » Community-level change must underpin all efforts to prevent and respond to child marriage. Without transformation at this level, the everyday reality for girls around the world will remain unchanged. Engaging in community dialogues to challenge harmful gender norms and child marriage, and to communicate the negative impacts on girls and their communities, is essential.²¹
- » One of the barriers most commonly associated with eliminating child marriage in Kenya include the limited income of parents and lack of awareness on the consequences of child marriage both for the girls as well as the family at large.²² Families see child marriage as a way to cope with greater economic hardship and to protect girls from increased violence. A World Vision barrier analysis and social change study demonstrated that parents with financial stability were more likely to wait until a girl was 18 before giving her in marriage.²³
- » Research from a UNFPA study of child marriage in eight countries, including Kenya, demonstrated that for safe space programming with income generating objectives to be gender transformative, interventions must go beyond the safe space itself and link to social norms change interventions. Specifically, interventions need to strategically promote safe spaces to family members and community leaders; assess real and perceived risk to new, different or non-traditional vocational training; provide small grants and tailored start-up kits; and promote referrals and partnerships with livelihood economic empowerment programmes.²⁴
- » In a global 20-year review of the existing evidence base for interventions that effectively prevent child marriage, conditional asset transfer for education showed the most substantial positive, quality and scalable results.²⁵



Education and life skills



Parents and caregivers support



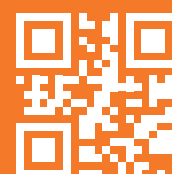
Safe environments

World Vision would like to thank our donors, international and local partners and the Government of Kenya for their ongoing commitment and investments to end all forms of violence against children, including their critical support in addressing child marriage.

We are confident that in implementing the actions outlined herein, in partnership with CSOs, that the Government of Kenya will effectively reduce child marriage and protect the rights and futures of its children.



Learn more about World Vision's work to end violence against children



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WORLD VISION RESOURCES

National Reports:

Barriers and Facilitators for Child Marriage in Four Developing Countries. A Social and Behaviour Change Study to Inform Programming for the Protection of Minors in Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar and Tanzania. World Vision and Enrich 1000 Day Journey.

THE KENYA BIG DREAM PROJECT, Ending FGM, Child Marriage and all forms of Violence against Children Social Norms Assessment in Phase II: Samburu County 2022/2023 Summary Report.

Global Reports:

Young and Married, World Vision, October 2023

No happily ever after, What children really think about child marriage in humanitarian crises, World Vision, 2020

Case Studies: Strengthening livelihood and preventing child marriage, World Vision, 2020

Fighting for a future: an index of girls' opportunities in countries and regions with high rates of child marriage, World Vision, 2022

Breaking the chain: Empowering girls and communities to end child marriages during COVID-19 and beyond, World Vision, 2020

Child Marriage Round Table, World Vision, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, UNFPA, Save the Children, Global Affairs Canada, December 2023.

Faith Norms, are they the neglected angle? Reflection from research and work of World Vision, International, 2022

ENDNOTES

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- 4 Kenyan Advocacy on Child and Forced Marriage: A guide for faith leaders.
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