

**Committee/Council:** Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

**Issue:** Tackling the issue of child marriage and child grooming

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**Position:** Co-Chair

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## Introduction

In 1989 the United Nations adopted the treaty produced by “The Convention on The Rights of The Child”, making it clear that human right violations are to be taken seriously, especially when their targets are children. The phenomena of child marriage and child grooming consist obvious violations of such rights, that however the determination to be tackled, have not yet been terminated. The severity of these issues has repeatedly been underlined in the context of the United Nations and by members of the civil society. Nonetheless, child marriage and child grooming continue to be happening, ruining the lives of the children, the future of our world, almost everywhere.

## Definition of Key-Terms

### Child

“[...] a child is any human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.”

(Convention on The Rights of The Child)

### Child grooming

“Child grooming refers to an act of deliberately establishing an emotional connection with a child to prepare the child for child abuse. Child grooming is undertaken usually to carry out sexual abuse and other child exploitation like trafficking of children, child prostitution or the production of child pornography. Currently, child grooming occurs through the use of internet.”

(US Legal)

## Child marriage

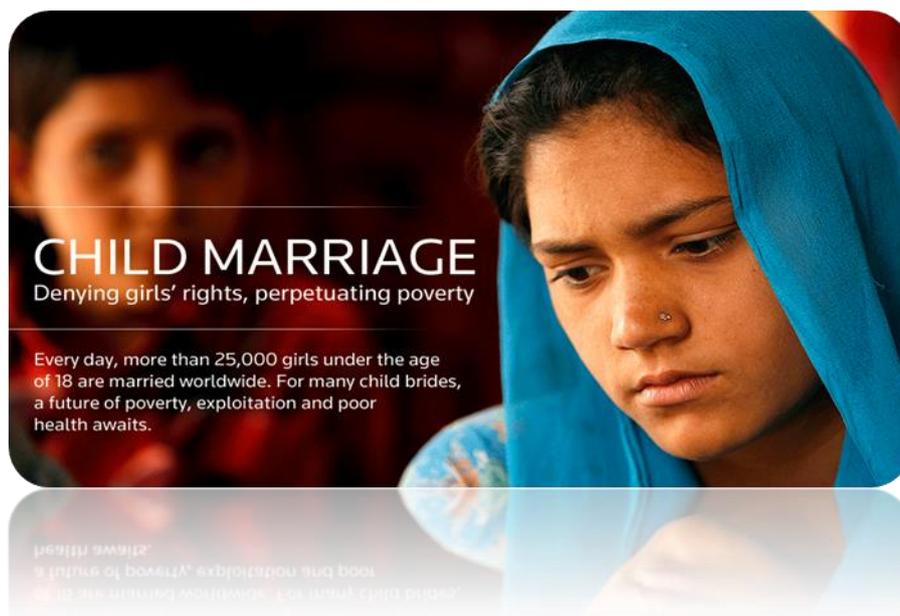
“[...] Formal marriages or customary and statutory unions recognized as marriage before the age of 18 (at 18 a girl is still considered a child under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, except in countries where the age of majority is lower). Following marriage a girl is expected to set aside her childhood and assume the role of a woman, embarking immediately upon a life that includes sex, motherhood and all the household duties traditionally expected of a wife. Although early marriage extends to boys as well, the number of girls involved is far greater.”

(United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

## Localized Grooming

“Localized grooming is a form of sexual exploitation – previously referred to as ‘on-street grooming’ in the media - where children have been groomed and sexually exploited by an offender, having initially met in a location outside their home. This location is usually in public, such as a park, cinema, on the street or at a friend’s house. Offenders often act together, establishing a relationship with a child or children before sexually exploiting them. Some victims of ‘street grooming’ may believe that the offender is in fact an older ‘boyfriend’; these victims introduce their peers to the offender group who might then go on to be sexually exploited as well. Abuse may occur at a number of locations within a region and on several occasions. “

(UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre)



## Background Information

### The effects of Child Marriage-Child Grooming

Child marriage and child grooming, although seemingly different violations, share characteristics that make it possible for their solutions to be considered together. Most importantly they have the same main result: the exploitation of the life of a child. Whether that is for sexual or other purposes, child marriage and child grooming should be considered methods of coercion of minors into engaging in activities that violate their fundamental human rights. Additionally, it should also be considered that they have the same impact on the children and on society as a whole, as well as are facilitated by the same factors. Thus it is logical that the two issues are to be tackled by one set of solutions due to their interconnectedness.

Another common trait of the two has to do with location: they are both problems that have no borders. There is no cultural, religious or ethnic criterion to determine or predict the intensity of the problem in a certain geographical area. Therefore, the solutions should be applicable universally, even though according to statistics the problem is more intense in some countries than in others.

This universal approach suggested by the geographical vagueness of the issues can also be corroborated by the vast nature of the facts on the issues. For example, taking into account that  $\frac{1}{3}$  girls in the developing world are said to be married before the age of 18, it is only logical that the response cannot be targeted to any specific region. Additionally, it should be noted that these problems are not “girl problems” as falsely perceived by a big part of the society; it should be noted that men are affected too since 156 million men in today’s world were married before the age of 18. Furthermore, the tendency for further globalization in conjunction with numbers such as the estimated additional 1.2 billion girls that are going to be married by 2050 makes these issues obstacles for the further development of our world. This is exactly the general impact of these problems, extending to spheres such as gender equality, health, education, safety and poverty.

### Gender equality

The perpetuation of stereotypes of inequality depending on gender is a direct result of child marriage, which institutionalizes them. In many places, around the world,

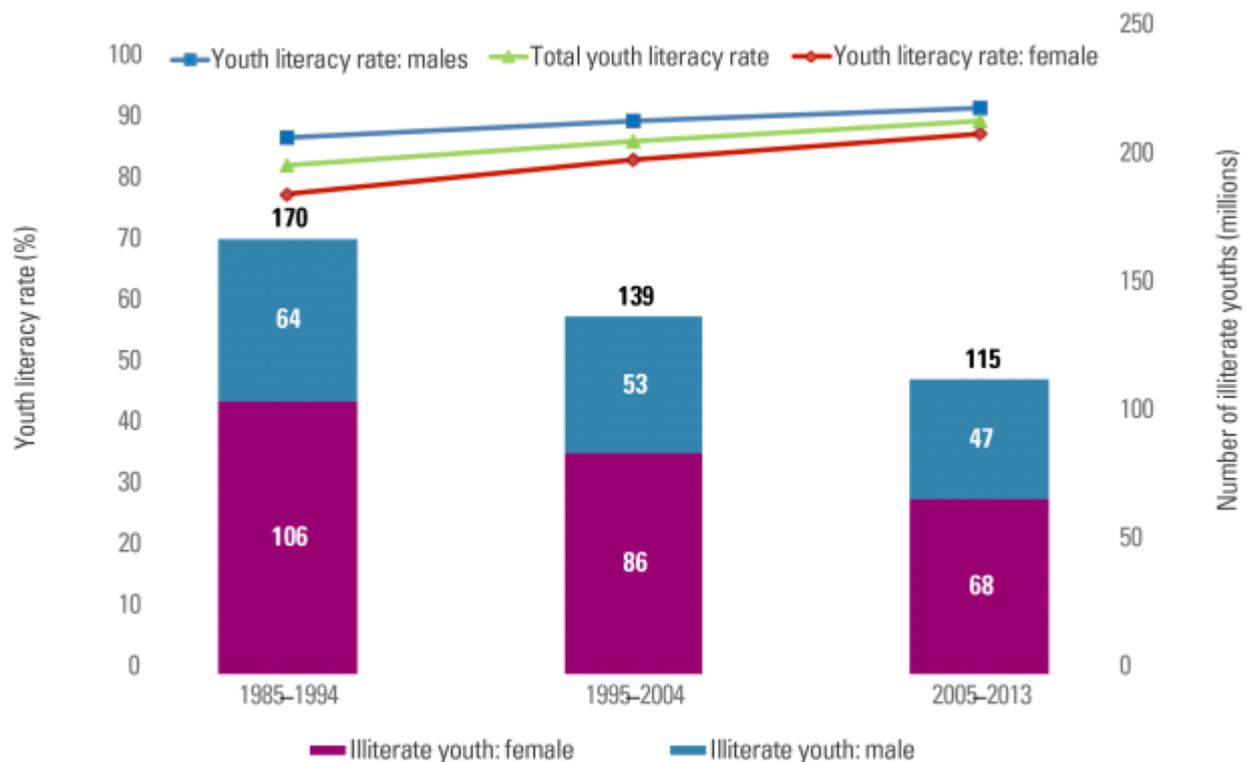
where child marriage is the norm, it is true that girls are not valued as much as boys. They are perceived as financial burdens or objects of control to prove the dominant status of the patriarchy. Therefore, child marriage is, in many societies, considered a means to “get rid” of members of the family that are not conducive to its financial well-being (based on the belief that women cannot be productive) or evidence of control over the child’s sexuality and protection of the family’s honor.

### Health

Child marriage and child grooming raise severe issues of health. Taking into account that minors cannot have control over the relationships established with the adults, it is not rare that they are sexually exploited by them. These sexual relationships developed are detrimental to the health of the children, since they are not physically nor psychologically ready to take part in them. Additionally, by maintaining such relationships children become susceptible to Sexually Transmitted Diseases such as the HIV-AIDS Virus.

### Education

Partaking in a marriage stops the development of the children, by violently making them members of the adult world. Having the responsibilities, occurring within the marriage, hinders other aspects of the children’s life, most importantly their education. By not being educated, the opportunities for the children to escape the occurring reality of dependency to their adult husband are seriously narrowed. Furthermore, illiteracy perpetuates the stereotypes and ideas that resulted in the violations of the child’s right in the first place, making him or her a part of a vicious circle of the same violations. As shown in the statistic below, globally the youth literacy rate has increased. However, literacy is still at its lowest in the less economical developed countries and higher among males than females that account for more than the half of the illiterate youth globally in the latest years.



*Youth literacy rate and number of illiterate youth (aged 15 to 24 years) worldwide, 1985–2013*  
<http://www.data.unicef.org/education/literacy.html#sthash.YGgDznYE.dpuf>

### Safety

The physical and psychological inability of children to react to the harassment of adults makes it easy for them to become objects of abuse by their adult husbands (or wives). Children are often trapped in situations of domestic violence, unable to do anything to protect themselves from the perpetrators, who enjoy acceptance due to their gender and age. Therefore, child marriage and child grooming have a great impact on the safety of the children in the society.

### Poverty

Lastly, however unclear, child marriage and child grooming are connected with poverty. Hindering the development of children makes them unable to become productive members of the society that would normally lead to self-sufficiency. Especially when child marriage has to do with gender equality, hindering the development of the female population leads to almost ½ of the society to be unable to contribute to its development. The culture of dependency that exists inside the marriage relationships is externalized and is also true about the society itself that eventually suffers issues of underdevelopment and poverty.

The impact of these phenomena in all these spheres makes child marriage and child grooming a priority issue for the international community. Not only do they consider

violations of children and human rights, but they are also detrimental to society in other ways.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ejd8qC-Qwe0#action=share>

*Short video including realistic reports from child brides in Nepal about their life*

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

### United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF is the UN Organization primarily responsible for the protection of the rights of children internationally. Taken that the issues at hand concern minors internationally, they fall under UNICEF's responsibilities. The Organization has run many international campaigns to raise awareness on the issue of child marriage. It is definitely a key organization for the solution of the issue in an international context.

### Care

The main focus of the international humanitarian organization called CARE is the impoverished often threatened women. CARE is also working alongside on directly eliminating the phenomenon of child marriage through the provision of various educational programs for girls and the cooperation with families, communities and often other organizations as well.

### Girls Not Brides

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 300 non-governmental organizations found throughout Africa, Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and North America with the aim of ending child marriage in various ways such as by cooperating with child brides in their communities or calling for new laws and policies in an effort to bring the phenomenon to global attention.

### Niger

Niger is the country with the highest rate of child marriage in the world, according to "Girls NOT Brides", with 3 out of every 4 girls marrying before the age of 18 years old. The legal status quo dictates that the legal age for marriage in Niger at the moment is 15. Child marriage is a problem that has a great impact in the country. The World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) have released research underlining that ending child marriage could save the country 25 billion dollars between 2014 and 2030. The country has struggled to solve the problem, unfortunately without results so far.

## Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the countries with the highest rates of child marriage as well. About 65% of the girls in Bangladesh are married before 18, whereas about 51% of the girls are enrolled in secondary school. Poverty, as well as the applying social norms, is thought to be the main reasons leading to the phenomena of child marriage and child grooming. Last but not least, the violent weather caused by the climate change in some parts of Bangladesh plays a major role in forcing the families indirectly to marry their girls earlier in a pursuit to limit the raising costs of the family, as many of the families lose their farms and crops. In that way, they seek a more stable future for their children.

## Malawi

Malawi is a country with a long history when it comes to child marriage. About 50% of the girls in Malawi are married before 18, whereas all of the girls are encouraged by social customs to engage in sex at an early age “as part of a rite of passage so that they can determine whether the girls are really grown up” (report by the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health). Lately, these inhuman customs finally found a fierce resistance by the girls themselves followed by the adoption of a new law by the Malawi parliament raising the age of marriage to 18.



## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1921	International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, a multilateral treaty of the League of Nations aiming to end the issue of illegal trafficking of women

	and children
1994	International Conference on Population and Development calling to put an end to child marriage
2010	Official definition of the term “localized grooming” given by the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
2015	Child grooming offences in England up by 32% in comparison to 2013 after specific sex gangs were revealed
2015	193 governments agreed to end child marriage by 2030 and include this human rights issue in the Global Goals for Sustainable Development
2016	The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) welcoming the U.S. Strategy for Adolescent Girls launched by Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington, D.C. ICRW, in cooperation with Girls Not Brides USA

## Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

### Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages

This UN treaty of 7 November 1962 aims to address the issues of early marriages and set a minimum age for marriage, while promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after its ratification by 20 countries. In 1989, almost one hundred nations agreed to abide by it. This Convention including topics, such as Guarantee of Basic Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 3), Sex Role Stereotyping and Prejudice (Article 5), Prostitution (Article 6) and Marriage and Family Life (Article 16) aims to bring the human rights of women to global attention and address the issue of child marriage as well.

## International Day of the Girl

October 11 marks the date of the first globally recognized International day of the girl. This day is about discussing girls' issues, learning more about the human rights of the girls, promoting them alongside and bringing together the international community to commit to ending the phenomenon of child marriage.

## Global Goals for Development

The issue of child marriage and the need to tackle it were brought to global attention after the decision of 193 states to include it in the Global Goals for Development. The goals set concerning child marriage are mainly the reasons child marriage exists and are the following: 1) No poverty, 2) Zero Hunger, 3) Good health and well-being, 4) Quality education, 5) Gender Equality, 8) Economic Growth, 10) Reduced inequalities, 16) Peace, justice and strong institutions.

## **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

Globally, the rates of child marriage are declining. This is due to the growing efforts of the various organizations working on finally putting an end to the issue. Such efforts include the Action for Adolescent Girls program and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. Generally, the programs of the specialized organizations include informing girls about their human rights and fundamental freedoms, enhancing their education or launching new educational and behavioral programs, if education is not already provided. They also cooperate with other organizations so as to come to contact with the child brides in various communities and upgrade their way of life as well as empower girls to know their right to choose, as adults, whom to marry. The inclusion of target 5.3 to end child forced marriage in the Sustainable Development Goals was another positive effort towards solving the issue. However, such phenomena need to be addressed globally on a legal basis mainly by governments. The problem is that although laws concerning child marriage do exist in most countries, communities fail to abide by them mainly due to local customs and social norms. The lack of UN resolutions addressing this issue at hand is another sign of the incapability of the global community to tackle this issue once and for all. However, international agreements, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women outlaw child marriage, whereas the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 also called governments to come together and commit to ending child, early and forced marriage. However positive the efforts from the organizations and some governments, including Sweden and Albania, in the progress of strengthening legal protection against child marriage and child grooming, the global community is called

to double its efforts, so as to finally come to a long-awaited end of the abovementioned issues.

## Possible Solutions

Child marriage and child grooming are issues caused by a variety of factors, happening in many different settings, and having a plethora of results. Taken that this is a central characteristic of these phenomena they should both be tackled in many different ways and levels. This means that a) every effort should be conducted on a local, national and international level and b) it should be taking into account the specific characteristics of each context.

There are, however, certain possible solutions that could be universally applicable. Before anything can be organized though it is principal that there is progress on the stage of the implementation of the currently existing laws. Having seen that the legislation exists and the problem has to do with the absence or insufficient implementation, efforts should be made through the educational process in order for a shift of mentality to take place. This would be especially effective if it was initially targeted to state officials, in other words, the people who are supposed to implement the law.

A first stage towards the solution of these problems would be the empowerment of youth. Educational efforts to facilitate the youth of the world with, not only higher level knowledge, but also and most importantly life skills, is a way to change the circumstances that make their victimization easier. Encouraging dialogue among young people, concerning such issues is also a great step towards overcoming anachronistic irrationalities that are often imposed by the older generations to the new ones.

Another way to go about solving the issue would be with work in the communities. Facilitating public discourse and conversation will make it easier to question and reject opinions of traditionally powerful figures, patriarchal models of organization and public opinion on these issues. That will eventually make these issues attainable to people, who are going to accept the termination of these practices.

The third part of the solutions would be the allocation of resources to the right fields, so as to ensure that the vicious circle of victimization stops. This means that the states should possibly fund and oversee the amelioration of their educational, health, employment and law enforcement mechanisms. Schooling should be mandatory not only in theory but in practice. Adequate medicinal and psychological support should be available to every child-target. Economic opportunities should be available, in order not for marriage to be a choice for children. Finally, no child should feel unprotected by older people, just because of their age.

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