World YWCA Position Paper

End Child Marriage and Support Married Girls

Child marriage has a devastating impact on girls and communities

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. One in three, or approximately 250 million, were married before the age of 15. Of the top 10 countries in the world with the highest rates of child marriage, nine are in Africa.\(^1\)

Child marriage has a devastating impact on women and girls’ personal development, future opportunities, education, health and wellbeing. Married girls are often forced to drop out of school, they get pregnant before their bodies are mature enough to bear children, and suffer serious health consequences. This creates a cycle of poverty that becomes very difficult to break and increasingly challenging for governments to support, with harmful consequences for families, communities and nations at large.

The global community has taken significant action against child marriage, especially within the United Nations framework. Ending child marriage is a target for gender equality in the draft post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the African Union has adopted a common position and tangible action plans to end child marriage on the continent.

Our position: We need to take action to end child marriage, while supporting married girls.

- Child marriage is child abuse. It is rape. It is a clear violation of children’s basic human rights.
- In Africa, we have a common position on child marriage. Now let’s enforce it. We need tangible actions to monitor and evaluate child marriage interventions so we can end this harmful practice on the continent.
- We need to end child marriage globally by raising the legal marriage age to 18—no exceptions. This can help break the cycle of poverty and unleash the potential of girls and young women.
- We also need to empower and support married girls and young mothers. This means ensuring they have the information, education and services they need to live healthy and empowered lives.

Our call to action: Advocate for actions that protect the dignity and rights of young women and girls and support married girls.

- Call for legislation that sets 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage.
- Ensure access to quality education for girls up to secondary and tertiary level.

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\(^1\) Loaiza, Edilberto Sr. and Wong, Sylvia. 2012. Marrying too Young. UNFPA
• Ensure economic and livelihood opportunities for girls both in and out of school and for teenage mothers.
• Promote dialogue to change social norms and attitudes which perpetuate child, early and forced marriage.
• Provide comprehensive support for girls who are already married and help those who leave marriage.
• Prioritise full access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and material health care services.
• Ensure the voice, agency and decision making of married girls and women and those at risk in all programmes and initiatives on ending child, early and forced marriage.

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For more information, see www.worldywca.org