Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Graduate Women International
SDG 5.3 Eliminate harmful practices
SDG 5.3
Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Women and girls, everywhere, must have equal rights and opportunity, and be able to live free of violence and discrimination.\(^1\)

Forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), that are especially aimed at young girls, persist despite efforts to eliminate these harmful practices.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) [https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5)

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), also called cutting and in violation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, is a harmful and abhorrent practice, involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for no medical reason and is often performed by a traditional practitioner with crude instruments and without anaesthetic.

At least 200 million girls and women have been subjected to female genital mutilation, according to recent data from the 31 countries where the practice is concentrated. The harmful practice is becoming less common, but progress is not fast enough to meet the global target of its elimination by 2030.¹

FGM puts her physical, mental and reproductive health at risk.

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200 million girls have been subjected to FGM in 31 countries where the practice is concentrated

2 million more girls are at risk due to Covid-19
FGM and the 2030 Agenda

Education SDG 4
Women are often not made aware of the sexual reproductive and human rights. Young girls are mutilated before the age of consent. Comprehensive sexual and human rights education in the curricula of all levels of education would serve as an adequate tool to curb violence against women along with monitoring compliance.

Gender Equality SDG 5
Gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the many root causes of discrimination that still curtail women’s rights in private and public spheres and the elimination of such harmful practices as Female Genital Mutilation.

Ending violence against children, especially girls, needs to go hand in hand with ending female genital mutilation.

Effects of COVID-19 on Incidences of FGM

The number of girls subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) is believed to have gone up due to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF estimates that coronavirus-related schools closures and disruptions to aid programmes mean a further two million girls are now at risk of being circumcised before the end of the decade, bringing the total number to 70 million.¹

According to UNICEF², however, the effect of COVID-19 on harmful practices may offer opportunities to disrupt FGM and child marriages due to restrictions on social activities and delays in initiation rites as occurred during the Ebola crisis. The disruption caused could offer opportunities by public health officials to advocate for an end to them. Policy level interventions should support efforts aimed at interrupting FGM during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

¹ Female genital mutilation: COVID-19 school closures have led to a rise in FGM cases, say experts | Euronews
Early Child and Forced Marriage

Harmful practices, such as child marriage, steal the childhood of 15 million girls under the age of 18 every year. In 2015, one in four young women ages 20 to 24 reported by young women reported being married before they were 18 but by 2019, only one in five reported an early marriage.

The highest value occurred in sub-Saharan Africa with more than one in three young women.¹

During the period between 2007-2018, 57 countries reported that only 55 per cent of married or in-union women 15 to 49 years of age made their own decisions regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights.

¹ https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/

15 million girls under 18 years of age marry every year
1 in 5 women ages 20-24 report marriage before 18
13 million more girls are at risk of forced marriage due to COVID-19
Her Education is at Risk

*Child marriage usually marks the end of a girl’s education.*

Marriage limits a girl’s ability to go to school, learn new skills and put the ones she has to use.

Being out of school puts girls at risk.

3x
Girls with no education likely to marry by 18 compared to those with a secondary or higher education

60%
of women ages 20-24 with no education were married before the age of 18.

When a girl gets married she is often expected to drop out of school: when a girl is out of school she is more vulnerable to child marriage.

Education can be one of the most powerful tools to enable girls to avoid child marriage and fulfil their potential. The longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years.

When girls have access to safe, quality secondary education, the benefits are widely felt. Educated girls develop skills, knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions including if, when and whom to marry.

Being in school also supports the perception that girls are still children and are therefore not of a suitable age to marry.
SDG 1 Poverty
Child brides are more likely to be poor and to remain poor. Where poverty is acute, giving a daughter in marriage allows parents to reduce their expenses: one less person to feed, clothe and educate.

Zero Hunger SDG 2
Families with little food may marry their daughters in order to have one mouth less to feed. Child brides usually suffer higher rates of malnutrition, due to early and frequent pregnancies and their babies are more likely to die before the age of 5.

Good Health and Well being SDG 3
Early pregnancy puts the health of child brides health at risk: every year, 70,000 adolescent girls in developing countries die of causes related to pregnancy and child birth. Child marriage can lead to poor mental health, including feelings of isolation, depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Ending child marriage will improve girls’ health and wellbeing throughout their lives.

Education SDG 4
Child marriage usually marks the end of a girl’s education. Marriage limits a girl’s ability to go to school, learn new skills and put the ones she has to use.

Gender Equality SDG 5
Child marriage keeps women and girls from achieving gender equality. Child marriage is rooted in inequality between men and women and discriminatory views towards a girl’s value, sexuality and role in society. Ending child marriage is a strategic way of tackling gender inequality and shifting the discriminatory norms that perpetuate child marriage. We need to empower girls so they can choose if, when and whom they marry.

Eliminating Early and Forced Marriage will help to achieve 8 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Root causes of child marriage: gender inequality, poverty, insecurity, and the lack of economic and social opportunities for girls.
Economic Growth SDG 8
Child brides are less likely to participate in the workforce once they become adults. When they do, it's usually in lower skilled and lower paid jobs. When girls have the skills and opportunities to secure a job, they can support themselves and their families and break the cycle of poverty. Child marriage is costing countries trillions of dollars through its impact on fertility, population growth, earnings and child health, according to the World Bank and ICRW.

Reduced Inequalities SDG 10
Child marriage affects the most vulnerable populations. Child marriage disproportionately affects poor, rural and disadvantaged girls, creating cycles of poverty that reinforce inequalities. Child brides have little decision-making power in their homes or communities and are less likely to participate fully in society. They are often marginalised and hard to reach. Leaving no one behind means targeting married girls and girls at risk of child marriage.

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions Goal 16
Child marriage is a form of violence against girls and a violation of their most fundamental human rights. Child brides often face violence at the hands of their partners or their in-laws, especially if there is a large age difference. The violence of forced sexual initiation and early pregnancy have a lasting impact on married girls' physical and mental health throughout their life.

Ending violence against children needs to go hand in hand with ending child marriage.

Effects of COVID-19 on Early Child and Forced Marriage
COVID-19 has exacerbated some of the main social and economic drivers of early marriage, such as limited access to education, early pregnancies and poverty. The economic strain caused by the recession on already vulnerable communities and the loss of family income is additionally forcing families to marry off their young girls, perceiving them as financial burdens rather than potential wage earners.

According to UNICEF, however, the effect of COVID-19 on harmful practices may offer opportunities to disrupt FGM and child marriages due to restrictions on social activities and delays in initiation rites as occurred during the Ebola crisis. The disruption caused could offer opportunities by public health officials to advocate for an end to them. Policy level interventions should support efforts aimed at interrupting FGM during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

GWl on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The harmful effects of FGM are not new to GWI. Since 1980, GWI has been promoting gender equality for women and the girl child and actively seeking human rights equality for women and children in all aspects of life through its Policy Resolutions.

GWI actively promotes the global achievement of SDG 5.3 which specifically targets the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.1

Regarding the physical and mental effects of FGM and the resulting violation of women and girls’ human rights, GWI concurs that unless governments and local leaders accelerate action to eliminate FGM, 68 million girls will be mutilated from now until 2030 (UNICEF), and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality will not be met.

As defined by WHO, FGM reflects a deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is usually carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of girls. Female genital mutilation is an act of extreme violation of the female body. It is an expression of supreme power of men over women’s bodies. It is not only traumatic but has late and severe repercussions on the body2 and psyche3 of the victim.

GWl condemns this harmful and traumatic cultural practice meted out to young girls in their very tender years and urge the national governments to take strong action against those who do this in the name of culture.

GWI Policy states that its “National Federations and Associations (NFAs) urge their respective governments to pass laws to forbid all forms of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).” 4

GWl also promotes:

1. comprehensive sexual and human rights education in the curricula of all levels of education and monitor their compliance as a tool to curb violence against women;
2. the review and creation of sexual and reproductive health education curricula that guarantee a thorough understanding of girls’ and boys’ biology throughout their life cycle, including their human, sexual and reproductive rights;
3. and government development of comprehensive programmes of sexual and human rights education for women and men designed to break patriarchal patterns in men demonstrating a new masculinity and femininity, in which they can both develop fully and be respectful of their mutual human rights.5

1 https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5
2 Complications include severe pain, hemorrhaging, sepsis, urethra damage, painful sexual intercourse and other sexual dysfunction
3 Many victims feel anxious, depressed, incomplete and traumatized.
5 Sexual and Reproductive Health Education as a Human Rights for All
GWI Policy Resolutions

- Policy Resolution 2019 - 3: Sexual and Reproductive Health Education as a Human Right for All
- Policy Resolution 2016: PREVENTING FGM
- Rights of the Child (1995, No. 12)
- Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1980, No. 5)

GWI Press Releases marking Zero Tolerance of FGM Day

- 2020: On International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM, GWI urges stronger government action
- 2019: GWI continues to act towards the elimination of FGM as barrier to education
- 2018: On International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM GWI recalls Resolution 6
- 2017: GWI observes International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM
- 2016: GWI calls for an end to FGM as a barrier to girls’ education and a human rights abuse
- 2014: The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) calls for increased access to education to stop the practice of FGM

Source: https://graduatewomen.org/media-publications/press-releases/

“The need is even more pressing amid concerns that two million additional cases of FGM may occur over the next decade as the coronavirus pandemic shutters schools and disrupts programmes that help protect girls from the harmful practice.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres
GWI on Child, Early and Forced Marriage

Since 1980, GWI has been promoting gender equality for women and the girl child and actively seeking human rights equality for women and children in all aspects of life through its Policy Resolutions. GWI actively promotes the global achievement of SDG 5.3 which specifically targets the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Throughout its 100+ years, GWI has advocated for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality secondary and tertiary education and training up to the highest levels. Our vision is 100% of girls and women in the world achieving education beyond primary school.

Early marriage not only disrupts a girl’s education, but may put an end to it all together in turn perpetuating poverty, dependence, inequality and insecurity that eventually becomes an obstacle to global development.

Early child marriage is a significant barrier to education that prevents millions of girls from accessing secondary education. GWI recognizes that the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to marry or to have children while she herself is still a child and her ability to gain useful lifelong skills increases thus breaking the cycle of marriage, children, dependence and possible abuse. Lengthening the time frame for a girl’s education also reduces maternal and infant mortality rates, increases her decision-making power and provides control over her reproductive rights.

GWI believes that child marriage is not only a violation of girls’ human rights and their children’s, but also represents a substantial economic burden for countries.

Millions of girls aren’t in education for a variety of reasons that may ultimately lead to early marriage: schools are inaccessible; may have unsafe facilities or subject girls to violence on the way to/from school; parents don’t see the value of educating girl children; the quality of education is poor; may be in areas of war, conflict, environmental disaster or disease; it may be forbidden to attend school if pregnant or are a young mother.

Parents also marry their children early for other reasons: poverty that leads to hunger and households with too many mouths to feed; many feel that their daughters are safer if they marry early before they can become impregnated by a man other than their future husbands or feel that a husband can provide protection they themselves cannot give; the persistence of other patriarchal family attitudes that require girls to be married young.

GWI and its NFAs work to:
1. urge governments to promote the protection of girls, especially from harmful traditions, harmful cultural practices and harmful religious beliefs;
2. educate families about the negative consequences for child brides so as to protect the human rights of girls;
3. seek support from governments and the judiciary, including appropriate legislation and publicity of positive judicial sentences, to increase awareness of early and forced marriage of girls and its consequent damaging effects;

In addition, GWI coordinates with Human Rights organizations and other NGOs to raise awareness about Child Marriage and encourages academic research to examine the causes and the consequences of Child Marriage.
GWI respects the rights of adolescents especially girls and encourages governments to implement projects and campaigns to draw attention to teachers and parents the adverse impact on their lives due to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, violence, and lack of opportunities for secondary education and employment.

GWI defends the Rights of the Child (GWI Resolution, 1995, 1) by striving for their observance by legislative and other measures progressively taken in accordance with the principles formulated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

**GWI Policy Resolutions**
- Early and Forced Marriage (child marriage) as a Form of Human and Children’s Rights Violations (2013, No. 1)
- Adolescents (1995, No. 1)
- Rights of the Child (1995, No. 12)

**GWI Toolkits – International Day of the Girl**

_In a world where harmful practices do not exist, she is free to dream..._

The International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM was first introduced in 2003 by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) as part of the UN’s efforts to promote the eradication of FGM.

GWI welcomes the UNGA resolution 73/149 (2020) on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation and efforts to anticipate and address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on its elimination.
Related Declarations and Conventions:
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Issue:
- FGM constitutes irreparable, irreversible harm and an act of violence against women and girls that impairs and undermines the enjoyment of their human rights.
- It affects many women and girls who are at risk of being subjected to the practice throughout the world, which is an impediment to the full achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
- FGM is a harmful practice constituting a serious threat to the health of women and girls, including their physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health.
- FGM has no documented health benefits.
- FGM may give rise to possible adverse obstetric and prenatal outcomes.
- May increase vulnerability to hepatitis C, tetanus, sepsis, urine retention and ulceration, as well as to fatal consequences for the mother and child.

Current Status:
Progress has been made in eliminating FGM in a number of countries using a common coordinated approach that promotes positive social change at the community, national, regional and international levels. The goal was set out in the United Nations inter-agency statement that FGM is to be eliminated within a generation, with some of the main achievements being obtained by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Cause:
FGM is inherently linked to deep-rooted harmful stereotypes, negative social norms, perceptions and customs on the part of both women and men that threaten the physical and psychological integrity of women and girls.
The Impact:
- FGM presents obstacles to their full enjoyment of human rights, and acknowledging in this regard that awareness-raising is critical.
- FGM persists in all parts of the world and that new methods, such as its medicalization and cross-border practice, are emerging.
- Negative discriminatory and stereotypical attitudes and behaviours, on the part of both women and men, have direct implications for the status and treatment of women and girls, and that such negative stereotypes impede the implementation of legislative and normative frameworks that guarantee gender equality and prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Eliminating FGM will serve as a contribution to the implementation of the range of Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular target 5.3.
- The empowerment of women and girls is key to breaking the cycle of discrimination and violence and for the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health, including sexual and reproductive health.

Prevention:
- Men and boys play an important role in the acceleration of progress in preventing and eliminating harmful practices such as FGM by being agents of change.
- Encourage men and boys to take an active part and to become strategic partners of women and girls and their allies in efforts, including through intergenerational dialogue, to eliminate violence, discrimination and harmful practices against women and girls, in particular FGM, through networks, peer programmes, information campaigns and training programmes.
- Elimination of this harmful practice can be achieved as a result of a comprehensive movement that involves all public and private stakeholders in society, including women and men, girls and boys, families, communities, religious leaders and local community and traditional leaders.

Recommendations from the UNGA resolution:
Increased national, regional and international efforts and the political commitment at the highest levels are critical to successfully eradicating FGM.

The resolution calls upon Member States parties to:
- place a stronger focus on the development and implementation of comprehensive prevention strategies, including the intensification of educational campaigns, awareness-raising and formal and non-formal education and training in order to promote the direct engagement of girls and boys, women and men.
• develop information and awareness-raising campaigns and programmes to systematically reach and engage the general public, especially relevant professionals, in particular school-teachers, families, communities, civil society representatives, including women’s and girl-led organizations and religious and traditional leaders, including through the traditional and non-traditional media, featuring television and radio discussions and information and communications technology, about the harmful effects of FGM and the fact that this practice still exists and about national and international levels of support for the elimination of FGM, with a view to helping to change existing negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours that condone and justify gender inequality, all forms of violence against women and girls and harmful practices, including FGM.

• provide the resources necessary to strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising programmes, to mobilize girls and women and boys and men to take an active part in developing preventive and elimination programmes to address harmful practices, especially FGM, to engage families, local community and religious leaders, educational institutions, the media and civil society and to provide increased financial support to efforts at all levels to end discriminatory social norms and practices, and calls upon the international community to support States in these efforts.

• complement punitive measures with awareness-raising and educational activities designed to promote a process of consensus towards the elimination of FGM, and also urges States to protect and support women and girls who have been subjected to FGM and those who are at risk in order to assist them, including by developing social, legal and psychological support services and care and appropriate remedies, and to ensure access to health-care services, including for sexual and reproductive health, in order to improve their health and well-being.

• condemn all harmful practices that affect women and girls, in particular FGM, whether committed within or outside a medical institution, to take all measures necessary, including through educational campaigns and by enacting and enforcing legislation to prohibit FGM, to protect women and girls from this act of violence, to hold perpetrators to account and to put in place adequate accountability mechanisms at the national and local levels, where applicable, in order to monitor progress.

• address the medicalization of FGM and to encourage professional associations and trade unions of health service providers to adopt internal disciplinary rules prohibiting their members from engaging in the harmful practice of FGM.

• promote gender-sensitive, empowering educational processes, sensitive to the needs of women and girls, by reviewing and revising, as appropriate, school curricula, educational materials and teacher-training programmes and elaborating policies and programmes of zero tolerance of violence against girls or of harmful practices, including FGM, placing special emphasis on education about the harmful effects of FGM, and to further integrate a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls into education and training curricula at all levels.

• ensure that the protection of and provision of support to women and girls subject to, or at risk of, FGM are an integral part of policies and programmes that address the practice, and to provide women and girls with coordinated, specialized, accessible and quality multisectoral prevention and response, including education, as well as legal, psychological, health-care and social services, provided by qualified personnel, consistent with the guidelines of medical ethics.

• ensure that national action plans and strategies on the elimination of FGM are comprehensive and multidisciplinary in scope and that they include projected timelines for goals and incorporate clear targets and indicators for the effective monitoring, impact assessment and coordination of programmes among all relevant stakeholders and promote their participation, including
the participation of affected women and girls, practising communities and non-governmental organizations, in the development, implementation and evaluation of such plans and strategies.

• pursue a comprehensive, culturally sensitive, systematic approach that incorporates a social perspective and is based on human rights and gender equality in providing education and training to families, local community leaders and members of all professions relevant to the protection and empowerment of women and girls in order to increase awareness of and commitment to the elimination of FGM.

• develop, support and implement comprehensive and integrated strategies for the prevention of FGM, including the training of social workers, medical personnel, community and religious leaders and relevant professionals, and to ensure that they provide competent, supportive services and care to all women and girls who are at risk of or who have undergone FGM and encourage them to report to the appropriate authorities cases in which they believe that women or girls are at risk.

• support, as part of a comprehensive approach to eliminate FGM, programmes that engage local community practitioners of FGM in community-based initiatives for the elimination of the practice, including, where relevant, the identification and the provision by communities of alternative livelihoods for them.

• Call upon the international community, the relevant United Nations entities and civil society and international financial institutions to continue to actively support, through the allocation of increased financial resources and technical assistance, targeted comprehensive programmes that address the needs and priorities of women and girls at risk of or subjected to FGM.

Partners and Allies:
• All public and private stakeholders in society, including women and men, girls and boys
• Families, communities
• Religious leaders
• Local community and traditional leaders
• [Victims and survivors]

Focal Points and Influencers:
Should work to eliminate attitudes and harmful practices, in particular FGM, that negatively affect women and girls, and emphasize the importance of adopting a non-stigmatization approach in all prevention interventions:

1. government officials
2. law enforcement and judicial personnel
3. immigration officials
4. parliamentarians
5. healthcare providers, practitioners
6. civil society, the private sector, community and religious leaders
7. teachers
8. employers,
9. media professionals
10. those directly working with girls, as well as parents, legal guardians, families and communities
United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) draft resolution
Promotion and protection of the rights of children: Agenda item 68 (a)

UNGA 75 October 2020
Third Committee Agenda item 28 Advancement of women: A/C.3/75/L.15
Albania, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Viet Nam and Zambia

Related Declarations and Conventions:
Universal Declaration of Human Rights
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
The Convention on the Rights of the Child
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages
Relevant agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women

The Early Child and Forced Marriage Issue
- Child, early and forced marriage is a harmful practice that violates, abuses or impairs human rights and is linked to and perpetuates other harmful practices and human rights violations and that such violations have a disproportionately negative impact on women and girls
- Social protection, education, adequate health care, nutrition, full access to clean water, including safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, skills development and the combating of discrimination and violence against girls, among other things, are all necessary for the empowerment of the girl child
- the practice of child, early and forced marriage may include arrangements that are not formalized, registered or recognized by a religious or State authority,
  - that such arrangements should be addressed in policies and programmes on child, early and forced marriage
  - that the gathering of information on these arrangements will help to develop responses for affected girls and women

Current Status
- Recent progress made globally towards ending child, early and forced marriage, including a decrease in the proportion of girls who were married before the age of 18 in the past decade from one in four to approximately one in five
- despite this global trend, progress has been uneven across regions, that the current pace of change is not sufficient to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030
- and that the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are projected to result in 13 million additional cases of child, early and forced marriage that otherwise would have been averted by 2030
Barriers

- Deep-rooted gender inequalities and stereotypes, harmful practices, perceptions and customs, and discriminatory norms are not only obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights and the empowerment of all women and girls, but are also among the root causes of child, early and forced marriage.

- The persistence of child, early and forced marriage places children, in particular the girl child, at greater risk of being exposed to and encountering various forms of discrimination and violence throughout their lives.

Root Causes

- Poverty, insecurity, early pregnancy and lack of education are among the root causes of child, early and forced marriage.

- Armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies are among the exacerbating factors.

Impact

- The persistence of child, early and forced marriage places women and girls at greater risk of being exposed to and encountering various forms of discrimination and violence throughout their lives, including marital rape and sexual, physical and psychological violence, and reinforces the lower status of girls and adolescent girls in society.

- Child, early and forced marriage is a major impediment to the achievement of the economic empowerment of women and their social and economic development, thereby hampering the ability of women to enter, advance and remain in the labour market, impedes economic independence, imposes direct and indirect short- and long-term costs on society.

- Child, early and forced marriage undermines women’s and girls’ autonomy and decision-making in all aspects of their lives and that the empowerment of and investment in all women and girls, as well as the strengthening of their voice, agency, leadership and meaningful participation in all decisions that affect them, are key factors in breaking the cycle of gender inequality and discrimination, violence and poverty and are critical, inter alia, for sustainable development, peace, security, democracy and inclusive economic growth.

Observations

- The economic autonomy of women can expand their options for leaving abusive relationships.

- Child, early and forced marriage disproportionally affects girls who have received little or no formal education and is itself a significant obstacle to educational opportunities and the development of employable skills for girls and young women, in particular girls who are forced to drop out of school owing to pregnancy, marriage, childbirth and/or childcare responsibilities, and that educational possibilities and opportunities are directly related to the empowerment of women and girls, their employment and economic opportunities and their active participation in economic, social and cultural development, governance and decision-making.

- Despite gains in providing access to education, girls are still more likely than boys to remain excluded from primary and secondary education, and recognizing that the attendance of girls at school can be affected by negative perceptions of menstruation and lack of means to maintain safe personal hygiene, such as water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools that meet the needs of girls.
• Child, early and forced marriage remains a serious threat to multiple aspects of the physical and psychological health of women and girls, including but not limited to their sexual and reproductive health, significantly increasing the risk of early, frequent and unintended pregnancy, maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, obstetric fistula and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS, as well as increasing vulnerability to all forms of violence.

• The incidence and risk of child, early and forced marriage can increase during humanitarian emergencies, situations of forced displacement, armed conflict, public health emergencies and natural disasters.

• Child, early and forced marriage is underrecognized and underreported.

• Child marriage often coincides with impunity and lack of accountability, particularly at the community level.

• Families, communities and religious, traditional and community leaders play an essential role in transforming negative social norms and confronting gender inequality, and recognizing further that empowering girls, including already married girls, requires their active participation in decision-making processes and as agents of change in their own lives and communities, including through women’s and girls’ organizations, with the active support and engagement of their parents, legal guardians, families and care providers, boys and men, as well as the wider community.

• The need to support girls and women who were subjected to child, early and forced marriage, as well as their children, requires the removal of structural barriers that prevent their access to services that respond to their specific needs.

• The incidence and risk of child, early and forced marriage can increase during humanitarian emergencies, situations of forced displacement, armed conflict, public health emergencies and natural disasters because of various factors, including insecurity, increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, the misconception of providing protection through marriage, gender inequality, lack of access to continuous, quality education, the stigmatization of pregnancy outside marriage, the absence of family planning services, disruption in social networks and routines, increased poverty and the absence of livelihood opportunities, and that this requires increased attention, appropriate protection measures and coordinated action by relevant stakeholders, with the full and meaningful participation of the women and girls affected, from the early stages of humanitarian emergencies, and recognizing further the importance of addressing the increased vulnerability of women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation in those situations.

• Preventing and ending child, early and forced marriage and supporting married girls and women affected by this harmful practice require appropriate gender- and age-sensitive protection, prevention and response measures, as well as coordinated action by relevant stakeholders, and that existing gaps in the collection and use of reliable data and evidence remain a major challenge for programming and informing appropriate measures and actions.

• Child, early and forced marriage remains common in rural areas and among the poorest communities, and recognizing that the immediate alleviation and eventual eradication of extreme poverty must remain a high priority for the international community.
Impact of Covid-19

- The Unprecedented and multifaceted negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the incidence of, and efforts to end, child, early and forced marriage, including:
  - the wide-reaching economic, social and human consequences and devastating impacts of the pandemic on the livelihoods of people and families, especially women and girls, and the poorest and most vulnerable,
  - the severe disruption to health and education systems, social protection programmes and the provision of protection and support services, including essential services

- the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated containment measures, including school closures and restrictions on the right to freedom of movement, are likely to increase risks faced by girls, including already married girls, as well as women affected by this harmful practice, including:
  - risks associated with sexual and gender-based violence,
  - trafficking in persons and other types of exploitation,
  - social isolation,
  - unintended and/or early pregnancy, obstetric fistula, female genital mutilation,
  - economic hardship, as well as the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work
  - the associated risk of not returning to school, and
  - difficulties in gaining access to health-care services, hindering the fulfilment of their rights and future economic opportunities, and that these risks are even further exacerbated in humanitarian situations,

- the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also diverts international, regional and national attention and resources away from, inter alia, the prevention and elimination of child, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices,

- COVID-19 containment measures are delaying and disrupting efforts, including by civil society and other relevant stakeholders, to end child, early and forced marriage, especially at the local level,

The resolution calls upon Member States and Government parties to:

1. with the participation of relevant stakeholders, including women and girls, men and boys, parents and other family members, teachers, religious, traditional and community leaders, civil society, organizations led by girls, women’s organizations, youth and human rights groups, the media and the private sector,
   a develop and implement holistic, comprehensive and coordinated responses and strategies to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage,
   b to support girls and women who are affected or at risk, who have fled such a marriage or whose marriage has dissolved, and widowed girls or women who were married as girls, including through the strengthening of child protection systems, protection mechanisms such as safe shelters, access to justice and the sharing of best practices across borders;

2. develop and implement measures at all levels to end child, early and forced marriage, national and subnational action plans where appropriate, and to make adequate resources available across relevant sectors, including health, nutrition, protection, governance and education;

Laws

3. enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies aimed at preventing and ending child, early and forced marriage, protecting those at risk and addressing the needs of those affected, and work towards the coherence of these laws and policies at the local level, to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the informed, free and full consent of the intending spouses;
4. enact, enforce and uphold laws concerning a minimum age of marriage, to monitor their application and to progressively amend laws with lower minimum ages of marriage and/or ages of majority to 18 and engage all relevant authorities to ensure that these laws are well known;

5. repeal or amend laws and remove any provisions that enable perpetrators of rape, sexual abuse or abduction to escape prosecution and punishment by marrying their victims;

**Birth Registration**

6. strengthen their efforts to ensure the timely registration of births and marriages, especially for individuals living in rural and remote areas, including by identifying and removing all physical, administrative, procedural and any other barriers that impede access to registration and by providing, where lacking, mechanisms for the registration of customary and religious marriages;

**Consultation and Awareness Raising**

7. promote the meaningful participation of and active consultation with children and adolescents, including already married girls, on all issues affecting them and to raise awareness about their rights, including the negative impact of child, early and forced marriage, through safe spaces, forums and support networks, including in digital spaces, that provide information, life skills and leadership skills training and opportunities, including catch-up and literacy education, and lifelong learning opportunities, remote learning opportunities and childcare, as needed, to be empowered, to express themselves, to participate meaningfully in all decisions that affect them and to become agents of change within their communities;

8. promote awareness-raising about the harmful effects of child, early and forced marriage on the individual and wider society and the benefits of ending this harmful practice, including through open dialogue with all stakeholders, including girls and boys, women and men, religious, traditional and community leaders, parents, legal guardians and other family members, to work with local communities to combat negative social norms and gender stereotypes that condone child, early and forced marriage, to empower parents and communities to abandon the practice and to empower all women and girls to make informed decisions about their lives;

  o the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding and that parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child, acknowledging the need to support their capacity to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, and reaffirming that the best interests of the child will be their basic concern;

**Poverty and Economic Opportunities**

9. to confront family poverty and social exclusion through investing in family-oriented policies addressing the multidimensional aspects of poverty, focusing on education, health, employment, social security, livelihoods and social cohesion, paying special attention to gender-sensitive social protection measures, child allowances for parents and pension benefits for older persons and protecting, supporting and empowering children, including girls, in child-headed households;

10. with the collaboration of relevant stakeholders, to tackle poverty, lack of economic opportunities for women and girls and other entrenched economic incentives that act as drivers of child, early and forced marriage, including by ensuring

  a the rights of women and girls to inheritance and property,
  b their equal access with men and boys to social protection, childcare services and direct financial services,
  c to encourage girls to continue their education, including through their re-enrolment in school after childbirth,
d. to develop livelihood opportunities through access to technical and vocational education and training and life skills education, including financial literacy, and
e. to promote freedom of movement, women’s equal access to full and productive employment and decent work, as well as equal political participation and rights to inherit, own and control land and productive measures;

**Human Rights**
11. promote and protect the human rights of already married girls and women affected by this harmful practice,
   a. to promote equality in all aspects of marriage and its dissolution and
   b. to address their specific needs, such as through targeted programmes that provide social services to protect them from sexual and gender-based violence,
   c. increase their decision-making power,
   d. make it easier for them to seek formal employment,
   e. increase their economic independence and financial literacy,
   f. access education, skills development programmes and lifelong learning opportunities,
   g. ensure their equal access to health-care services and information and
   h. decrease their social isolation, including by establishing or strengthening childcare services and working with communities to change discriminatory social norms;

**Education**
12. promote and protect the right of women and girls to equal access to education
   a. through enhanced emphasis on free and quality primary and secondary education, including catch-up and literacy education for those who have not received formal education, have left school early or were forced to leave school, including because of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and/or childcare responsibilities, which empowers young women and girls to make informed decisions about their lives, employment, economic opportunities and health,
   b. through scientifically accurate and age-appropriate comprehensive education that is relevant to cultural contexts,
   c. that provides adolescent girls and boys and young women and men, in and out of school, consistent with their evolving capacities, and with appropriate direction and guidance from parents and legal guardians, with the best interests of the child as their basic concern, information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, gender equality and the empowerment of women, human rights, physical, psychological and pubertal development and power in relationships between women and men,
   d. to enable them to build self-esteem and foster informed decision-making, communication and risk reduction skills and to develop respectful relationships, in full partnership with young persons, parents, legal guardians, caregivers, educators and health-care providers, in order to contribute to ending child, early and forced marriage;

13. remove barriers to education, including by investing in quality primary and secondary education for every child in a safe environment, through
   a. adequate financing, ensuring that married girls and boys, pregnant girls and women and young parents continue to have access to schooling,
   b. improving access to quality formal education and skills development, especially for those living in remote or insecure areas,
   c. improving the safety of girls at and on the way to and from school,
   d. providing safe and adequate sanitation, including for menstrual hygiene management,
   e. adopting and implementing laws and policies to prohibit, prevent and address violence and to hold perpetrators accountable,
   f. strengthening and intensifying their efforts to implement effective violence prevention and response activities in schools and communities,
g engaging men and boys, community leaders and parents,

h educating children from a young age regarding their human rights and the importance of treating all people with dignity and respect and

i designing educational programmes and teaching materials that support respectful relationships, non-violent behaviours, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls;

14. adopt, as appropriate, and implement inclusive policies and programmes to promote technical and vocational training and skills development and lifelong learning opportunities, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and in information and communications technology, as well as higher educational opportunities for women and girls, including those at risk of or affected by child, early and forced marriage, so as to enable them to gain the knowledge, attitudes and skills that they need to fulfil their full potential;

Health and Mental Health

15. promote, respect and protect the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health through the development and enforcement of policies and legal frameworks and the strengthening of health systems, including health information systems, that make universally accessible and available quality, gender-responsive, adolescent-friendly health services, sexual and reproductive health-care services, information and commodities, HIV and AIDS prevention, testing, treatment and care, mental health services and nutrition interventions and prevention, treatment of and care for obstetric fistula and other obstetric complications by providing the continuum of services, including family planning, prenatal and postnatal care, skilled birth attendance, emergency obstetric care and post-partum care;

16. promote and protect the human rights of all women and girls, including the right of women, and those girls who have been subjected to child, early and forced marriage, to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, and to adopt and accelerate the implementation of laws, policies and programmes that protect and enable the enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including reproductive rights, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences;

Violence

17. formulate or review, as needed, appropriate policies, programmes or strategies in order to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, and address discrimination and violence, including domestic violence, which may occur against women and girls subjected to child, early and forced marriage, as well as strengthen child protection systems and provide targets and timetables for implementation;

Justice and Accountability

18. ensure access to justice and accountability mechanisms and remedies for the effective implementation and enforcement of laws aimed at preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage, including by informing women, girls and boys about their rights under relevant laws, including in marriage and at its dissolution, improving legal infrastructure, removing all barriers to access to legal counselling, assistance and remedies, training law enforcement officers, the judiciary and professionals working with women and children and ensuring oversight of the handling of cases of child, early and forced marriage;
Humanitarian Emergencies

19. develop and implement, in consultation with and with the participation of women and, as appropriate, girls, and integrate into humanitarian responses, from the early stages of humanitarian emergencies, measures to address the increased vulnerability of women and girls to child, early and forced marriage, and to protect women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation during humanitarian emergencies, situations of forced displacement, armed conflict, natural disasters and public health emergencies, including by ensuring their access to such services as health and education, as well as strengthening follow-up and interventions to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian settings, as well as to address the needs of those affected;

COVID-19

20. take a comprehensive, rights-based, age- and gender-responsive, victim-centred and multisectoral approach that takes into account linkages with other harmful practices in the prevention of and response to child, early and forced marriage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to pay particular attention to the specific needs of all women and girls, in particular those in vulnerable situations and those experiencing various forms of violence, discrimination, stigmatization, exclusion and inequalities, including in humanitarian situations, in terms of, inter alia, access to essential services such as safe spaces, shelters and other social protection services, health-care services, safe and affordable drinking water and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, as well as access to education and to timely registration of births and marriages;

21. ensure that COVID-19 response measures are transformative, participatory and adequately funded, promote inclusive, gender-equal and sustainable economies and societies, and address inequalities and exclusion and poverty, which are among the root causes of child, early and forced marriage by, inter alia:

(a) Paying particular attention to the specific needs of children, especially adolescent girls, who are more likely to be subjected to child, early and forced marriage, in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic at all levels, and promoting their effective and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them, by prioritizing the provision of child- and adolescent-centred services, with a focus on equitable access, particularly in relation to schooling, nutrition programmes, immunization, maternal and newborn care, and child protection programmes;

(b) Mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families and communities by, inter alia, expanding programmes that protect them against economic shocks, including poverty eradication measures, labour policies, public services and gender-responsive social protection programmes;

(c) Mitigating the impact of school closures, particularly for those learners who are among the poorest, most marginalized and vulnerable, especially girls, by facilitating access to and continuity of equitable and inclusive quality education for all, including through distance learning, re-enrolling all previously enrolled children and those who were already out of school, providing community awareness on the importance of girls’ education, and working to ensure that those subjected to child, early and forced marriage, pregnant girls and women, as well as young parents, also continue to have access to schooling on an equal basis with others, including by ensuring access to the Internet and bridging the digital divides, both between and within countries and the gender digital divide;

(d) Adopting measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work and the feminization of poverty, which is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to address the discrimination and gender inequality, including gender stereotypes and negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours, unequal power relations in which women and girls are viewed as subordinate to men and boys, that are at the root of these imbalances;

(e) Ensuring continuity and further strengthening protection and support services for women and girls who experience violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, including
domestic violence, during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially girls at risk of child, early and forced marriage and already married girls and women affected by this harmful practice, and designating protection shelters, hotlines and help desks, health and support services and legal protection and support as essential services available to all women and girls, in addition to establishing safeguarding measures and raising awareness and providing training for police, judiciary, first responders, health workers, and education and child services staff;

(f) Ensuring uninterrupted access to and funding for essential health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health-care services, and to safe and affordable drinking water and adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, including menstrual hygiene, and including in disadvantaged areas such as rural communities, informal settlements and humanitarian settings;

(g) Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 response measures on the ability of civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders working at the local and national levels to continue their work with girls, families and local communities to prevent and respond to child, early and forced marriage;

Stakeholders and Allies

- women and girls
- men and boys
- parents and other family members
- teachers
- religious, traditional and community leaders
- civil society, organizations led by girls, women’s organizations, youth and human rights groups,
- the media
- the private sector
Empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace.

GWI, formerly International Federation of University Women, is in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1947 and is a nongovernmental organisation maintaining official relations with UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation.

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