



BRIEFING PAPER

Secondary Education and Child Marriage in Forced Displacement and Crisis Settings Brief

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Introduction

This brief was commissioned to contribute to expert discussion within the Secondary Education Working Group. It is intended to inform advocacy, programming and learning efforts to advance secondary education which is responsive to the prevention of child marriage and the inclusion of adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers.

The **Secondary Education Working Group** (SEWG), led by Plan International and UNHCR, is an inter-agency working group made up of education partners, including international non-governmental organisations, youth-led coalitions, states and donors. The group was established in 2020 with a vision to support all crisis-affected adolescents and youth with equitable access to quality, inclusive and relevant secondary education which they can complete in safety.

This brief was informed by a rapid review of good practice, evidence-based programmatic guidance and thematic reports, as well as conversations with practitioners and advisors from Secondary Education Working Group member organisations. This brief is non-exhaustive but aims to provide an initial brief for discussion with SEWG members to support further investment in action and evidence gathering on child marriage and secondary education.

The brief presents an overview of actions and approaches to address child marriage within secondary education in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings. It showcases how gender-responsive and inclusive secondary education can

support adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. The brief is structured through the lens of the Interagency Network for Education in Emergency Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery¹ to highlight how education actors can, and must, take more intentional action to tackle child marriage in humanitarian programming. The brief includes a series of initial recommendations generated through discussion with SEWG members to advance secondary education programming, innovation and learning on child marriage.

Key terms:

- This brief uses the term **adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers**. Ever married girls includes girls who have already experienced marriage, including informal marriages or unions. This may include girls who are currently married and those who are widowed, divorced or separated. The brief also specifically names adolescent girls who are pregnant and/or young mothers as they are often affected by similar risks and barriers to secondary education in emergencies.
- **Adolescents** are defined by the United Nations as those aged 10-19 years old.²
- **“Child marriage”** refers to all forms of child, early and forced marriage and unions – formal and informal – where at least one party is aged under 18.³
- **Secondary education** refers to formal learning opportunities and the different pathways or programmes which lead adolescents towards accredited certification.⁴





Recommendations

Priority Programming Actions

What priority programming actions can deliver sustained change to delay marriage and support adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to complete secondary education in crisis-affected and forced displacement settings?

1. **Engage adolescent girls** who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to understand the barriers they face accessing secondary education and take steps to remove barriers to support their continued participation or return to secondary education.
2. **Strengthen the design of secondary education programming to be adolescent girl-responsive** through the meaningful participation of adolescent girls, including girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers across the programme cycle.
3. Implement **accelerated education programmes** tailored to the needs of adolescent girls in all their diversity, including girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to ensure that they have flexible learning pathways to complete secondary education.
4. Invest in **quality early childhood education and childcare services** within secondary education for the children of learners and teachers to support adolescent girls and women teachers' participation.
5. **Invest in gender-responsive and inclusive secondary education programming including prioritising women teachers'** recruitment, professional development and leadership using curricula, facilitation and safeguarding which promotes adolescent girls' wellbeing and rights.
6. **Invest in adolescent girls' life skills and empowerment** programming to strengthen girls' secondary education aspirations and reinforce support networks. Utilise approaches which are designed for adolescent girls who are at risk of child marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers.
7. **Collaborate with child protection and GBV actors**, including women and girls and children and youth community led groups to work collectively to prevent and respond to child marriage.
8. **Engage women and men parents, caregivers and in-laws** of adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers and other **women and men leaders and influencers** in the community to increase support for adolescent girls' secondary education and delayed marriage.

What innovation and learning do we need to deliver this change?

1. **Advocate** with and support governments to enact **policies for school re-entry** of adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings. Include measures which support the retention and transition of adolescent girls to secondary school, such as adequate financial and social support.
2. **Advocate** with humanitarian donors for **increased funding for secondary education** and multi-year and multi-sector programming to effectively prevent and respond to child marriage from the start of the emergency.
3. Evaluate how successful child marriage and access to secondary education currently being addressed in **humanitarian/refugee response plans** is at national and regional level.
4. Prioritise funding for **local women and girls led groups and organizations** to enable community-led, rights-based movements to lead action to prevent child marriage and support adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers' inclusion within secondary education.
5. Develop an **inter-agency and multi-sector programmatic and coordination framework** by engaging national and local stakeholders in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings to inform the cohesive design and implementation of action to prevent and respond to child marriage from the start of the emergency.
6. Deliver **action responsive to the prevention of child marriage** and the inclusion of adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers at scale within secondary education systems in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings and **evaluate the gains in secondary education completion for adolescent girls**.



Background

According to *Girls Not Brides*, an estimated 163 million additional girls will marry as children by 2030⁵, equivalent to the entire populations of Russia and Syria combined. Despite progress in preventing child marriage over the last decade, this advance has been uneven, particularly for marginalised adolescent girls in forced displacement and crisis-affected contexts.

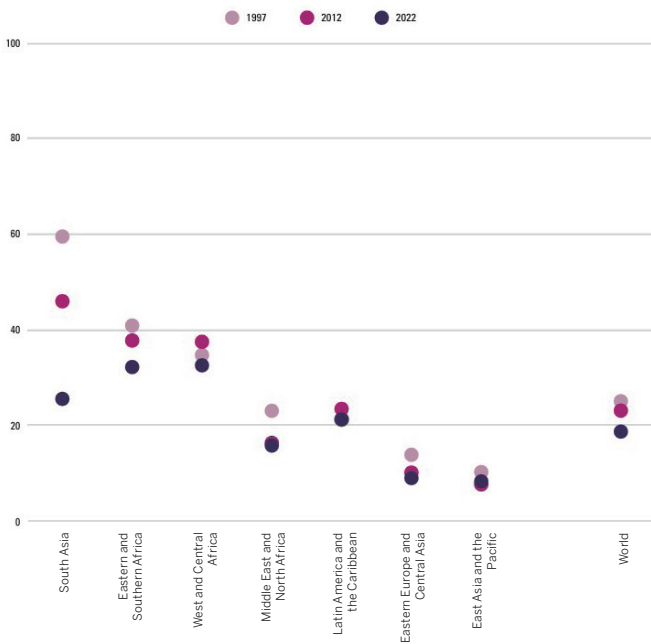


Figure 1 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by region.⁶



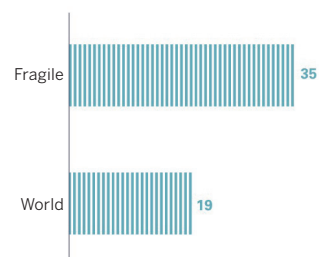
“I strongly opposed the wedding,” says 15-year-old Monalisa who made local headlines in Bangladesh stopping the child marriage her parents were arranging for her.

Child marriage is deeply rooted in gender inequality and discrimination.^{7, 8} Forcibly displaced and crisis-affected adolescent girls are at even greater risk of child marriage as crises intensify poverty, insecurity and the breakdown of social support systems, which in turn limits protective services like education.^{9, 10} Child marriage deepens girls’ experience of gender inequality and has a negative impact on their rights and quality of life. Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and catapults them into adult responsibilities and relationships which threatens their wellbeing. Girls who marry early typically experience limits on access to health, including their sexual and reproductive health, education and economic and political participation.

Girls who marry have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers which are then passed down to their own children. Because of the power dynamics entrenched in gender inequality, unmarried girls at risk of child marriage and married girls are not in control of their own bodies – including if, when and whom to marry, or choice around pregnancy – which increases their risk of GBV.¹¹ Married girls often become pregnant early, when the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth is high. The practice can also isolate girls from family and friends, taking a heavy toll on their mental health.¹²

Child marriage in situations of fragility is nearly two times higher than the world average

FIGURE 2 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, worldwide and in countries with high levels of institutional and social fragility.¹³



The 2023 UN human rights resolution on child marriage highlights insecurity, gender inequality, increased risk of gender-based violence and the breakdown of state authority as factors which exacerbate the proliferation of child marriage in humanitarian settings.¹⁴ The 12 countries with the highest child marriage prevalence rates are either fragile or extremely fragile (see *Girls Not Brides* child marriage atlas snapshot below). Forcibly displaced and crisis-affected populations may resort to child marriage as an extreme coping mechanism in response to food and economic insecurity. In these



Top 20 countries with the highest prevalence rates of child marriage

01	76% Niger
02	61% Central African Republic
03	61% Chad
04	54% Mali
05	53% Mozambique
06	52% South Sudan
07	51% Burkina Faso
08	51% Bangladesh
09	47% Guinea
10	45% Somalia
11	41% Eritrea
12	40% Ethiopia
13	39% Madagascar
14	38% Malawi
15	37% Mauritania
16	36% Suriname
17	35% Nicaragua
18	35% Nepal
19	34% Sudan
20	34% Uganda

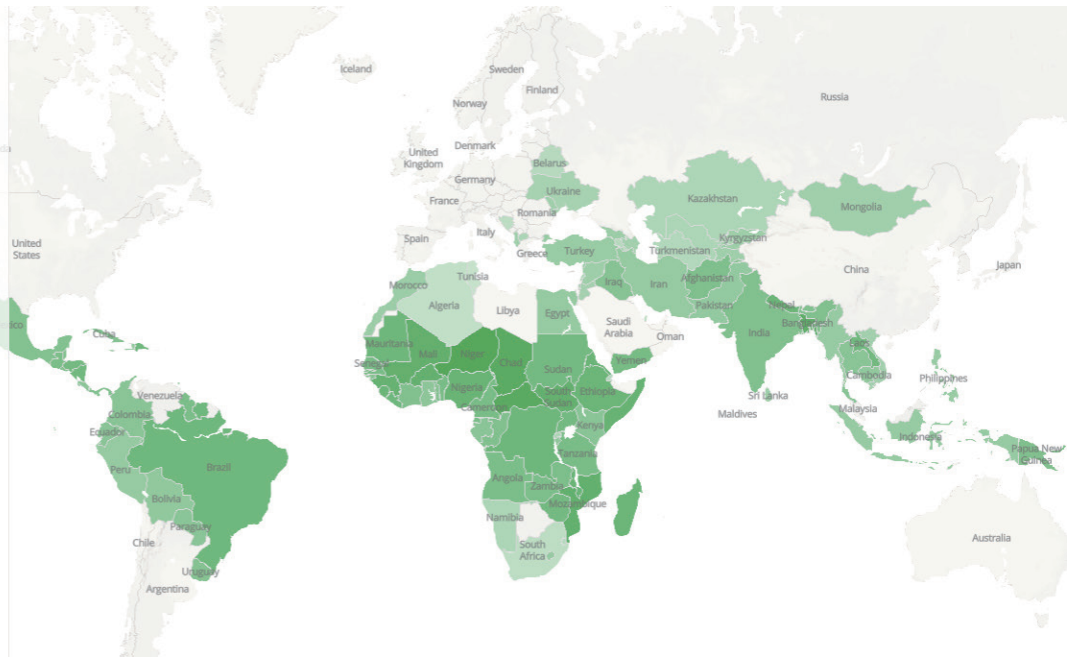


FIGURE 3 | Graphic from *Girls Not Brides' Child marriage atlas*. Percentage of women 20-24 years old who were first married or in union before they were 18 years old.¹⁶

settings, adolescent girls may be commodified and exploited when no other alternatives are available. In communities where female sexuality and virginity are linked to family honour, parents may marry their daughters at a young age, mistakenly believing that it offers them protection.¹⁵ However, child marriage facilitates child sexual abuse and increases the risk of intimate partner violence, as well as higher rates of early pregnancy and associated higher risks of maternal and child mortality and morbidity.

By the end of 2023, the number of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide reached nearly 120 million, with children making up 40% of this population.¹⁷ New global estimates indicate that over one third of crisis-affected, out-of-school children and adolescents are of lower secondary school age and that nearly half are of upper secondary school age:¹⁸ a combined figure of over 40 million adolescents. A further 52 million crisis-affected adolescents in secondary school are experiencing significant learning deprivation which increases the risk of dropout.¹⁹ Crisis-affected girls are 90 per cent more likely to be out of school than girls in stable settings.²⁰ For refugees, the gross enrolment rate at secondary level (42%) is far below the global average (77%).²¹

As outlined in the 2023 SEWG's brief, *The missing piece: Secondary education in crisis contexts*, secondary education remains one of the most neglected and underfunded sectors within the education in emergencies field.²² The brief also



documents how forced displacement and crisis create profound gaps in secondary education infrastructure which impacts quality teaching and learning. This includes inadequate classroom resources, untrained or under skilled teachers, and limited subjects.²³ Late entry, repetition, dropout and re-entry following extended absence are prevalent challenges for adolescents and education systems in emergencies. In crisis and forced displacement contexts, educational disruption means that adolescents of secondary school age may not have completed their primary education and require access to accelerated education programming²⁴ as a pathway to secondary education and to catch up within secondary education. This



is particularly important for adolescent girls who face increasing pressure to marry as they get older. Completing secondary school by the time they reach adult hood is therefore an important window of opportunity.

Forcibly displaced and crisis-affected adolescent girls continue to be excluded from secondary education at higher rates than boys. Progress to close the gender gap is slow, as illustrated by the chart below. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation, with an estimated 20 million secondary education-aged girls potentially never returning to school, many due to child marriage and parenting.²⁵ Adolescent girls facing forced displacement and crises encounter numerous barriers which reduce their participation and completion rates in secondary education. In many contexts, secondary schools have been destroyed or repurposed, forcing adolescents to travel long distances, which particularly increases adolescent girls' experience of violence, abduction and harassment en route to school. Adolescent girls also contend with inadequate sanitation facilities during menstruation, heightened risks of school-related gender-based violence and family pressures to prioritise household duties over education.²⁷ Economic hardship can also lead families to favour boys' education over that of girls.²⁸ Once out of school, adolescent girls are more at risk of child marriage and early pregnancy, which can prevent their return to education.²⁹ This combination of child marriage and education deficit leads to multiple negative outcomes across women's and girls' lifetimes for literacy, employment, empowerment and decision-making, health, and gender-based violence.

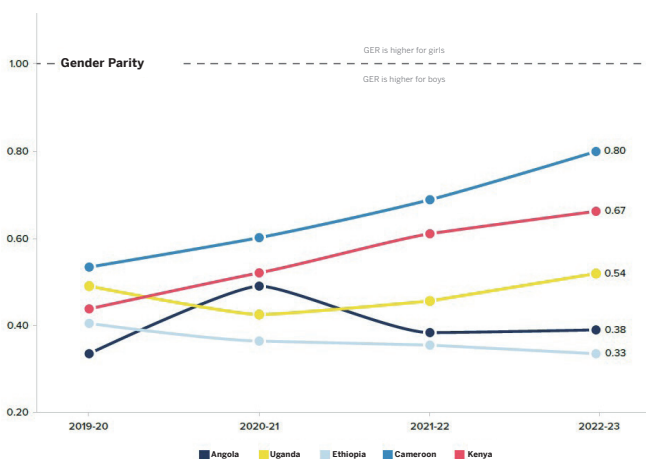


FIGURE 4 | Getting girls in school: Secondary [education] refugee Gender Parity Index. Graphic from UNHCR 2024.³⁰

Comprehensive education which is gender-responsive, inclusive, relevant and safe is one of the most effective strategies for preventing child marriage.³¹

The links between child marriage, early pregnancy, and educational outcomes are significant. Increased secondary educational attainment for girls correlates with delayed marriage and improved outcomes for future generations.³² For instance, in countries where education is compulsory and free, the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who were first married or in union before the age of 18 is nearly half that in countries where it is not.³³ Girls with secondary or higher education are three times less likely to marry as children than those with no education.³⁴ On average, each additional year of schooling decreases the likelihood of marrying before the age of 18 by six percentage points.³⁵

A recent *Girls Not Brides* brief to inform the forthcoming WHO guidelines on preventing early pregnancy and poor reproductive outcomes in adolescents³⁶ points to three evidence-based education pathways which prevent child marriage:

- 1 In contexts where marriage and education are mutually exclusive, just being in school can be enough to prevent child marriage.
- 2 In school, girls acquire skills, confidence, connections and new opportunities outside the home, expanding their aspirations beyond marriage.
- 3 A critical mass of girls going to school can transform social norms in families and communities to expand opportunities for girls.

Addressing child marriage from the onset of forced displacement and crises has been advocated for over a decade.³⁷ The 2017 Human Rights Council resolution marked a pivotal acknowledgment of the need to address child marriage in humanitarian contexts.³⁸ However, the issue continues to lack priority in emergency response, and establishing child marriage-responsive humanitarian action remains slow. The human rights council report on child marriage in humanitarian settings stresses the critical role of education as intervention to address child marriage. It calls on states to establish inclusive education systems targeting marginalised girls, including refugees, migrants and girls with disabilities.³⁹ In addition to preventing child marriage, there are substantial opportunities to support forcibly displaced and crisis-affected girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers in re-engaging with secondary education through flexible learning pathways such as accelerated education.

This brief will outline practical steps education actors can take to combat and respond to child marriage within secondary education.



Action and approaches to advance secondary education which is responsive to the prevention of child marriage and the inclusion of adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers

This section frames action to advance secondary education in emergencies which can support adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers across the five domains of the [Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery](#).⁴⁰ Relevant action is highlighted which can support adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to complete secondary education successfully. There are also toolbox links to global best practice tools and resources across the domains to guide quality programming.

Domain 1: Foundational standards for a quality response

Participation

Adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young are best placed to advise on the issues and decisions which impact them directly.⁴¹ However, these girls can be excluded from meaningful participation in community engagement activities unless specific action is taken to make space for their voices and contributions. Adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers can participate as representatives in **community education committees** and contribute to developing and implementing **community-based action plans** which are responsive to adolescent girls' secondary education needs. Community action plans should include targeted action to ensure secondary education which is responsive to the prevention of child marriage and the inclusion of adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. Education stakeholders should take action to remove barriers to adolescent girls' participation. This can include negotiations with women and men community leaders, parents, caregivers and in-laws to secure their participation. Women facilitators and the use of women's and girls' safe spaces to host discussions are recommended to support adolescent girls' participation and acceptance of engagement activities by the wider community.

Toolbox: Adolescent girl participation

Participatory, creative and age-appropriate focus group discussions can engage forcibly displaced and crisis-affected adolescent girls in design and feedback on secondary education programming in emergencies. Groups should be formed to engage younger and older girls, unmarried girls and girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers, who are in and out of school, to learn about the specific risks, barriers and support needs of these girls. Participatory and creative activities can support girls to share more easily than a verbal discussion during focus groups. Consider using Who am I? body diagrams, community safety mapping, problem ranking, spider diagrams and problem trees from adolescent girl engagement tools (for example, [Girl Shine](#)). For guides to support the participation of adolescent girls in all their diversity across the programme cycle in education programming, please see:

- [Adolescent Girls' Consultation Toolkit and Adolescent Programming Toolkit – tools for consultation with adolescents by PLAN International](#)
- [Girl Shine consultation and feedback tools by the IRC](#)
- [Girl-led participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation can lead to powerful insights, for example, the youth-led research to address child marriage and girls' education in West Africa by Girls Not Brides](#)

Resources

Some of the barriers which adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers may face in accessing secondary education can be overcome by mobilising community resources. Communities and education authorities can work together to make secondary education a protective place for adolescent girls in all their diversity. For example, the community can play a valuable role in supporting safe access and transportation for adolescent girls. Women community members can assist teachers in secondary educations, particularly where there are few women teachers, to help create a safer, more gender-responsive learning environment. The presence of women community members and teachers can also strengthen community acceptance of adolescent girls' access to secondary education. Mothers-in-laws and women parents and caregivers may also be motivated to help provide childcare in secondary educations to support young mothers to continue their education. Childcare within secondary education facilities allows for breastfeeding and care of young children and supports young mothers to continue attending secondary school. Young women



from the local community can also be engaged to support adolescent girls through life skills and mentoring.⁴²

Toolbox: Feminist partnership with women and girls-led movements

As outlined in the Grand Bargain,⁴³ the focus of sustainable, transformative emergency response engages and resources local movements and organisations. Secondary education offers important opportunities to resource local women and girls and children and youth led movements to lead community mobilization and social norms change to prevent child marriage and the support adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to access secondary education. Feminist partnership with local social justice movements can promote the value of secondary education and leverage community resources to address barriers to adolescent girls' access to secondary education. Community organisations can also proactively engage girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to support their continued participation or return to secondary education. Engaging and resourcing adolescent girls led groups and organisations is an important part of localisation efforts to address child marriage within secondary education.

- Save the Children offers resources on how to [effectively support girl-led groups, networks, and movements, as well as training material for girl-led and girl-centred advocacy.](#)

Coordination

Coordination mechanisms can support actors to develop secondary education which is responsive to the prevention of child marriage and the inclusion of girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers from the start of the emergency. To achieve this, it is particularly important for education co-ordination mechanisms to collaborate with other sectors including child protection, GBV, health, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to develop joint and complementary intervention in humanitarian response plans and strategies. These must include joint measurable outcomes and indicators for adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. Co-ordination with protection actors can strengthen safe, gender-responsive and inclusive secondary education, including improved safeguarding, adolescent girls' safe spaces and psychosocial support and with cash actors, can ensure carefully targeted cash to remove barriers to adolescent girls' participation. Co-ordination with early childhood development actors can deliver childcare in secondary schools for adolescent girls and female teachers with young children. Finally,

coordination with nutrition can provide feeding programmes, and coordination with WASH actors can advance appropriate sex-segregated and lockable bathrooms, and dignity kit distributions.

Toolbox: Co-ordinated action to address child marriage

Many influential organisations have highlighted the gap in co-ordination to address child marriage in emergencies. The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage highlights as one of six key points the need for strengthened co-ordination between GBV child protection and health, education actors in emergency response and across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.⁴⁴ Within the humanitarian architecture, there remains a lack of dedicated child marriage coordination structure or strategy to lead forward cross-sectoral action on child marriage in emergencies; however there are some positive examples:

- The establishment of frameworks to address child marriage within emergency management systems and structures was identified as a promising practice in 2019 in the child marriage in humanitarian settings report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁴⁵
- The GBV and Child Protection field co-operation framework provides a positive example of co-ordinated action to address child marriage in 2020 in the Occupied Palestinian territory where UNFPA and UNICEF developed a joint child marriage strategy and task force to oversee implementation.⁴⁶

Assessment

Assessments are essential to designing secondary education which prevents child marriage and includes girls who are ever married, pregnant, and/or young mothers. Assessments should explore existing and emerging risks facing adolescent girls in each crisis, including child marriage. Assessments should leverage existing national data on marriage prevalence⁴⁷ and education⁴⁸ and capture strengths and gaps in the education system for these adolescent girls. Data collection should be disaggregated by sex, age and disability to enable intersectional analysis. Assessments should include conflict analysis of the risks, challenges and solutions affecting adolescent girls at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers, which has been generated through engagement with these groups of adolescent girls themselves, as well as with women and girls-led organisations. Secondary education actors can engage early childhood development, nutrition, MHPSS, WASH, cash, food security, child protection and GBV actors to assess how best to support adolescent girls' safe access, participation and learning in secondary education in each location.



Toolbox: Context analysis with adolescent girls

Engage adolescent girls to understand the barriers and risks which they face accessing and participating in secondary education in emergencies. To reach these girls, negotiation with community leaders and parents, caregivers and/or in-laws may be needed. Ensure women facilitation teams are available to lead these group discussions. Questions on child marriage can also be included within multi-sector humanitarian needs assessments to help identify the specific drivers of child marriage in each context and inform mitigating actions to advance adolescent girls' secondary education attendance and learning outcomes.

- Gender-responsive needs assessment checklist from the [EiE-Genkit - A core resource package on gender in education in emergencies](#) addresses child marriage.
- [Context analyses tools on child marriage in crises and forced displacement settings](#) by PLAN International and UNHCR.⁴⁹

Response strategies

Education response preparedness, emergency planning and implementation must include targeted actions to address child marriage to ensure that a quality, equitable education response is possible. This is particularly important within secondary education. Funding for secondary education should be available as early as possible when a crisis occurs. This prioritisation by donors has a lifelong impact on adolescent girls at risk of marriage as delays in providing secondary education quickly contribute to increased child marriage in emergencies.

Community engagement is a critical strategy to support adolescent girls' successful participation and completion of secondary education in emergencies. Community leaders and members can influence individuals and wider social norms to improve adolescent girls' access to education. Changing social norms in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings requires benefits-based messaging about the value of adolescent girls' education through multiple influential channels such as community and religious leaders, the media and teachers. Empowering adolescent girls and engaging community leaders to promote positive norms can be highly effective.⁵⁰ Education actors should work closely with community-based groups and organisations led by women and girls, adolescents and youth to promote positive social norms.

Toolbox: Cash and voucher assistance

Including cash and voucher assistance within secondary education programming can be effective to address child marriage, if informed by thoughtful analysis of child marriage dynamics in the local context.⁵¹ The careful design of cash and voucher assistance within wider programming has been

shown to be effective in humanitarian contexts in delaying marriage and improving educational outcomes for adolescent girls. Cash can also support adolescent girls' access to GBV and Child Protection case management and wider psychosocial support services.⁵²

- [8 key actions to implement adolescent-responsive cash and voucher assistance](#)⁵³ developed by PLAN International and the Women's Refugee Commission
- [GBV risk mitigation in cash and voucher assistance](#) developed by the GBV Area of Responsibility and UNFPA

Monitoring and evaluation

Disaggregated data collection on adolescent girls' enrolment, attendance and learning outcomes is essential. Evidence suggests that adolescent girls who are struggling at school due to barriers to their regular participation, starting secondary education late and poor learning outcomes are at increased risk of child marriage.⁵⁴ Monitoring should capture whether adolescent girls attending secondary school are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers, enabling real-time adjustments in child marriage-responsive programming. Many stakeholders are supporting improved monitoring through the EiE information management system.^{55 56} Engaging adolescent girls in participatory evaluations collects insights which can strengthen secondary education programming.

Domain 2: Access and learning environment

Equal and equitable access

Humanitarian responses must prioritise equal and equitable access to education for adolescent girls, especially those at risk of or affected by child marriage, early pregnancy and motherhood. Firstly, national secondary education systems must include refugees in alignment with the Global Compact on Refugees.⁵⁷ While exclusionary policies around marriage and pregnancy have mostly been removed, refugees are often placed in parallel education systems which lack certification and accreditation, or face limited access to education, leaving them without protected, recognised pathways to formal qualifications. Refugee inclusion in national systems can help ensure that they receive protection and opportunities which support their access to accredited, certificate-bearing secondary education alongside other students.⁵⁸ While exclusionary policies around pregnancy and marriage have mostly been removed, without policies which explicitly protect education access, adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers continue to experience discrimination and exclusion.



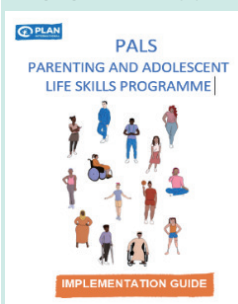
Toolbox: Accelerated education

Adolescent girls in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings may need accelerated education programmes to complete primary education and catch up with their peers in secondary education. As outlined in the SEWG and Jesuit Refugee Service 2023 report *Accelerate with care: Towards gender-responsive accelerated secondary education*,⁵⁹ accelerated secondary education programming offers the potential for adolescent girls to access secondary education despite prolonged disruption and changes to social circumstances, including child marriage and child-related responsibilities. Accelerated education programme guidelines outline the need for certification, qualified teachers and learner and age-responsive teaching approaches.⁶⁰ For adolescent girls who are out of school and ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers, accelerated education programmes will need to include flexible pathways which are tailored to adolescent girls' levels and lives. These may include childcare for girls who are young mothers of young children, psychosocial support, mentorship, formal and informal education, vocational training, livelihood support and protection strategies.⁶¹ Girls may also need cash assistance to reduce financial barriers.

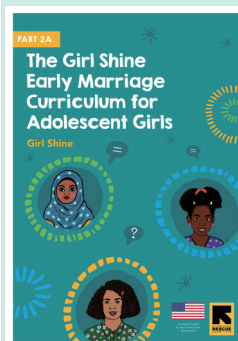
Diverse adolescent girls, including girls at risk of marriage, who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers, must be engaged and supported within gender-responsive and inclusive enrolment approaches. Adolescent girls' safe spaces and tailored life skills and psychosocial support programming can work within and alongside secondary education programming to improve education and safety outcomes for adolescent girls. The improved life skills and self-efficacy, psychosocial support, friendship circles and mentorship which these groups provide can support adolescent girls to sustain their education through experiences of discrimination, violence, child marriage, pregnancy and motherhood. In addition, when used with targeted content for girls who are out of school and are married, pregnant, and/or young mothers, this approach can increase girls' aspirations to return to school and engage parents, caregivers and in-laws to support girls' education. Adolescent girls' safe spaces and groups can also help adolescent girls voice their needs and priorities to inform the design of education programming in crisis and forced displacement settings. Safe spaces and groups for adolescent girls can be cost-effective and scalable when implemented in partnership with women and girls-led movements and community organisations and delivered in partnership with the education system by young women mentors from the local community.⁶²

Toolbox: Adolescent girls' life skills and empowerment groups

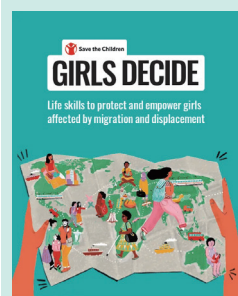
Adolescent girls benefit from life skills and empowerment groups in forced displacement and crisis-affected settings.^{63 64} These groups are facilitated by young women mentors from the local community within safe spaces where girls can learn about their health, safety and power, including healthy relationship management, goal-setting and negotiation skills with parents, caregivers, or in-laws regarding schooling and marriage decisions. These groups can be integrated within secondary education or community settings and delivered in partnership with local women and girls' led organisations. These groups also strengthen girls' access to child protection and GBV response services when they experience violence. Promising approaches combine adolescent girls' groups with tailored content for ever married girls alongside gender transformative parenting and male engagement approaches (see the following toolbox).



- Parenting and Adolescent Life Skills (PALS)⁶⁵ was developed by PLAN International for emergency settings. The programme aims to equip adolescents aged 10 to 19 and their caregivers with essential information, skills and resources to support adolescent health, safety and wellbeing in times of crisis. PALS includes tailored content for ever married girls to address the unique challenges which they face.



- Girl Shine⁶⁶ is an adolescent girls protection and empowerment approach developed by the IRC for emergencies. Girl Shine includes differentiated content for adolescent girls who are married or at risk of child marriage. As well as life skills content designed for use with ever married adolescent girls, the parenting component has also been adapted for use with in-laws of ever married girls.



- Girls Decide⁶⁷ is a life skills curriculum which aims to empower and protect girls in situations of migration and/or displacement so that they have safer journeys and better outcomes. The curriculum can be used for girls from the age of 10 upwards, including young women, and provides a valuable set of activities for shared learning in Girl-Friendly Spaces, Girls' Clubs and other settings where we engage with girls.

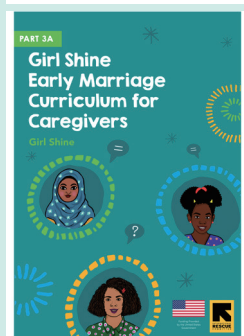
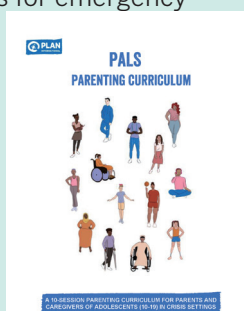


In addition, it's important to engage adolescent girls and their families to foster supportive views among parents, caregivers, in-laws and partners. Engaging parents, in-laws, male partners and the wider community to help to support adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to access secondary education through formal and alternative education pathways is critical.

Toolbox: Gender transformative parenting

Women and men parents, caregivers and in-laws are the primary decision-makers who enable adolescent girls' completion of secondary education. They significantly affect adolescent girls' ability to achieve positive learning outcomes by encouraging and allowing time for adolescent girls to complete homework and attend secondary education regularly and on time. They create a safe and supportive family home where adolescent girls are mentally and physically well, and so able to learn. For unmarried girls, they significantly influence if or when adolescent girls marry. Gender transformative parenting approaches engage women and men parents, caregivers and in-laws to strengthen their relationships with girls, improve communication, promote diverse gender roles for parents and children, and promote understanding of adolescent development, reproductive health, violence and positive discipline. These approaches can be integrated within secondary education programming for in-and-out-of-school adolescent girls and their parents, carers and in-laws to great effect. Gender transformative male engagement programming models for emergency response can also powerfully engage men as fathers, as well as partners.

- The adolescent girls' life skills and empowerment approaches developed by PLAN International⁶⁸ and the IRC⁶⁹ for emergencies both include women and men parenting groups – with tailored content for in-laws of married girls.
- The Safe Families Common Approach developed by Save the Children supports parents to practise non-violence and strengthen their relationships with adolescent children through better communication skills, including on issues like child marriage.



Protection and wellbeing

Protection and wellbeing within educational settings is crucial for encouraging adolescent girls at risk of

marriage, who are ever married, pregnant and/or have children to complete secondary education in crisis and forced displacement settings. Bullying, harassment and violence in secondary education significantly increase the likelihood of adolescent girls dropping out and reduce their learning outcomes. Family members can hesitate to support adolescent girls' access to secondary education due to fears of sexual harassment and violence. Conversely, adolescent girls in safe and supportive learning environments are more likely to attend school and achieve better learning outcomes. Protective learning environments support adolescent girls' safe participation through robust safeguarding policies and practice which uphold adolescent girls' rights to violence-free education. In forced displacement and crisis-affected settings, it is critical to improve the safety of routes to and from school. Locating educational facilities close to adolescent girls can facilitate their safe access and minimise time constraints caused by long-distance travel. It can also be useful to provide transportation allowance.

Within secondary schools, there should be a balance of women and men teachers who are trained to create safe, gender-responsive and inclusive classrooms, facilitate curricula which support social emotional learning and combat harmful attitudes towards married, pregnant or parenting adolescent girls. Secondary education actors should partner with local groups and organisations which promote child protection and address school-related GBV. There is a wealth of ways in which secondary education players can collaborate meaningfully with child protection and GBV organisations to address child marriage.⁷⁰ These include: risk analysis, gender responsive and inclusive integrated programming design, training teachers and learners to support adolescent girls' access to child protection and GBV response services, safe spaces providing adolescent girls' life skills and empowerment groups and safeguarding and reporting mechanisms.

Toolbox: Value clarification and attitudes online training

Educators should be trained to connect learners to support services, including child protection, GBV response and SRHR services. Value clarifications and attitude training for teachers, health and protection actors can support them to provide confidential, non-judgmental support and respect the choices of adolescent girls.

- Learning series to tackle child marriage in crisis and forced displacement settings by PLAN International and UNHCR.⁷¹
- Adolescent girl service provider training: self-guided or group by the IRC.⁷²



Develop and publicly post clear rules against sexual harassment and GBV and include within the secondary education personnel code of conduct. Train all secondary education personnel on the code of conduct and institute strong, independent accountability and safeguarding mechanisms. Teach comprehensive sexuality education which ensures all learners understand their rights to safe and healthy relationships.

Facilities and services

Education facilities support the safety and wellbeing of learners, teachers and staff and are linked to health, nutrition, psychosocial and protection services. Gender-responsive WASH infrastructure improves adolescent girls' retention and learning outcomes.^{73 74} School nutrition programmes particularly benefit adolescent girls who are pregnant and/or young mothers which enhances their learning outcomes. Rebuilding schools provides a chance to add childcare facilities for adolescent girls and women teachers. Secondary education can also empower young mothers with knowledge and skills about their own and their children's health and nutrition, mental health and wellbeing, and their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Toolbox: Early childhood education and childcare

Girls spend 50% more time on unpaid domestic and care work than boys; girls who are ever married or in a union spend more than twice as much time on unpaid work as their unmarried peers, impacting their education and aspirations.⁷⁵ To ensure an equitable secondary education response, adolescent girls who are young mothers need childcare as part of secondary education programming.

- Connecting early childhood education and development initiatives with secondary educations can provide the children of adolescent girls with quality education and childcare. This early educational input for the children of adolescent girls may help to mitigate the intergenerational negative impact of child marriage on the educational outcomes of the children of young mothers.
- Early childhood education and childcare facilities can also benefit women teachers who are young mothers who are often underrepresented at secondary education level and so contribute to advancing a gender-responsive secondary education learning environment which also benefits adolescent girls.

Domain 3: Teaching and Learning

Curricula

Gender-responsive, socially inclusive curricula support the learning and wellbeing of adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. Ensure that the curriculum is appropriate to the age, developmental level, capacities and unique needs of adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. Secondary education curricula should promote positive role models of women and girls with varied roles in society, equal to men and boys, rather than limit the portrayal of women and girls to mothers and wives, which can contribute to social norms which justify child marriage.⁷⁶ Instead, curricula should promote stereotype-defying role models for adolescent girls and boys and encourage girls to study science, engineering, technology and maths-related subjects.⁷⁷ Curricula should include comprehensive sexual reproductive health and rights information⁷⁸ which promotes women's and girls' bodily autonomy and choice⁷⁹ and includes life skills which are age-appropriate and reflect the experiences and reality of girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. This should include promoting understanding of the benefits of delaying marriage and pregnancy, recognising and seeking help for GBV and consent.⁸⁰ Using a differentiated learning approach, these topics need to be adapted to be taught to adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to ensure that they provide the level of information they need to navigate safer sex and avoid stigmatising or distressing girls who are already married.⁸¹

Teaching and learning process

Education in emergencies actors need to support secondary education teachers to promote positive learning experiences for adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers and address any discrimination in the learning environment from peers. Support and train teachers to understand child marriage and how to create inclusive, bias-free classrooms for adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers.⁸² Training should cover codes of conduct, reporting violence, and referral pathways to child protection,⁸³ GBV, MHPSS, and reproductive health services. Teachers should be equipped to work with communities and support girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers and through flexible learning pathways. This may require teachers are trained on differentiated learning approaches, accelerated education, and use of technology for distance learning. Community-based study groups can further support these girls by providing social assets and access to learning resources.



Domain 4: Teachers and other education personnel

Recruitment and selection

Increased numbers of women teachers result in a more positive secondary education experience for adolescent girls, including girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers, and improve their retention and learning outcomes.⁸⁴ Teachers play a critical role in creating protective learning environments, so their attitudes on child marriage and educating adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers should be assessed during the recruitment process. A gender-responsive and inclusive recruitment process can help recruit women teachers who are critical of creating learning environments where adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers can succeed. Special measures may be needed to proactively identify and recruit women teachers including adjusting entry qualifications, providing ongoing training and additional support or organising safe transportation, and accommodation and childcare for women teachers who have young children.⁸⁵

Toolbox: Women teachers and mentors

Evidence shows that providing girls with women teachers and/or women from the community in secondary education who provide mentoring and positive role models can raise learning, safety and wellbeing outcomes.

- The adolescent girls' life skills and empowerment approaches (see toolbox) engage young mentors from the community.
- An independent evaluation of the CAMFED-supported Learner Guide Programme in Tanzania – which deploys upper secondary level girls to support younger girls – found that girls were 33 percent less likely to drop out and learnt twice as much as comparison groups.⁸⁶



Code of conduct

Implementing a robust code of conduct is essential to creating the protective secondary education environment which is needed by adolescent girls who are at risk of marriage, ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers to complete secondary education successfully. An unsafe secondary education environment compromises adolescent girls' desire to attend secondary education and weakens support from partners, parents and the wider community for adolescent girls to attend secondary education. The code of conduct also upholds teachers and holds them accountable for good practices in gender-responsive, inclusive secondary education which are critical for adolescent girls' successful completion of secondary education.

Domain 5: Education Policy

Law and policy formation

Education authorities must ensure quality, free, and inclusive education for forcibly displaced and crisis-affected populations, especially adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers. Policies should guarantee these girls access to national secondary education with legal protections, language support and certified qualifications. Currently, 63% of countries lack laws to protect girls' education rights during pregnancy, with regions like Africa, Europe and Latin America leading in positive policies.⁸⁷ Even where there are positive policies, implementation remains weak, with limited awareness among teachers and ongoing stigma against these girls. Education actors should reinforce policy awareness, advocate reform and improve safety measures based on feedback from adolescent girls in all their diversity.

Planning and implementation

Gender-transformative, whole-system approaches are most effective at addressing the multi-dimensional drivers of child marriage and barriers to girls' secondary education. Such approaches bring political leaders together with diverse stakeholders, and embed gender equality in national plans, policies and budgets to promote sustainable change.⁸⁸ Secondary education actors need to work closely with early childhood development, child protection, GBV, livelihoods, health, MHPSS and WASH sectors to deliver secondary education which is responsive to the prevention of child marriage and the inclusion of adolescent girls who are ever married, pregnant and/or young mothers.



Toolbox: Integrated adolescent-centred design

To achieve secondary education programming in emergencies which is responsive to child marriage, integrated programming is needed. As outlined in Plan International's adolescent programming in emergencies toolkit, evidence and experience requires us to:

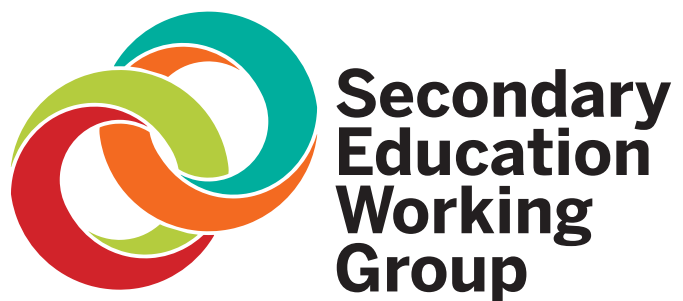
- Place **adolescents at the centre** of action, address them as drivers of their own actions and promote their participation and leadership.
- Address **specific risks and barriers for adolescent girls** and engage with boys and men to tackle gender inequality, discrimination and violence against girls and women.
- **Work at all levels** and engage with families and communities, local power holders, service providers, duty-bearers and humanitarian actors to improve action for adolescents.
- **Deliver intentional, multi-sectoral programmes** covering protection, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights and economic empowerment intervention tailored to the needs and capacities of adolescents and girls in each emergency context.

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Cover photo: Proby in her second year of secondary school, joined a new club for students to learn about children's rights, Rwanda.

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