



## Recommendations for the First 100 Days in Office

Globally, **1 in 5 girls** around the world are married while still children themselves- that's 23 girls every minute who marry before the age of 18. Child marriage is a form of gender-based violence and a violation of girls' human rights, and happens across cultures and contexts. The pathways into child marriage are diverse and complex, yet its root cause is gender inequality. Evidence shows that child marriage exposes girls to increased violence throughout their lives, denies them access to social networks and support systems, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and gender inequality, with both short- and long-term repercussions for girls' education and health.

With the global spread of COVID-19, we are already seeing increases in child marriage due to the secondary impacts of the pandemic and related containment measures, including school closures, limited livelihood opportunities, food insecurity, restrictions on movement, and disruptions to essential protection and health services for girls. UNFPA is estimating as many as 13 million additional child marriages over the next 10 years if we do not act quickly.

In addition to its impact on generations of girls and their families, child marriage also inhibits the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals. Child marriage perpetuates cycles of poverty, poor health, illiteracy, and gender-based violence that have negative impacts on overall sustainable development and global peace and security goals. Around the world, the U.S. Government's investments in foreign assistance should include a focus on addressing child marriage to ensure that goals on issues as diverse as education, malnutrition, maternal and newborn health, gender-based violence, countering violent extremism, democracy and good governance, and economic empowerment are met for both this and the future generations of girls, their families, communities, and countries.

*Girls Not Brides is a global partnership of more than 1300 civil society organizations from over 100 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential. Girls Not Brides USA became the first official Girls Not Brides National Partnership in 2012. Before then, the group was known as the U.S. Child Marriage Coalition and was instrumental in pushing forward key policies on child marriage in the United States. Girls Not Brides USA is composed of over 60 civil society organizations working to end child marriage wherever it occurs.*

*For more information please visit [girlsnotbrides.org](http://girlsnotbrides.org) or contact any of the Coalition Co-Chairs:*

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We applaud commitments already made to promote U.S. global leadership and to champion girls' empowerment in U.S. foreign policy and assistance. We urge the next administration to continue to elevate the voices and needs of girls and young women globally. Specifically, we would like to recommend five ways for the next Administration to promote the rights and empowerment of girls at risk of child marriage and already married girls in its first 100 days of office:



Jordi Matas / Save the Children

**1) Establish an inter-agency working group through executive order to review and improve the effectiveness and coordination of U.S. government efforts to end child marriage and address the needs of married girls globally.**

This should be part of broader mandate to address gender equality and gender-based violence prevention and response efforts across agencies. By bringing together the expertise and strength of relevant U.S. agencies, such as the U.S. Department of State, USAID, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S.

Department of Labor (DOL), the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the U.S. Government can more strategically work to address barriers to the empowerment of adolescent girls. This inter-agency working group should have high-level leadership from USAID. The working group should develop a public report, accessible to partner countries and girls themselves, every two years on the status and progress of U.S. This report should include a review of child marriage data and response needs in humanitarian settings, identification and documentation of best practices, and lessons learned across contexts. The report should articulate how the U.S. government's efforts to end child marriage and address the needs of married girls across the globe are in alignment with, and providing support to partner countries' national action plans to end child marriage, where such plans exist. It should also include recommendations for ways to more strategically work with other governments, multilateral bodies and organizations, the private sector, and civil society organizations, including girl-led groups and networks.

Recognizing the interrelationship between ending child marriage and ensuring women's economic empowerment and meaningful participation in decision-making spaces, this cross-agency working group should also coordinate with existing multi-agency efforts focused on women's economic empowerment and women, peace, and security.

Together, agencies should prioritize a holistic and coordinated approach to prevention, mitigation, and response to gender-based violence, and particularly child marriage, as a key barrier to women's economic empowerment and women and girls' meaningful participation in peace processes.

**2) Prioritize addressing child marriage holistically in the U.S. Government global COVID-19 response and recovery efforts by applying a gender lens across all efforts, and by ensuring specific funding and programming to prevent child marriage and respond to the needs of married girls.**

We recommend that the U.S. Government make a commitment to take a gender-transformative approach to COVID-19 response and recovery. All policy and programs to respond to the global crisis across sectors should

employ a gender analysis through all phases of program development and execution in order to address global increases in child marriage. Programming to prevent and respond to child marriage should also be prioritized and robustly funded, especially programs ensuring access to health services, quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education, psychosocial support, and to build girls' leadership and civic engagement skills so that they are empowered to make decisions about their own lives.



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**3) Demonstrate high-level global commitment to ending child marriage and responding to the needs of married girls by announcing it as a U.S. foreign policy and assistance priority during the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2021.**

We also recommend spearheading and launching a targeted policy and funding initiative as part of the Generation Equality Forum and resulting five-year roadmap. This should include dedicated funding, leadership, and advocacy across the six action coalitions to ensure that ending child marriage is a global priority for the international community.

**4) Issue guidance from the National Security Council (NSC) to relevant agencies for civil society consultations that prioritize the safe and meaningful participation of adolescent girls, including girl-led groups and networks.**

These consultations should occur during programming design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of global humanitarian and development programs. We urge U.S. Government leaders to increase attention and support to girls' agency, civic and political participation, and leadership skills across the board, including in the design, implementation, and accountability mechanisms of the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, the Adolescent Girl Strategy, and any other U.S. strategies or initiatives directly impacting them. Girls and young women can and do play a significant role as agents of transformation, in accordance with their evolving capacities and increasing autonomy. When they are afforded the opportunity to communicate their opinions, are encouraged to take responsibility, and are invited to participate in decision-making processes, girls and young women develop a sense of belonging, justice, responsibility, and solidarity.

**5) Include funding for global programming in the President's Budget Request that addresses the unique and intersecting needs of adolescent girls at risk of child marriage and already married girls, including:**

- No less than **\$30 million** should be dedicated to the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive effort to end child marriage and meet the needs of married girls in alignment with the United States Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. This should be in addition to funding specifically to address the increased need due to COVID-19.
- These funds should include a commitment to the U.S. commitment to the joint UNICEF/UNFPA Global Program to End Child Marriage, which has generated remarkable results addressing child marriage in 12 of the most high-prevalence or high-burden countries. This commitment must be commensurate with the increased needs due to COVID-19.



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