

# Ending ~~child marriage~~ in Ethiopia

This brief highlights key learnings and puts forward evidence-based recommendations for the Government of Ethiopia to take action for preventing and addressing child marriage.

**CURRENT STATE**

## Progress towards ending child marriage in Ethiopia

Over the past two decades, Ethiopia has been making progress towards ending the practice of child marriage (SDG 5.3). Today, UNICEF estimates that **four in 10 girls in Ethiopia are married before age 18, down from six in 10 in 2005.**<sup>1</sup> World Vision recognises the efforts undertaken by the Government of Ethiopia to realise this progress, including enacting the 2020 revised Family Code to establish the minimum age of marriage at 18, and Article 648 of the Criminal Code to criminalise forced and child marriage.

As child marriage is driven by varied and complex factors that require multisectoral solutions, delivered through strong child protection systems, World Vision in Ethiopia has been working alongside the government to address child marriage for many years through child protection technical programming. This work has included strengthening local child protection structures, mobilising community groups including faith leaders, enhancing awareness among the wider community members and empowering girls and boys to actively engage in protecting themselves and others from violence.<sup>2</sup>

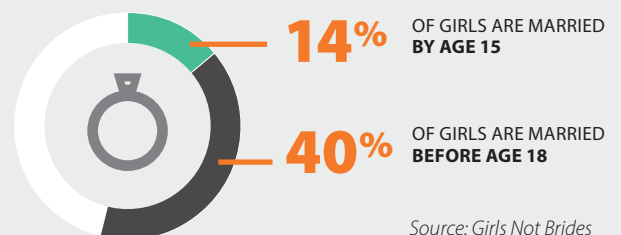
**Despite this progress, however, Ethiopia still remains in the top five countries in the world—and second in**



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*Caption here.*

**Africa—in terms of absolute numbers of girls who are married as children—only behind India, Bangladesh and Nigeria.**<sup>3</sup> Conflict and drought in recent years are also putting this progress at risk of not only slowing, but potentially reversing.<sup>4</sup> Across Ethiopia, rates of child marriage vary widely and fluctuate in crisis. Currently, the Amhara region records the highest rates of child marriage in Ethiopia, with approximately 45% of girls getting married before the age of 18;<sup>5</sup> while according to local government sources, child marriage has increased by an average of 119% across regions worst hit by drought and food insecurity between January and April 2021 and 2022, including Somali, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region (SNNP).<sup>6</sup>



Source: Girls Not Brides



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Caption here.

**While laws and policies are in place relevant to child protection; recognition, implementation and enforcement of these laws have demonstrated to be inadequate to protect children from early marriage.**

Ethiopian law provides exceptions to its own legal ban on child marriage, allowing future spouses and/or parents or guardians to apply to the Minister of Justice for an early age exemption that allows children to marry under the age of 18 in religious and customary marriages.<sup>7</sup> And in cases where an exemption is not granted, parents and elders who commit the marriage, are most often not held accountable.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

### Evidence-based recommendations to take action against child marriage in Ethiopia

World Vision believes the Government of Ethiopia can make significant progress in ensuring all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential without the threat of child marriage. Therefore, World Vision and its partners urge the government to renew its commitment to ending child marriage by adopting evidence-based, INSPIRE-aligned pledges at the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children and beyond.

**World Vision is confident that, in partnership with civil society organisations, the Government of Ethiopia can effectively combat child marriage and protect the rights of children, in the present and for their futures.**

## We call on the Government of Ethiopia to commit to ...

### FORBID – TO FLOURISH AND THRIVE

#### 1 Address the exceptions disparity between laws prohibiting child marriage, its implementation and cultural practices.

- A. **Amend existing legislation to eliminate all exceptions** that permit marriage under the age of 18 and ensure the enforcement of the law.
- B. **Enact legislation mandating evidence-based behaviour-change programmes** to eradicate child marriage.



### EVIDENCE

#### *These recommendations are supported by the evidence as follows:*

- » Evidence highlights the importance of strengthening child marriage laws in Ethiopia, including providing Woreda and Kebele-level officials with the necessary support to consistently enforce the law.<sup>8</sup>
- » A World Vision Barrier Analysis cites common correlations between the knowledge of the legal age of marriage and parental adherence. Parents who married off their daughters under the age of 18 shared that they believed the legal marriage age to be 16–17 years.<sup>9</sup> A consensus among this group of parents also emerged that there were no legal consequences for marrying a daughter below 18. Limited information is available around the causes of why laws fail to be enforced, however there appears to be a connection between social norms and law enforcement in communities (i.e., police officers perceive stigma and discrimination if they enforce laws against religious leaders, elders or prominent community figures).<sup>10</sup>

Learnings suggest that widespread knowledge of laws and punishments, and an elevated fear of sanctions may provide parents with some legal pressure that counteracts the social burden of marrying their children.<sup>11</sup> A 2023 World Vision Contribution Analysis revealed that elders caused more social pressure than fear of the law, emphasising the need for targeted social behaviour-change programmes.<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, the Contribution Analysis revealed that a continuum in the change process—from education and awareness to action—needs to happen at the individual, household, community and system levels. The study also highlighted the dynamic and delicate balance of social norms change, policy change and the implementation of the legal framework to contribute to the prevention and reduction of child marriage, as evidence points to using an education-only approach may be driving child marriage underground and undermining the outcomes rather than creating desired behaviour change and addressing the root causes.<sup>13</sup>

 **Implementation and enforcement of laws**

 **Norms and values**

## We call on the Government of Ethiopia to commit to ...

### CHALLENGE PERCEPTIONS – TO TRANSFORM THE NORMS

## 2 Partner with civil society organisations to implement initiatives that address harmful social, gender and cultural norms contributing to child marriage:

- A. **Build upon CSOs to develop a norms strategy** specifically for community leaders and faith leaders focused on changing entrenched social norms that enable child marriage.
- B. **Adapt and scale up integrated family and community behaviour-change models** with livelihood programmes to address root causes and shift the belief that child marriage is a problem to be eradicated, not a solution.
- C. **Invest in initiatives to empower girls with education** (including sexual reproductive health, future job skills and voice).



### EVIDENCE

#### *These recommendations are supported by the evidence as follows:*

- » The importance of building upon the initiatives with faith leaders is highlighted in SNET (Social Norms Exploration Tool) explorations, where it is revealed that religious and traditional norms, often reinforced by community and faith leaders, perpetuate child marriage. World Vision's Barrier Analysis shows significant pressure from elders and leaders, poses a challenge as parents look to them for guidance on such matters.<sup>14</sup>
- » Research from World Vision Social Behaviour Change (SBC) demonstration sites in Amhara and Oromia identified five key determinants of child marriage: social, gender and cultural norms; adolescent agency; Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH); educational opportunities; household resilience; and child protection systems. These findings emphasise the need to address both norms and their underlying drivers in intervention programmes.<sup>15</sup>





Results of adapting an existing Community Change approach—a tool used by World Vision Ethiopia to facilitate dialogue to help communities explore and take action on underlying beliefs, socio-cultural norms and traditional practices that either challenge or support the well-being of children—demonstrated both an individual change in attitude and increase in knowledge about the negative effects of child marriage; and empowerment as a community group to collaborate on the issue. The greatest changes were demonstrated by male participants in attitude towards gender norms.<sup>16</sup>

When looking at the success rate of single component interventions over the past 20 years, evidence indicates that economic incentive interventions have been most successful. Notably, conditional cash and asset transfers aimed at supporting education have proven highly effective.<sup>17</sup>

- » In Ethiopia, one study from Girls Not Brides shows that girls whose mothers are educated are two times less likely to marry under age 18 than girls whose mothers are uneducated. The same pattern is not found in relation to fathers' education, thus demonstrating a role model effect.<sup>18</sup>

Education initiatives to keep girls in school have been shown to support the reduction of child marriage. Such initiatives include access to both traditional and non-traditional schooling, cash support, life skills training, integration of health education and awareness raising about the importance of girls' education. Evidence from other contexts also point to the importance of wrap around support for girls to keep them in school, including strengthening their resilience and protection.<sup>21</sup>

Aflateen, a rigorously studied social and financial education model designed for adolescents ages 15–19 challenges young people to explore their identity and the world around them and consider topics such as child marriage and social and economic empowerment. Demonstrated outcomes include improvement in healthy decision making in personal relationships, critical thinking about gender roles (both girls and boys), and financial knowledge and entrepreneurial attitudes.<sup>23</sup>

-  **Norms and values**
-  **Parent and caregiver support**
-  **Income and economic strengthening**
-  **Education and life skills**

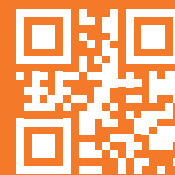


World Vision would like to thank our donors, international and local partners and the Government of Ethiopia for their ongoing commitment and investments to end all forms of violence against children, including their critical support in addressing child and early marriage.

**We are confident that, in partnership with CSOs, the Government of Ethiopia can effectively combat child marriage and protect the rights and futures of its children.**



Learn more about World Vision's work to end violence against children



For more information, contact:

**Eshetu Alemu**  
Protection and Equity Program Manager  
eshetu\_alemu@wvi.org

**Teresa Wallace**  
Technical Director, Quality and Innovation  
– Child Protection and Participation  
teresa\_wallace@worldvision.org

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## WORLD VISION RESOURCES

### National Reports:

Evaluating WV Ethiopia's Child Marriage Interventions: A Contribution Analysis

Barriers and Facilitators of Child Marriage in Ethiopia: A Social and Behaviour Change Study in the Amhara and Oromia Regions to inform programming for the protection of minors. May to September 2022.

Ethiopia SNE Analysis Report, Gechi and Dera. January 2023

Young and Married, World Vision. October 2023

Social and Behavioural Change Demonstration Sites: Final Report Ethiopia and Bangladesh, May 2023.

### Global Reports:

Young and Married, World Vision. October 2023

No happily ever after, What children really think about child marriage in humanitarian crises, World Vision, 2020

Case Studies: Strengthening livelihood and preventing child marriage, World Vision, 2020

Fighting for a future: an index of girls' opportunities in countries and regions with high rates of child marriage, World Vision, 2022

Breaking the chain: Empowering girls and communities to end child marriages during COVID-19 and beyond, World Vision, 2020

Child Marriage Round Table, World Vision, UNICEF, Girls Not Brides, UNFPA, Save the Children, Global Affairs Canada, December 2023.

Faith Norms, are they the neglected angle? Reflection from research and work of World Vision, International, 2022

## ENDNOTES

- 1 UNICEF Data and Analytics Section, 2017.
- 2 World Vision Ethiopia Child Protection Technical Programme Evaluation Report, December 2019-March 2020.
- 3 Girls Not Brides, Under 18 Burden in sub-Saharan Africa / Girls Not Brides Child Marriage Atlas
- 4 UNICEF, 2016.
- 5 Multi-Country Analytical Study of Legislation, Policies, Interventions and Cultural Practices on Child Marriage in Africa, UN Women.
- 6 <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/child-marriage-rise-horn-africa-drought-crisis-intensifies>
- 7 Girls Not Brides, Ethiopia.
- 8 Towards Ending Child Marriage in Ethiopia, Policy Brief, Share-Net Ethiopia, 2022
- 9 Barriers and Facilitators of Child Marriage in Ethiopia: A Social and Behaviour Change Study in the Amhara and Oromia Regions to Inform Programming for the Protection of Minors, 2022.)
- 10 Barriers and Facilitators of Child Marriage in Ethiopia: A Social and Behaviour Change Study in the Amhara and Oromia Regions to Inform Programming for the Protection of Minors, 2022.)
- 11 Barriers and Facilitators of Child Marriage in Ethiopia: A Social and Behaviour Change Study in the Amhara and Oromia Regions to Inform Programming for the Protection of Minors, 2022. (p17)
- 12 Evaluating WV Ethiopia's Child Marriage Interventions, A Contribution Analysis. World Vision, 2023.
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 *ibid*, p3.
- 15 *ibid.*
- 16 *ibid*, p.16-18.
- 17 Evaluating WV Ethiopia's Child Marriage Interventions, A Contribution Analysis. World Vision, 2023.
- 18 Girls Not Brides, Girls Education and Child Marriage Thematic Brief (Malhotra, A., and Elnakib, S., 2021, Evolution in the evidence base on child marriage: 2000-2019, s.l. : UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.)