Advocacy briefing paper

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TEN YEARS OF PROGRESS: REFLECTING ON THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted its first substantive resolution on child, early and forced marriage, recognising that accelerated action was needed to end the practice. A year later, member states set ending child, early and forced marriage by 2030 as a target in the Sustainable Development Goals. In the years since, UN member states have elaborated on the original resolution to develop a comprehensive global normative framework that defines the magnitude and drivers of child, early and forced marriage, its consequences and impacts, setting out concrete actions to address it.

2024 marks the ten-year anniversary of this landmark resolution and presents an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come as a global community in our efforts to end child, early and forced marriage, while taking stock of how far we still must go.

The UNGA resolution, along with its sister resolution adopted biennially at the Human Rights Council, has been critical in anchoring global action and establishing a normative framework to end child, early and forced marriage. The resolution has called for action across multiple spheres to address the root causes and drivers of child, early, forced marriage, establish supportive legal and policy environments to prevent and address the practice, and to realise the human rights of girls and women, including ever-married girls – that is, girls who are or have been married. From the beginning, it has put girls' empowerment, autonomy and meaningful involvement in decision-making about all aspects of their lives at the centre of community- and national-level responses.

This briefing paper examines progress and setbacks across nine key themes: laws and policies; girls' empowerment, autonomy and decision-making; gender-transformative strategies; education; health; sexual and gender-based violence; economic empowerment and poverty reduction; humanitarian emergencies; and the role of civil society. It also examines four areas that have been recognised in the resolution but not explored as deeply as other areas, including:

- informal unions
- · support for already married girls
- intersectionality
- the role of families in preventing child, early and forced marriage.

In each of these areas, the language in the resolution has progressively strengthened over time, with very few setbacks.

In addition to recommendations for member states, the resolutions also ask United Nations agencies to support national-level responses to child, early and forced marriage and the United Nations Secretary-General to develop reports documenting progress, challenges and best practices. In 2020, the Secretary-General was asked to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the practice, however, in most years the request has not specified any topic. There is an opportunity to request Secretary-General reports or other actions that would help to fill critical gaps in knowledge, policies, and strategies.

While the resolution has been adopted by the UNGA by

consensus, each time without a vote, it has not been without challenges. Language related to sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education has come under the greatest attack, although has ultimately been retained. There have also been challenges to including language on sexual and gender-based violence, the need to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination which increase risk and vulnerability for certain girls, and increasingly, the term "gender." Despite these challenges, there has been no significant regression in commitments, even in the face of deep opposition. This progress is a testament to the strength of the global movement to end child, early and forced marriage.

One measure of the level of support for the resolution is its number of co-sponsors. In 2014, 116 member states co-sponsored the resolution. In 2022, the number of co-sponsors increased to 125, demonstrating widespread and growing support for addressing this urgent issue and promoting and protecting the human rights of girls. However, several countries where the burden of child, early and forced marriage – that is, the total number of girls and women alive today who were married before age 18 – have never co-sponsored the resolution: China, India, Indonesia, Iran and Pakistan. To end and address child, early and forced marriage, it will be essential to ensure that this resolution is supported and implemented in the countries where the greatest number of girls affected by child, early and forced marriage live.

With just six years left until 2030, accelerated action is urgently needed to achieve the target of ending child, early and forced marriage as agreed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Implementing the existing resolutions will be critical to achieve this goal. There are also several key areas where the global normative framework could be strengthened to ensure robust responses that address the root causes of child, early, and forced marriage, while supporting ever-married girls. These areas could include providing at least 12 years of free, quality primary and secondary education for all girls, and at least one year of pre-primary education; supporting transitions from school to livelihoods; access to comprehensive sexuality education, contraception and abortion; increasing accountability and access to justice; investing in holistic, multi-sectoral and multi-layered strategies and programmes that start with girls and expand to the community, district, and national levels; and financing for programmes and civil society organisations working to address it.

Increasing accountability for action to prevent and end child, early and forced marriage is also key using existing platforms, such as the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies and the High-Level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals. National-level accountability processes that involve civil society organisations and girls themselves are also critical.

Finally, member states should ensure that ending child, early and forced marriage remains a global priority, now and in the future. Continuing to develop the normative framework through resolutions at the UNGA and Human Rights Council will be important, while also keeping an eye toward discussions on the global development agenda that is likely to succeed the SDGs.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 2014, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted its first substantive resolution on child, early and forced marriage, recognising that accelerated action was needed to end the practice.¹ A year later, member states set ending child, early and forced marriage by 2030 as a target in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).² In the years since, UN member states have elaborated on the original resolution to develop a comprehensive global normative framework that defines the magnitude and scope of child, early and forced marriage, its consequences and impacts, setting out concrete actions to address it.

2024 marks the ten-year anniversary of this landmark resolution and presents an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come as a global community in our efforts to end child, early and forced marriage, while taking stock of how far we still must go. In 2023, one in five girls between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18, compared to nearly one in four ten years prior. The progress is notable, but insufficient. Urgent action is needed to realise girls human rights and reach the goal of ending child, early and forced marriage by 2030.4

This report is based on an analysis of the resolutions, summary records and official records of relevant Third Committee and UNGA meetings, tabled amendments, and documents used during the negotiations, including drafts and compilation texts. It provides background on the history of the resolution and explores how it has evolved over the past ten years. It examines progress and setbacks in nine key areas: laws and policies; girls' empowerment, autonomy and decision-making; gender-transformative strategies; education; health; sexual and gender-based violence; economic empowerment and poverty reduction; humanitarian emergencies; and the role of civil society. It outlines some key emerging issues that are yet to be comprehensively addressed through the resolution. It also provides a synopsis of key asks of the UN Secretary-General and agencies and member state support for the resolution. Finally, it provides a series of recommendations regarding the evolution of the resolution and to strengthen accountability, as the world works towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including target 5.3 to "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation" by 2030.

METHODOLOGY

This briefing note is a qualitative analysis of publicly available documents, including the UNGA resolutions, official records of relevant UNGA meetings, reports of the Third Committee, which is responsible for the resolution, and summary records of Third Committee meetings. In addition, drafts of the resolution, compilation texts used during negotiations, and recommendations from civil society

organisations that advocated with member states during the negotiations were also reviewed to garner an understanding of how certain issues were addressed at the time.

Key informant interviews with representatives of governments involved in the negotiations and civil society advocates also informed the analysis and recommendations



¹UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 18 Dec. 2014. A/RES/69/156. (UNGA 2014).

²UNGA. Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

³UNICEF, Is an end to child marriage within reach? Latest trends and future prospects, 2023 edition. UNICEF: New York, 2023.

HISTORY OF THE UNGA RESOLUTION

The UNGA resolution on child, early and forced marriage was introduced at a time when the global movement to end the practice was gaining strength. The launch of *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage in 2011* by the Elders brought together organisations around the world that were working to ensure that girls could stay in school, stay healthy, and achieve their dreams. Together they set their sights on ensuring that UN member states took decisive action to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of girls and end the child, early and forced marriages that undermined their autonomy and ability to reach their full potential.

In 2012, UN member states, agencies and civil society organisations began envisioning the post-2015 development agenda, which aimed to galvanize action around a set of global goals for the years 2015-2030. Ensuring that a commitment to end child, early and forced marriage was a key part of that agenda quickly became a priority of advocates and government champions, who looked to leverage political momentum through several key intergovernmental forums.

In 2013, both the UN Human Rights Council and the UNGA adopted short procedural resolutions that put the issue of child, early and forced marriages on their respective agendas. The UNGA resolution, introduced by Canada and Zambia and co-sponsored by 109 countries, directed the UN Secretary General to organise a panel discussion at its next session to explore the issue in more depth, including in relation to the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda. It also announced the UNGA's intention to consider the issue under its standing agenda item on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

After more than a year of negotiations, in July 2014 the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals put forward its proposals, which included a target under a proposed goal on gender equality to "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations."

It is against this backdrop that negotiations on the first substantive UNGA resolution on child, early and forced marriage began. With the governments of Zambia and Canada holding the pen, the goal for the initial resolution was to recognise the magnitude of the issue; establish child, early and forced marriage as both a violation of the human rights of girls and a harmful practice that is rooted in gender-based discrimination and inequalities; and begin

to outline the steps that governments, in cooperation with UN agencies and civil society, need to take to prevent it. That year in particular, the resolution also aimed to demonstrate widespread support for including a target to address the practice in the 2030 Development Agenda, which was set to be negotiated over the course of the following year and adopted in September 2015. After sometimes contentious negotiations, the resolution was adopted by consensus in December 2014 with the co-sponsorship of 116 member states, representing countries from all regions of the world.

Since 2014, UNGA's Third Committee, which focuses on the promotion and protection of human rights, has considered the resolution biennially. With each iteration, the resolution has changed to reflect new and emerging evidence about child, early and forced marriage and its linkages with other gender equality, human rights and development issues; the impact of global challenges such as COVID-19, climate change and other humanitarian crises on our collective efforts to address it; and strategies that work to empower girls, protect their autonomy and rights, and support parents, communities and countries to end the practice.

The UNGA resolution, along with its sister resolution adopted biennially at the Human Rights Council, has been critical in anchoring global action and establishing a normative framework to end child, early and forced marriage. However, throughout its history it has been contested. Over the years, several states, including some where the burden of child, early and forced marriage are highest, have pushed back on certain elements of the resolution, such as whether the practice is harmful or whether it disproportionately impacts adolescent girls because of underlying gender inequalities. In every negotiation, it has been challenging to achieve consensus on issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, comprehensive sexuality education, and sexual and genderbased violence, particularly as it relates to domestic violence and intimate partner violence (the latter has yet to appear in a resolution). Despite these challenges, five biennial resolutions have been adopted to date, all by consensus. The resolution has progressed over the past ten years, taking ever more comprehensive and holistic approaches to ending the practice and transforming the deep-rooted gender inequalities, as well as discriminatory norms and attitudes that drive it. That there has been no significant regression in commitments, even in the face of deep opposition, is a testament to the strength of the global movement to end child, early and forced marriage.

⁵United Nations Human Rights Council. Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage: challenges, achievements, best practices and implementation gaps. 27 Sept. 2013. A/HRC/RES/24/23; UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 18 Dec. 2013. A/RES/68/148. (UNGA 2013).

 $^{^6 \}text{UNGA}.$ Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and protection of the rights of children. 6 Dec. 2013. A/68/452.

⁷UNGA 2013

⁸UNGA. Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on the Sustainable Development Goals. 12 Aug. 2014. A/68/970.

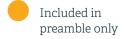
⁹UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 18 Dec. 2014. A/RES/69/156. (UNGA 2014). ¹⁰UNGA 2014. Paragraph 7.

 $^{^{11}}$ UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child. 5 Dec. 2014. A/60/484.

¹²UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 19 Dec. 2016. A/RES/71/175. (UNGA 2016); UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 17 Dec. 2018. A/RES/73/153. (UNGA 2018); UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 16 Dec. 2020. A/RES/75/167. (UNGA 2020); UNGA. Child, early and forced marriage. 15 Dec. 2022. A/RES/77/202. (UNGA 2022).

SNAPSHOT OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE UNGA RESOLUTION ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Theme	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
Laws and Policies					
Girls' Empowerment, Autonomy and Decision-Making					
Gender-transformative strategies					
Education					
Health					
Sexual and Gender-Based Violence					
Economic Empowerment and Poverty Reduction					
Humanitarian Emergencies					
Strengthening Civil Society-led Responses					



Included in preambular and operative paragraphs

Language strengthened compared to prior resolution

Language is the same as prior resolution

Language
weakened
compared to
prior resolution

KEY THEMES

The initial resolution adopted in 2014 sought to define the issue of child, early and forced marriage as a harmful practice and human rights violation; identify root causes and drivers that perpetuate the practice; outline the consequences of child, early and forced marriage; as well as set out a range of strategies to address it, including through

laws and policies, health, education, and gender norm change. Every year since, member states have elaborated on prior resolutions to address different dimensions of the practice. This section examines several key themes that are addressed through the resolutions and how they have evolved over time.

1. LAWS AND POLICIES

2014

Enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies to prevent and address child, early and forced marriage 2016

Minimum age of

Birth and marriage registration

Repeal laws and policies that allow perpetrators of sexual violence to escape punishment by marrying victims

Access to justice and accountability

2018

18 as minimum age of marriage

Ensure girls understand rights related to marriage and its dissolution 2020

2022

Birth and marriage registration as a human rights issue

Ensure registration of births and marriages in emergencies

Repeal all laws and polices that enable child, early and forced marriage

Eliminate loopholes in customary law

In 2014, the resolution included one paragraph calling on states to "enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies aimed at preventing child, early and forced marriage," while ensuring informed, free and full consent to marriage by intending spouses. ¹³ This core language has remained in all subsequent resolutions and has been elaborated on over time.

1.1. Minimum age of marriage

While there were attempts to include a reference to a minimum age of marriage of 18 in the 2014 resolution, member states were unable to reach consensus on inclusion of this point during the negotiations. In 2016, the resolution did call upon states to establish and enforce a minimum age of marriage, although member states were again not able to reach consensus on the inclusion of a specific age. ¹⁴ It was not until the 2018 resolution that member states agreed to enact and amend laws to establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage. ¹⁵ This language has remained in all subsequent resolutions. ¹⁶

1.2. Birth, marriage and civil registration

For the first time in 2016, the resolution called upon states to strengthen registration of births and marriages, including customary and religious marriages, and address barriers to registration, particularly in rural and remote areas. In 2022, the resolution urged that registration of births and marriages remain accessible during emergencies, or quickly re-established thereafter. A preambular paragraph was added to the text that year that established civil registration and vital statistics as an important tool for protecting the human rights of girls. 19

1.3. Repealing laws and policies that perpetuate child, early and forced marriage

In 2016, member states agreed to language for the first time that would urge the repeal of laws and policies that help to perpetuate the practice. Specifically, member states agreed to "amend relevant laws and policies to remove any provision that enables perpetrators of rape, sexual abuse or abduction to escape prosecution and punishment by marrying their victims." In 2022, the language was expanded upon to include other laws and policies that "may enable, justify, or lead to child, early and forced marriage," and called on member states to work with traditional and religious leaders to "eliminate traditional practices that resolve sexual violence incidents through marriage." 21

¹³UNGA 2014, Paragraph 1.

¹⁴UNGA 2016, Paragraph 4.

¹⁵UNGA 2018, Paragraph 5.

 $^{^{\}mbox{\tiny 16}}\mbox{UNGA}$ 2020, Paragraph 5; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 5.

¹⁷UNGA 2016, Paragraph 3; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 7; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 7.

¹⁸UNGA 2022, Paragraph 8.

¹⁹UNGA 2022, Preamble

 $^{^{20}} UNGA$ 2016, Paragraph 2; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 6; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 6.

²¹UNGA 2022, Paragraph 7.

1.4. Ensuring access to justice and accountability

Starting in 2016, the resolution began calling on states to ensure access to justice and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of laws, and the establishment of remedies for women and girls affected by the practice. It further called for education measures to ensure that women and girls understood their rights under the law, training of law enforcement officers, the judiciary and others working with women and children, improving legal, and removing barriers to legal assistance and counselling.²²

In 2018, language was added to ensure that women and girls understood their rights "in marriage and at its dissolution."²³ In 2022, the resolution also encouraged states to work towards "the elimination of loopholes in customary laws" that permit the practice to continue.²⁴

Despite this progress, there are still significant gaps in the resolution when it comes to ensuring that women and girls affected by child, early and forced marriage have access to justice. These areas include strengthening access to judicial and legal remedies and redress; ensuring that justice services are child-friendly and gender-responsive; providing access to services to protect women and girls seeking to leave or annul unions from violence, pressure or retribution; ensuring that national formal laws prohibiting child, early and forced marriage take precedence over religious or customary laws; and increasing accountability for people in authority who violate laws and policies prohibiting child, early and forced marriage.

2. GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT, AUTONOMY AND DECISION-MAKING

2014

Recognition that child, early and forced marriage undermines women's and girls' autonomy and decision-making

Meaningful participation of girls in all decisions that affect them

2016

Resources and programmes to empower girls to express themselves, participate meaningfully in decision-making

2018

Recognition of importance of girls voice, agency and leadership

Engaging already married girls 2020

Girls' effective and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them in COVID-19 responses 2022

Engaging girls who are hardest to reach

Girls' autonomy and their rights to make decisions over their lives has been a central feature of the resolution since the beginning. In 2014, the preamble of the resolution recognised that "child, early and forced marriage undermines women's and girls' autonomy and decision-making in all aspects of their lives" and that investing in girls' empowerment was critical for the "meaningful participation of girls in all decision that affect them." In 2018, the preamble was strengthened to also emphasize the importance of strengthening girls' "voice, agency, and leadership" in

addition to meaningful participation. In another preambular paragraph focused on the role various actors, including families, communities, and religious and traditional leaders, play in transforming harmful gender norms, the resolution emphasized 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..."²⁶

²²UNGA 2016, Paragraph 11.

²³UNGA 2018, Paragraph 20; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 20; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 27.

²⁴UNGA 2022, Paragraph 27.

²⁵UNGA 2014, Preamble.

²⁶UNGA 2018, Preamble; UNGA 2020, Preamble; UNGA 2022, Preamble.

In an important step forward, beginning in 2016, the resolution included an operative paragraph focused on ensuring that girls had the resources and support necessary to be empowered, able to express themselves, participate meaningfully in decision-making and become change agents within their communities.²⁷

In 2018, the operative paragraph was amended to also specify the importance of engaging already married girls, ²⁸ while in 2022 it was extended to girls "who are hardest to reach." ²⁹ In 2020, when the resolution added language calling on states to pay particular attention to ensuring girls' "effective and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them," in COVID-19 responses, including by prioritizing child- and adolescent-centred services.³⁰

Since 2020, the resolution has recognised that adolescent girls are more likely to be subject to child, early and forced marriage. However, it does not yet take a comprehensive

approach to looking at adolescence as a moment when adolescent girls both have greater capacity to make decisions about their own lives and futures and face increased vulnerability to child, early and forced marriage. For example, parents and communities may view marriage as a tool to control girls' sexuality, either to prevent premarital sex or as a solution to adolescent pregnancy. The challenge for governments is striking the balance between respecting the evolving capacities of adolescents, while ensuring the protections that are needed for children. Recent trends to raise the age of sexual consent and/or align it with the age of marriage is one example of how laws are out-of-step with the reality of adolescents' lives. Specific, holistic and multi-layered strategies that centre adolescent girls, respect their agency and bodily autonomy, expand access to adolescent-friendly services, and ensure that they can achieve their aspirations, should be more fully elaborated in the resolution.

3. GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES TO END CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

2018 2020 Stronger language on links between child, early stereotypes, discrimin-atory social norms and and forced marriage and and forced marriage and women and girls' deep-rooted gender harmful gender norms inequalities, norms and and practices and strategies to address it Impact of COVID-19 on changes in gender roles and prevalence of child, early and forced marriage

From the start, the resolution made clear that the practice of child, early and forced marriage is "inherently linked to deep-rooted gender inequalities, norms and stereotypes."³² However, it stopped short of identifying specific actions for member states to take to transform the norms that perpetuate gender inequality, discrimination, and the practice of child, early and forced marriage.

In 2016, the resolution called on states to "address gender stereotypes, discriminatory social norms and harmful practices that contribute to the acceptance and continuation of the practice of child, early and forced marriage", 33 including through awareness-raising strategies and dialogue at the community level. This was built upon in 2018, calling

for work to "empower parents and communities to abandon the practice and empower women and girls to make informed decisions about their lives." ³⁴

The resolution went further in 2022 by making clear the linkages between child, early and forced marriage and harmful gender norms, attitudes and behaviours and calls for stronger action to address it, including through awareness-raising programmes and through traditional and social media.³⁵ That year, the resolution also added a new paragraph asking for member states to monitor how COVID-19 impacted the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage, including in relation to changes in gender roles.³⁶

²⁷UNGA 2016, Paragraph 5.

²⁸UNGA 2018, Paragraph 8.

²⁹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 9.

 $^{^{\}mbox{\tiny 30}}\mbox{UNGA}$ 2020, Paragraph 23(a); UNGA 2022, Paragraph 35.

³¹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23(a); UNGA 2022, Paragraph 35.

³²UNGA 2014, Preamble.

³³UNGA 2016, Paragraph 6.

³⁴UNGA 2018, Paragraph 9; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 9; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 10.

³⁵UNGA 2022, Paragraph 22.

³⁶UNGA 2022, Paragraph 30.

Transforming harmful and discriminatory gender norms, attitudes and practices and addressing gender inequalities is necessary for ending child, early and forced marriage. However, in 2022 some member states began pushing back on the use of term "gender" as well as the importance of gender-responsive strategies, addressing inequalities, or gender-based violence.³⁷ These efforts were limited to a small, but vocal

group of countries and were unsuccessful in substantively influencing the language in the resolution. However, this does reflect the influence of anti-gender movements, who are working to undermine global commitments and national action to end harmful practices, achieve gender equality and realise the human rights of girls and women.

4. EDUCATION

2014

Recognises lack of education as a risk factor for child, early and forced marriage and child, early and forced marriage as a barrier to education

Promote right to quality education

2016

Free and quality primary and secondary education, including catch-up and literacy education

Improving safety of girls at and on the way to and from. school

Continued access to school for married and pregnant girls and young parents

Comprehensive sexuality

2018

Strengthen laws and policies against violence within schools

Recognition that pregnancy and childcare keeps girls out of school

Role of parents and lega guardians in providing direction and guidance on sexuality education 2020

Continued access to education in emergencies, including remote learning and by bridging digital divides 2022

Recognition of need to focus on marginalised and vulnerable groups of girls

Girls' education plays a critical role in preventing child, early and forced marriage, promoting their empowerment and agency, and in changing gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate the practice. As such, guaranteeing their right to education, vocational training, and lifelong learning has been a critical strategy elaborated on the resolution since the beginning.

The first resolution recognised that girls with little or no education are at greater risk of child, early and forced marriage, and that child, early and forced marriage also acts as a barrier to education for girls. It called upon states to promote and protect the right to quality education both as a strategy to prevent child, early and forced marriage and enable married women and girls to make informed choices about their lives.

In the years since, the resolution has elaborated on the issue of education in several ways, including by outlining the types of education that should be made accessible, addressing barriers to education, and ensuring access to lifelong learning.

4.1. Free pre-primary, primary and secondary education

A priority for advocates has been ensuring that girls have access to free pre-primary, primary and secondary education, recognising that school fees are a critical barrier to education for girls. In 2016, the resolution specified that member states should put "enhanced emphasis on free and quality primary and secondary education, including catch-up and literacy education." ³⁸ This language has remained consistent in all subsequent versions of the resolution.³⁹

Access to free pre-primary education is increasingly recognised as an important strategy for girls' empowerment, preventing child, early, and forced marriage, and supporting married girls, as it supports children to have the best start in life and increases the likelihood of continued access to education. Pre-primary education also builds skills that are essential in later life, including communication, critical thinking and motivation. It also provides critical childcare for girls who are caregivers to their younger siblings and/or who are young mothers, as is the case for many ever-married girls, so that they can continue to attend school.⁴⁰ Despite its importance, it has not yet been addressed in the resolution.

³⁷In statements after the adoption of the resolution by the Third Committee, Iraq, Senegal, Nigeria, and the Russian Federation sought to define gender or draw limits on the meaning of gender-related terms. UNGA. Third Committee: Summary record of the 51st meeting. 15 Nov. 2022. A/C.3/77/SR.51.

³⁸UNGA 2016, Paragraph 8.

³⁹UNGA 2018, Paragraph 14; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 14; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 16.

⁴⁰A World Ready to Learn - Global Report on Pre-primary Education – UNICEF, 2019, pp 11-12.

4.2. Safe education environments

Since 2016, the resolution has recognised that girls' real and perceived lack of safety while travelling to and from and while at school acts as a barrier to their access to and retention in school. It has called upon members states to remove barriers to education by "improving the safety of girls at and on the way to and from school, providing safe and adequate sanitation, including for menstrual hygiene management, and adopting policies to prohibit, prevent and address violence against children, especially girls."41

In 2018, this was elaborated on to strengthen laws and policies against gender-based violence and to hold perpetrators accountable, while strengthening violence prevention and response activities within schools.⁴²

4.3. Ensuring that out-of-school, married girls, and girls in particularly vulnerable situations have access to education

The resolution has consistently recognised that girls with no or little formal education, face greater risk of child, early and forced marriage and called on member states to ensure that they have access to catch-up and literacy education. ⁴³ In 2016, it recognised that marriage and childbearing is often a factor that compels girls to leave school and urged member states to ensure that "married girls and boys, pregnant girls and women and young parents continue to have access to schooling." ⁴⁴ In 2018, the resolution further built on this idea by recognising that pregnancy and childcare responsibilities also kept girls out of school. ⁴⁵

In 2020, with widespread school closures due to COVID-19, the resolution called upon States to ensure continued access to education for girls, including through distance learning, and to take additional action to bridge digital divides. ⁴⁶ In 2022, the resolution elaborated the need to focus on particularly marginalised and vulnerable groups of girls. ⁴⁷ While this addition recognises that children who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination face barriers and that additional action is needed, the importance of ensuring that girls subjected to child, early and forced marriage have continued access to education was somehow lost.

4.4. Comprehensive sexuality education

Starting in 2016, the resolution recognises the importance of ensuring that adolescents and young people have access to comprehensive information about sexual and reproductive health and rights as a critical strategy to prevent child, early and forced marriage. Specifically, it calls for access to scientifically accurate, age-appropriate and culturally relevant education on "sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, human rights, physical, psychological and pubertal development, and power in relationships between women and men."⁴⁸ It also calls for partnerships with young persons, parents and other stakeholders in the delivery of such education.

The inclusion of this language on comprehensive sexuality education was highly contested. In the end, language was drawn from a resolution negotiated earlier that year on Women, the Girl Child, and HIV in the Commission on the Status of Women.⁴⁹

In 2018, it was updated to include another caveat stressing the role of parents and legal guardians in providing appropriate direction and guidance, with the best interests of the child as their basic concern. The language has remained consistent in subsequent versions of the resolution. In 2018 and 2020 the United States (US) Government tabled formal amendments to remove the term sexual and reproductive health from the paragraph during the Third Committee sessions where the resolution was being considered for adoption. Both efforts were ultimately defeated (for more information, see box on sexual and reproductive health and rights, on p14).



⁴¹UNGA 2016, Paragraph 9.

⁴²UNGA 2018, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 17.

⁴³UNGA 2014, Preamble and all subsequent resolutions.

⁴⁴UNGA 2016, Paragraph 9.

⁴⁵UNGA 2018, Paragraph 14,

⁴⁶UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23(c).

⁴⁷UNGA 2022, Paragraph 18.

⁴⁸UNGA 2016, Paragraph 8.

⁴⁹United Nations Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women. Report of the 60th Session. Resolution 60/2 Women, the Girl Child and HIV AIDS. 2016. E/2016/27-E/CN.6/2016/22.

⁵⁰UNGA 2018, Paragraph 14.

⁵¹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 14; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 16.

SUNGA. Third Committee: Summary Record of the 48th Meeting. 15 Nov. 2018. A/C.3/73/SR.48; UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children. 29 Nov. 2018. A/73/585; UNGA. Third Committee. United States of America: Amendment to revised draft resolution A/C.3/75/L.18/Rev1. 11 Nov. 2020. A/C.3/75/L.84; UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children. 2 Dec. 2020. A/75/474.

5. HEALTH

2014

Recognises that child early and forced marriage threatens women's and girls' health

Ensure access to health services, including sexual and reproductive

Protect women's rights to control sexuality and reproductive rights 2016

Protect right to highest attainable standard of health

Ensure health services are universally accessible gender-responsibe and adolescent friendly

Protect married girls' rights to control sexuality 2018

Access to continuum of maternal health services, including family planning

2020

Ensure uninterrupted access to health services

Ensure safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene including menstrual hygiene 2022

Health, along with education, was one of the few substantive issues that received significant attention in the 2014 resolution. It recognised that child, early and forced marriage threatens women's and girls' health, including their sexual and reproductive health, while increasing their vulnerability to violence.⁵³ This language has remained in the preamble in every subsequent resolution.

In 2014, the resolution also outlined in the preamble the need to ensure access to a full range of services for girls and women at risk of or affected by child, early and forced marriage, including "education, counselling, shelter and other social services, psychological, sexual and reproductive health-care services and medical care." 54

In 2016, the resolution included an operative paragraph that urged states to act to protect the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including by strengthening health systems. In addition, it specified that health services should be universally accessible and available, quality, gender-responsive and adolescent friendly.⁵⁵

Starting in 2020, an additional paragraph was included in the resolution, urging governments to ensure uninterrupted access to health services and noting the importance of safe and affordable drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, including menstrual hygiene.⁵⁶

5.1. Sexual and reproductive rights

The resolution has consistently recognised that child, early and forced marriage is fundamentally linked to women's and girls' bodily autonomy and often violates their sexual and reproductive rights. Starting in 2014, the resolution has urged states to protect the rights of women "to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality," as well as their reproductive rights, as recognised in key prior intergovernmental agreements.⁵⁷ In 2016, the resolution also recognised "those girls who have been subjected to child, early and forced marriage" have the right to control their sexuality.⁵⁸ While advocates have noted that these rights apply to all girls, and not just those who were already married, the limitation has remained in the text in all subsequent iterations of the resolution.

SUNGA 2016, Paragraph 13; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 18; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 18; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 24.



⁵³ UNGA 2014, Preamble and all subsequent resolutions.

 $^{^{54}}$ UNGA 2014, Preamble. In 2016, this section on services in the preamble was moved to operative paragraph 12 and further elaborated on.

⁵⁵UNGA 2016, Paragraph 12; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 17; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 17; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 23.

⁵⁶UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23(f); UNGA 2022, Paragraph 37.

⁵⁷UNGA 2014, Paragraph 3.

In focus: sexual and reproductive health and rights

Girls at risk of child, early and forced marriage and married girls face significant challenges related to the exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights and their right to bodily autonomy. These include limits on their ability to negotiate sex and make decisions about whether to seek health care, including maternal health care, use contraceptives, or seek abortion services. It has not been possible to elaborate more deeply on these issues in this resolution, because language on sexual and reproductive rights, sexual and reproductive health, and comprehensive sexuality education has been historically difficult to negotiate.

During negotiations on the resolution, a small group of countries consistently raise challenges to the inclusion of language on sexual and reproductive health and rights and related issues. While they often make statements reserving their positions on these issues upon the adoption of the resolution by the Third Committee, they have consistently joined the consensus on the resolution and have not sought to formally amend the text.⁵⁹

In 2018, however, when the resolution was being considered by the Third Committee for adoption, the United States Government sought to amend all paragraphs that included language on reproductive rights, the rights of women and married girls to control their sexuality, sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health. ⁵⁰ Specifically, they proposed an oral amendment to add the words "in accordance with national laws" after all instances of sexual and reproductive health. ⁵¹ In the paragraph on women's and married girls' right to control their own sexuality and reproductive rights, they sought to further limit the definitions of these terms to agreements

that were adopted by the UNGA, thereby excluding other intergovernmental agreements that had elaborated upon them, such as at regional economic and social commissions, the Human Rights Council, and Commission on the Status of Women. The US amendment was rejected by a recorded vote of 96 against to 33 in favour, with 35 abstentions. 62

In an extraordinary situation, when the resolution was subsequently before the full UNGA for adoption, the US government proposed an amendment to delete these paragraphs altogether. Their amendment was soundly defeated: 134 countries voted to retain the paragraphs, while only the US and Nauru voted to delete them. 32 countries abstained. The resolution was subsequently adopted by consensus.⁶³

In 2020, the US government again attempted to amend the resolution in the Third Committee by deleting all references to sexual and reproductive health and health-care services in the resolution. ⁶⁴ Their amendment was defeated by a recorded vote of 121 to 11, with 32 abstentions. ⁶⁵ The resolution was adopted without further challenge by consensus at the UNGA.

In 2022, no formal amendments on these issues were proposed during adoption of the resolution in the Third Committee or UNGA. Despite the difficulties in negotiating sexual and reproductive health and rights, there has been no regression in the language on these issues over the history of the resolution. The advocacy by civil society organisations working to end child, early and forced marriage has been critical in retaining strong commitments on sexual and reproductive health and rights and resisting efforts to roll them back.

⁵⁹In 2022, for example, Libya, Iraq, Algeria, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Malaysia, Senegal, Russian Federation, Mali, Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, Nigeria and the Holy See all made statements disassociating from or reserving on language on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues. UNGA. Third Committee: Summary record of the 51st meeting. 15 Nov. 2022. A/C.3/77/SR.51.

⁶⁰UNGA 2018, preamble and paragraphs 14, 17, and 18. UNGA. Third Committee. Summary Record of the 48th Meeting, 15 November 2018. A/C.3/73/SR.48

GUNGA. Third Committee. Summary Record of the 48th Meeting, 15 November 2018. A/C.3/73/SR 48

⁵²Countries who voted in favor of deleting the paragraphs were Bahrain, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, China, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guyana, Iraq, Jamaica, Kuwait, Libya, Malaysia, Nauru, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Suriname, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, Yemen, and Zimbabwe. UNGA. Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Report of the Third Committee. 29 Nov. 2018. A/73/585.

⁶³UNGA. Official Records: 55th Plenary Meeting. 17 Dec. 2018. A/73/PV.55.

⁶⁴UNGA. Third Committee. United States of America: Amendment to revised draft resolution A/C.3/75/L.18/Rev.l. 11 Nov. 2020. A/C.3/75/L.84.

⁶⁵Belarus, Cameroon, Libya, Nauru, Qatar, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tonga, and the United States voted in favor of the United States Government's proposed amendment. UNGA. Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children: Report of the Third Committee. 2 Dec. 2020. A/75/474.

5.2. Access to sexual and reproductive health services

In elaborating states' obligations to provide access to health services, sexual and reproductive health services have been core. In 2014, the preamble included specific mention of ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services. 66 In 2016, a specific operative paragraph was added that elaborated a range of services that should be provided, including sexual and reproductive health information, and commodities, HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care, mental health services and nutrition interventions, in addition to sexual and reproductive health services. 67 The listing of interventions was further built upon in 2018, to include a range of essential maternal health services. 68

While the recognition of family planning as part of a continuum of care to prevent maternal health complications is welcome, the resolution is yet to recognise the specific importance of ensuring access to contraceptives as a tool for

preventing early and unwanted pregnancies, which help to drive child early and forced marriage. Access to safe abortion services also remain a gap in the resolution. These are critical issues for married and unmarried girls, who face formidable barriers to making and acting on their own informed decisions about their bodily autonomy and health.

5.3. Mental health

Although child, early and forced marriage has considerable implications for girls' mental health, this issue has yet to be discussed comprehensively in the resolution. The 2014 resolution recognised the importance of access to psychological care. ⁶⁹ In 2016, this was adapted to mental health services. ⁷⁰ In 2022, the resolution further recognised the importance of ensuring that "gender-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support services" were integrated into humanitarian responses. ⁷¹

6. SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2014

Recognition that child, early and forced marriage increases girls risk of violence 2016

Adopt policies to prohibit and prevent violence against girls

2018

Elaborates the types of violence faced by girls due to child, child, early and forced marriage

Recognises role of men and boys in preventing violence

Outlines actions to prevent and address violence, including laws and policies and programmes 2020

Strengthen access to services for sexual and gender-based violence

2022

Setback: Loss of paragraph on strengthening access to services for sexual and genderbased violence

The 2014 resolution recognises that child, early and forced marriage places girls "at risk of being exposed to and encountering various forms of discrimination and violence throughout their lives." However, it is not until 2016 that the resolution calls upon states to act to adopt "policies to prohibit, prevent and address violence against children, especially girls" in the context of education.73

In the 2018 resolution, sexual and gender-based violence is a major theme, elaborated on throughout. The preamble includes a paragraph that recognises that child, early and forced marriage often occurs with impunity and a lack of accountability and elaborates the increased risk of "marital rape and sexual, physical and psychological violence" faced by girls. It further recognises that men and boys should play a role in "transforming discriminatory social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence" and that "economic autonomy of women can expand their options for leaving abusive relationships."

⁶⁶UNGA 2014, Preamble.

⁶⁷UNGA 2016, Paragraph 12.

⁶⁸UNGA 2018, Paragraph 17; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 17; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 23.

⁹UNGA 2014, Preamble

⁷⁰UNGA 2016, Paragraph 12; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 17; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 17; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 23.

⁷¹UNGA 2022, Paragraph 32.

⁷²UNGA 2014, Preamble.

⁷³UNGA 2016, Paragraph 9.

⁷⁴UNGA 2018, Preamble.

The 2018 resolution urges states to take several clear actions to prevent and address violence, including domestic violence and violence against married girls, including:

- the review or formulation of laws, policies, programmes and strategies, along with targets and timetables for implementation;⁷⁵
- laws and policies to prohibit violence in education settings and hold perpetrators to account;⁷⁶
- violence prevention education, awareness-raising, and response services in schools and communities;⁷⁷ and
- targeted programmes and social services to protect girls from sexual and gender-based violence.⁷⁸

Responding to the increasing incidence of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19, the 2020 resolution calls on states to ensure continuity and strengthen services for women and girls who experience sexual and gender-based violence, including girls at risk of child, early and forced marriage, and already married girls. Specifically, the resolution calls on states to provide

"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." Unfortunately, this paragraph was not carried over to the 2022 resolution.

Despite the significant progress that has been made, consensus on sexual and gender-based violence is often challenging to reach. Although advocates have pushed for recognition in the resolution of the need to prevent and address intimate partner violence, which includes violence that occurs outside of marriage, in addition to domestic violence, this has been highly contested and has not been included. In 2022, the use of the term "sexual and genderbased violence" was also contested during the negotiations, largely because of the increasing influence of anti-gender movements. For the first time that year, four member states made reservations on the term "gender-based violence" upon adoption of the resolution.⁸⁰

7. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION

2014

as a root cause of child, early and forced marriage

Recogntition of the need to address extreme poverty

2016

Outlines strategies to increase girls' and women's economic empowerment 2018

Recognises lack of economic empowerment is a consequence of child, early and forced marriage

Childcare and freedom of movement as strategies for economic empowerment

Access to technical and vocational training

2020

Insulate families from economic shocks linked to COVID-19

Address burden of unpaid care and domestic work 2022

Reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work as part of poverty alleviation efforts

In 2014, the resolution recognises that poverty is a root cause of child, early and forced marriage and notes that alleviating and eventually eradicating extreme poverty is key to addressing the issue. ⁸¹ It calls on member states to invest in the well-being of women and girls, including by addressing extreme poverty. ⁸²

The 2016 resolution begins to outline concrete strategies to address poverty and the lack of economic opportunities for women and girls, including by protecting their rights to inheritance and property, social protection, direct financial services, support and microcredit, education, technical and vocational training, financial literacy, and promoting their

access to full and productive employment and decent work.83

In 2018, the resolution recognises for the first time that women's and girls' lack of economic empowerment is also a consequence of child, early and forced marriage, hampering their ability to enter and stay in the labour market, impeding their economic independence and their ability to leave abusive relationships, while also imposing costs on society. In addition to the actions outline above, it calls on governments to ensure access to childcare services and freedom of movement, as key strategies for bolstering women's economic empowerment.

 $^{^{75}}$ UNGA 2018, Paragraph 19; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 19.

⁷⁶UNGA 2018, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 17.

UNGA 2018, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 17.

⁷⁸UNGA 2018, Paragraph 13; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 13; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 15.

⁷⁹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23.

⁸ºYemen, Jordan, Senegal and Mali. UNGA. Third Committee: Summary record of the 51st meeting. 15 Nov. 2022. A/C.3/77/SR.51.

⁸¹UNGA 2014, Preamble

⁸²UNGA 2014, Paragraph 3.

⁸³UNGA 2016, Paragraph 10.

⁸⁴UNGA 2018, Preamble and all subsequent resolutions.

⁸⁵UNGA 2018, Paragraph 12; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 12; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 13.

7.1. Vocational and technical training and transitions from school to work

In 2018, the resolution introduces a paragraph focused on ensuring access to technical and vocation training, as well as higher education, for women and girls at risk of or affected by child, early and forced marriage, to support them to achieve their full potential.⁸⁶ This paragraph has been repeated in subsequent resolutions.⁸⁷

The transition between schooling to the workforce can increase the vulnerability of many adolescent girls to child, early and forced marriage, particularly those girls who are marginalised and who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Adolescent girls are often pushed into marriage if they are not able to start earning an income on their own, soon after leaving school. They face significant barriers to safe, secure, fulfilling and productive employment, including a lack of foundational skills due to leaving school early, unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities, and discriminatory gender norms. Addressing these barriers and implementing strategies to ease this transition as a tool to prevent child, early and forced marriage has not yet been specifically addressed through the resolution.

7.2. Social protection policies

The 2018 resolution calls upon governments to invest in "family-oriented policies addressing the multidimensional aspects of poverty." It emphasizes the importance of investing in employment, social security, livelihoods, gendersensitive 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, among other measures.⁸⁹

The resolution in 2020 further builds on this by calling for investments in policies to insulate families and communities from economic shock linked to COVID-19, through "poverty eradication measures, labour policies, public services and gender-responsive social protection programmes." 90

7.3. Unpaid care and domestic work

The 2020 resolution recognised for the first time the need to address the burden of unpaid care and domestic work and the feminization of poverty that had been exacerbated by COVID-19.⁹¹

The 2022 resolution noted that the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work shouldered by women and girls who have experienced child, early and forced marriage hampers their economic empowerment. It calls upon governments to take action to reduce and redistribute it as part of poverty alleviation efforts.

8. CRISES AND HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

2014

Recognition that conflic and humanitarian crisis stiuations exacerbate child, early and forced narriage 2016

Implement measures to prevent child, early and forced marriage and address risk of sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies

2018

Recognises factors that increase risk of child, early and forced marriage in emergencies and strategies to address them 2020

Outlines measures to mitigate risk of child, early and forced marriage in the context of COVID-19 and public health emergencies 2022

Recognises the risk of child, early and forced marriage posed by climate change and related disasters

Calls for measures to increase girls'and women's resilience and adaptive strategies to mitigate risks

The first resolution recognised that "conflict and humanitarian crisis situations" exacerbate the risk of child, early and forced marriage. In 2016, it goes further by noting that humanitarian emergencies, including situations of forced displacement, armed conflict and natural disasters, require "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," to prevent child, early and forced marriage. ⁹⁵ It further recognises the need to address women's and girls' increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation. ⁹⁶

⁸⁶UNGA 2018, Paragraph 16.

⁸⁷UNGA 2020, Paragraph 16; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 21.

⁸⁸Rose, P. 2021. Exploring the School to Work Transition for Adolescent Girls. REAL Centre. University of Cambridge.

⁸⁹UNGA 2018, Paragraph 11; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 11; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 12.

⁹⁰UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23 (b); UNGA 2022, Paragraph 36.

⁹¹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23(d).

⁹²UNGA 2022, Preamble.

⁹³UNGA 2020, Paragraph 31.

⁹⁴UNGA 2014, Preamble.

⁹⁵UNGA 2016, Preamble.

⁹⁶UNGA 2016, Preamble.

The 2018 resolution outlines the reasons why risk of child, early and forced marriage is exacerbated during humanitarian emergencies, including misconceptions that marriage may provide protection to girls, as well as disruptions in access to critical services such as education and family planning.⁹⁷

The 2018 resolution also adds an operative paragraph calling for specific action to integrate strategies to prevent child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian responses with the participation of women and girls, while also working to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation and ensuring access to health and education. The 2022 resolution builds on this by directing states to ensure that "the provision of essential services during emergencies respect the rights of girls and women" and are addressed in national response plans.

8.1. COVID-19 and public health emergencies

In light of COVID-19, the 2020 resolution adds public health emergencies to the list of crises that can exacerbate child, early and forced marriage. With ongoing disruptions in critical services that are essential for preventing child, early and forced marriage, such as education and health, as well as increases in gender-based violence, the resolution takes stock of actions needed in a range of areas to mitigate the harmful impacts of COVID-19, while ensuring that strategies to prevent and address child, early and forced marriage continue. Many of these strategies—in the areas of health, education, economic empowerment, and violence—are outlined above and were integrated into the 2022 resolution as core measures to prevent and address the practice.

The 2020 resolution also emphasizes the importance of "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 and response to child, early and forced marriage," ¹⁰¹ articulating for the first time the importance of addressing multiple harmful practices targeting women and girls through coordinated responses.

The 2020 resolution also calls for member states to pay particular attention to the needs of "women and girls in vulnerable situations and those experiencing various forms of violence, discrimination, stigmatization, exclusion and inequalities" in humanitarian situations to ensure access to vital services.¹⁰²

Finally, the 2020 resolution calls for responses to COVID-19 to be "transformative, participatory, and adequately funded" to ensure that they address the root causes of child, early and forced marriage. The 2022 resolution extends this call to not just COVID-19 responses, but future humanitarian responses more broadly, although it replaces the word "transformative" with "comprehensive." 104

8.2. Climate change

Although natural disasters are recognised as exacerbating child, early and forced marriage starting in 2016, it is not until the 2022 resolution that the resolution outlines the impact of climate change on the practice and the need for appropriate responses. It notes in the preamble that "climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation" and "more frequent and intense natural disasters" negatively impact women and girls.¹⁰⁵

The resolution urges awareness-raising on how climate change impacts women and girls, including those facing child, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices, and to ensure that these impacts are reflected in policies and programmes, and "take targeted action to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacities of all women and girls, including in cities and tropical, arctic, coastal, mountainous, rural and remote areas." 106

9. STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES

2014

Recognition of the key role of civil society, including girls and womens' and human rights organisations 2016

Includes girl-led organisations as well as women and other civil society actors

2018

Includes teachers as key stakeholders 2020

Calls on states to ensure civil society can continue their work to prevent child, early and forced marriage in the context of COVID-19 2022

Recognises that civil society organisations are often best placed to reach communities

Starting in 2014, the resolution recognises the importance of ensuring the participation of key stakeholders from civil society, including "girls, religious and community leaders, civil society, women's and human rights groups, men and

boys and youth organisations," in the development and implementation of comprehensive, coordinated and holistic responses to address child, early and forced marriage. ¹⁰⁷ In 2016, the resolution adds women, parents and other

⁹⁷UNGA 2018, Preamble.

⁹⁸UNGA 2018, Paragraph 21.

⁹⁹UNGA 2020, Preamble, paragraph 21.

¹⁰⁰UNGA 2020, Paragraphs 22, 23.

¹⁰¹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 22.

¹⁰²UNGA 2020, Paragraph 22.

¹⁰³UNGA 2020, Paragraph 23.

¹⁰⁴UNGA 2022, Paragraph 28.

¹⁰⁵UNGA 2022, Preamble.

¹⁰⁶UNGA 2022, Paragraph 33.

¹⁰⁷UNGA 2014, Paragraph 2.

family members, traditional leaders, girl-led organisations, media and the private sector to the list of key stakeholders, while in 2018 it expands again to include teachers. 109

In 2020, the resolution calls on states to take action to ensure that COVID-19 response measures enable civil society organisations and other stakeholders to "continue their work with girls, families, and local communities to prevent and respond to child, early and forced marriage." In 2022, this paragraph is expanded upon to call upon states to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations during emergencies, recognising that they are often best placed to reach communities, particularly "communities in vulnerable situations." In 2022, the state of the state of

In a context where civic space is closing in many countries, and attacks on gender equality, including initiatives to prevent and end harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, are increasing, recommendations such as these are critical. They help to keep space open for civil society, and particularly women-led and girl-led organisations, to shape and implement local responses, but also emphasize their unique role in reaching communities but also advocating for robust responses. Protecting and expanding upon these commitments to support and strengthen women- and girl-led responses should be an urgent priority.

10. EMERGING ISSUES

10.1. Informal unions

In many contexts, adolescent girls are not legally or religiously married, but instead live in informal unions with similar impacts on girls' freedom, education, and opportunities. Girls in informal unions face increased risks of intimate partner violence and significant discrepancies in power within their relationships. They often take on greater responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work, face disruptions in their access to education, and experience greater barriers to health, social protection, and other critical services. Although the resolution has yet to address comprehensively the needs of girls in informal unions, starting in 2018 it acknowledges that such unions exist and "should be addressed in policies and programmes on child, early and forced marriage."112 The resolution further notes that the "gathering of information on these arrangements will help to develop responses for affected girls and women."113

10.2. Support for already married girls

While much of the resolution is oriented towards preventing child, early and forced marriages, in recent years there has been an increasing focus on addressing the distinct needs of already-married girls. For the first time in 2018, paragraphs were added to the resolution which recognised the need to support girls and women subjected to the practice and remove "structural barriers to their access to services that respond to their specific needs." 114 The resolution specifically calls upon member states to promote and protect the rights of already married girls; promote equality in all aspects of marriage and its dissolution; and address their specific needs through targeted programmes that aim to protect them from sexual and gender-based violence, increase decision-making power, make it easier to seek formal employment and increase economic independence, while expanding

access to education, health and other social services, among other actions. 115

In 2022, the resolution reiterates in a separate paragraph the need to "ensure access to services and education for women who were married in childhood, and for girls who are married, are pregnant, or are mothers." ¹¹⁶

10.3. Intersectional approaches

The 2022 resolution added new language recognising that policies, programmes and strategies should address "multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence" that are experienced by women and girls and which increase vulnerability to child, early and forced marriage. In addition, throughout the resolution it called on states to pay attention to specifically marginalised and vulnerable groups of girls, including girls with disabilities, indigenous girls, girls living in rural and remote areas and refugee camps, among others. The inclusion of language on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination was highly contested during the negotiations. Although no formal amendments were proposed on this text when the resolution was adopted by the Third Committee, several delegations made reservations on this text in subsequent statements. In 19

10.4. Families

Language in relation to role of families in preventing child, early and forced marriage was first added to the text in 2016. The paragraph recognises the benefits of growing up in family environments, while affirming that a child's upbringing and development is the primary responsibility of parents and legal guardians and that they should be supported to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, with the best interests of the child as a key concern. ¹²¹

¹⁰⁸UNGA 2016, Paragraph 1.

¹⁰⁹UNGA 2018, Paragraph 2.

¹¹⁰UNGA 2020. Paragraph 23(g).

¹¹¹UNGA 2022, Paragraph 29.

¹¹²UNGA 2018, Preamble, and all subsequent resolutions.

¹¹³UNGA 2018, Preamble, and all subsequent resolutions.

¹¹⁴UNGA 2018, Preamble.

¹¹⁵UNGA 2018, Paragraph 13.

¹¹⁶UNGA 2022, Paragraph 14.

¹¹⁷UNGA 2022, Preamble and Paragraph 25.

¹¹⁸UNGA 2022, Preamble and Paragraphs 9, 18, 19, 25, 26, 40.

¹³⁹Libya, Iraq, Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, Yemen, Malaysia, Senegal, the Russian Federation, Mali, Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. UNGA. Third Committee: Summary record of the 51st meeting. 15 Nov. 2022. A/C.3/77/SR.51.

¹²⁰ UNGA 2016, Paragraph 7; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 10; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 10; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 11.

¹²¹UNGA 2016, Paragraph 7; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 10; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 10; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 11.

In 2018 a preambular paragraph was added recognising that families, as well as other actors and girls themselves, play an essential role in transforming negative social norms and inequality.¹²² An operative paragraph was also added on the need to address family poverty as a driver of child, early and forced marriage, through investments in family-oriented policies.¹²³

Language on families and the rights of parents is often used to counterbalance recognition of girls' rights to make decisions about their own lives. While the language in the resolution is currently positive, ensuring that the language continues to focus on the role of families in helping to end the practice as well as family-oriented policies that help to address the drivers of child, early and forced marriage should be the priority.

ASKS OF UN AGENCIES AND THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

With each iteration of the resolution, specific asks have been included of both UN agencies and the UN Secretary-General.

Since 2014, UN entities and agencies have been asked to collaborate with member states in developing strategies and policies to prevent child, early and forced marriage as well as support ever-married girls. ¹²⁴ Starting in 2018, they were also asked to support member states to strengthen data collection and reporting systems, as well as capacities for analysing, monitoring and reporting on progress to end child, early and forced marriage. ¹²⁵ In 2020, the ask expanded once again to include strengthening capacities to collect and use disaggregated data to focus action on the most marginalised, enhance research and dissemination of evidence-based practices and strengthen impact assessments of existing policies and programmes. ¹²⁶

Each resolution has asked the UN Secretary-General to prepare a comprehensive and evidence-based report outlining progress towards ending child, early and forced marriage and supporting already married girls. The ask has included requests for best practices, as well as an analysis of gaps in research and implementation, using information provided by member states as well as civil society and other

relevant stakeholders.¹²⁷ In 2014, the resolution requested a specific focus on high prevalence countries,¹²⁸ though in subsequent years asked for reporting on the issue worldwide. In 2016, the request called for action-oriented recommendations for the consideration of member states.¹²⁹ In 2018 and subsequent years the ask included information on girls' and women's empowerment programmes.¹³⁰ In 2020 the ask specified that it should include reporting on child, early and forced marriage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³¹ In 2022, it reverted to the language used in the 2018 resolution.¹³²

While the Secretary-General has used his discretion to focus on different issues that are critical for preventing and addressing child, early and forced marriage, there could be greater opportunity to request reports or other actions that would help to fill critical gaps in policies, programmes and strategies. These could include issues such as financing for multi-level and multi-sectoral strategies to prevent and end child, early and forced marriage; guidance on policies and interventions; or an analysis of how the resolutions have been implemented at the country level and strategies for increasing accountability.



¹²³UNGA 2018, Paragraph 11; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 11; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 12.

¹²⁴ UNGA 2014, Paragraph 6; UNGA 2016, Paragraph 15; UNGA 2018, Paragraph 22; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 24; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 38.

¹²⁵UNGA 2018, Paragraph 23; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 25; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 39.

¹²⁶UNGA 2020, Paragraph 26; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 40.

^{****}UNGA 2014, Paragraph 8; UNGA 2016, Paragraph 18; UNGA, 2018, Paragraph 27; UNGA 2020, Paragraph 29; UNGA 2022, Paragraph 43.

¹²⁸UNGA 2014, Paragraph 8.

¹²⁹UNGA 2016, Paragraph 18

¹³⁰UNGA 2018, Paragraph 27.

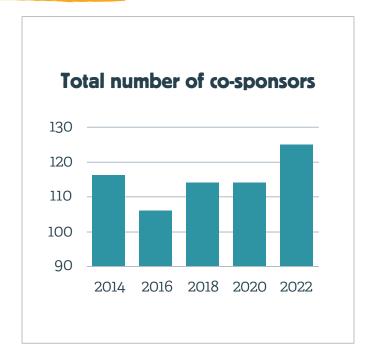
¹³¹UNGA 2020, Paragraph 29.

¹³²UNGA 2022, Paragraph 43.

CO-SPONSORSHIP OF THE RESOLUTION

One measure of support for a resolution is the total number of co-sponsors over time. While Zambia and Canada have jointly led the development of and negotiations on the resolution, co-sponsors tend to be countries that are strongly supportive of the content of the resolution. Often, the number of co-sponsors is linked to the strength of the outreach strategy by key proponents of the resolution. In 2014, the resolution had 116 co-sponsors. Over time, the number of co-sponsors has remained relatively consistent, with a dip in 2016, 134 followed by an increase to 114 in 2018 and 2020. 136 In 2022, the number of co-sponsors significantly increased to 125. 137

In some cases, the decision on whether to co-sponsor a resolution is more political. For example, after contesting language related to sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education in 2018 and 2020, the US government did not co-sponsor the resolution in those years. Similarly, some countries that have voiced the strongest opposition to elements of the resolution in negotiations, like Russia and Saudi Arabia, have never co-sponsored the resolution.





 $^{^{135}}$ UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child. 5 Dec. 2014. A/60/484.

¹³⁴UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child. 6 Dec. 2016. A/71/480.

¹³⁵UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child. 29 Nov. 2018. A/73/585.

 $^{^{136}}$ UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child. 2 Dec. 2020. A/75/474.

¹³⁷UNGA. Report of the Third Committee: Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child. 1 Dec 2022. A/77/459.

1. CO-SPONSORSHIP BY HIGH BURDEN COUNTRIES

Two-thirds of all child brides live in just eleven countries, with one-third of them in India alone. ¹³⁸ Mexico is the only high burden country that has co-sponsored the resolution every year. Ethiopia has co-sponsored the resolution for all years but 2022, while Egypt has been co-sponsoring the resolution since 2018. Bangladesh co-sponsored the

resolution for the first time in 2022, while Nigeria and Brazil have co-sponsored in some years, but not others.

Five high burden countries—China, India, Indonesia, Iran and Pakistan—have never co-sponsored the resolution.

High burden countries	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
India					
Bangladesh					x
China					
Indonesia					
Nigeria			X	X	
Brazil		X	X		
Pakistan					
Ethiopia	X	X	X	X	
Mexico	X	X	X	X	x
Iran					
Egypt			X	X	x

While this resolution is critically important in maintaining child, early and forced marriage as a standalone issue that requires specific measures, the challenge moving forward will be to ensure that it is supported and implemented in the countries where the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage is highest.

¹³⁸UNICEF 2023.

FUTURE PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

With just six years left until 2030, accelerated action is urgently needed to achieve the target of ending child, early and forced marriage. Implementing the existing resolutions will be critical to achieve this goal. There are also several key areas where the global normative framework could be strengthened, to ensure robust responses that address the root causes of child, early, and forced marriage, while supporting ever-married girls.

Future resolutions should:

- Articulate strategies to address the rights of girls in informal unions, recognising that their needs are often not addressed in policies and programmes, and they face additional barriers to education, livelihoods, justice, health, and other services.
- Recognise adolescence as a time of change and growth
 for girls that is marked by increasing capacity to make
 decisions about their own lives and achieve their
 aspirations, but also significant vulnerability, including to
 child, early and forced marriage. Strengthen commitments
 to protect the human rights of adolescent girls and ensure
 that they have access to education, livelihoods, health and
 other social services and programmes that enable them to
 exercise agency over their lives and futures.
- Recognise the rights of all girls to have control over all aspects related to their sexuality.
- Support transitions from school to livelihoods for marginalised girls as a key strategy to prevent child, early and forced marriage.
- Commit to provide at least 12 years of free, quality and gender-transformative primary and secondary education for all girls, and at least one year of preprimary education to set girls on a path of learning and provide childcare support for young mothers.
- Commit to ensuring access to comprehensive sexuality
 education, contraception, and safe reproductive health
 services to prevent and address unwanted and early
 pregnancies, which are key drivers of child, early, and
 forced marriage. Strengthen commitments to overcome
 barriers to contraception and the full spectrum of
 maternal health services for ever-married girls, including
 by ensuring they can exercise bodily autonomy and
 make their own health decisions.
- Strengthen access to justice for girls, including ever-married girls, by ensuring their access to legal aid, reparations and other remedies, and protection against retribution or physical or psychological pressure.

- Strengthen accountability for those in authority for upholding laws and regulations related to violence against women and girls and the prevention of child, early and forced marriage.
- Commit to invest in holistic, multi-sectoral and multilayered strategies and programmes that start with girls and expand to the community, district, and national levels.
- Develop and implement a legal and policy framework that is not only focused on the minimum age of marriage, rights within marriage and upon its dissolution, but that supports girls to thrive in all aspects of their lives.
- Include specific commitments to funding programmes and initiatives to end child, early and forced marriage and support ever-married girls and women, including direct funding to community-led women's and girls' organisations.

Supporting action

Increasing accountability for action to prevent and end child, early and forced marriage is also key. Since 2016, the resolution has called on governments to report on is progress through their national reports to international treaty bodies, the High-Level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review process.

These forums for accountability are important first steps. However, action should also be taken at the country level, in collaboration with civil society organisations, including feminist, women's and girl-led organisations, and girls themselves, to review progress, identify challenges and chart further action.

In addition, governments, donors, and UN agencies should work to **support and increase funding to community-based and -led organisations** that are working to end child early and forced marriage, including for their advocacy and accountability work.

Finally, member states should **ensure that ending child**, **early and forced marriage remains a specific global priority**, now and in the future. Continuing to develop the normative framework through resolutions at the UNGA and Human Rights Council will be important, while also keeping an eye toward discussions on the development agenda that is likely to succeed the Sustainable Development Goals.

ANNEX 1: THE EVOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Year	Key themes		
2014	 Defines child, early and forced marriage as a harmful practice that violates the human rights of girls and is driven by gender inequality. Emphasizes importance of girls' autonomy and decision-making. Calls for States to enact, enforce and uphold laws to prevent child, early and forced marriage. Recognises links between child, early and forced marriage, health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and education and calls for action to realise girls' rights in each area. Identifies poverty and insecurity as root causes of child, early and forced marriage and calls for action to address them. Calls for coordinated, holistic responses implemented in partnership with civil society. 		
2016	 Elaborates on additional actions States should take to prevent child marriage and address the needs of girls in the areas of health, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, economic empowerment, violence prevention and access to justice. Calls for the meaningful engagement of girls in all areas of decision-making that affects their lives. Calls for strategies to address gender stereotypes, discrimination and norms that help perpetuate child, early and forced marriage, including through the engagement of men and boys. Introduces language on the role of families in preventing child, early and forced marriage. Elaborates on legal and policy actions to address child marriage, including by setting a minimum legal age for marriage, amending laws that allow perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence to avoid punishment by marrying their victims, and birth and marriage registration. 		
2018	 Recognises informal unions and the importance of addressing the needs and protecting the human rights of already married girls for the first time. Calls upon states to set 18 as the minimum age of marriage and for work to ensure greater awareness and enforcement of laws at the local level. Strengthens language on access to maternal health services, vocational and technical training, sexual and gender-based violence prevention and responses, and access to justice including for married girls, and gender norm change. Introduces new language on strengthening girls' voice, agency and leadership. Introduces new language on family-oriented policies to address factors such as poverty that contribute to child, early and forced marriage. Strengthens commitments to address child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian emergencies and responses. 		
2020	 Recognises the impact of COVID-19 on child, early and forced marriage and elaborates actions to mitigate the impacts, including in the areas of health, education, sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response, poverty eradication, economic empowerment, girls' decision-making, and the efforts by communities and civil society to address and prevent child, early and forced marriage. 		
2022	 Recognises how multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination may increase the risk of child, early and forced marriage and calls for action to address the specific needs girls with disabilities, indigenous girls, and girls in vulnerable situations, including girls facing social and economic exclusion and girls in rural and remote areas and refugee camps, among others. Introduces language on the impact of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters on child, early and forced marriage and strengthens language on addressing child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian contexts. Strengthens language on accwess to education, with a focus on mitigating the impact of school closures and addressing digital divides. Strengthens language on addressing the root causes of gender inequality and unequal power relations as key drivers of child, early and forced marriage. 		



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