

Checklists for handling cases of child marriage in case management

UNHCR and Plan International

December 2023



Case workers and volunteers

This checklist is based on UNHCR and Plan International’s lessons learned when handling cases of child marriage in child protection (CP) and gender-based violence (GBV) case management services. Four operations in three countries participated in piloting approaches throughout 2022 and 2023. **See the full technical paper and a brief summary for more information.** Read the statements and consider how to apply this to your work. Discuss with your supervisor any areas where you feel you need extra support or guidance. Throughout this checklist we refer to girls. This is because girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage practices. However, we know that boys are also affected by the practice depending on the setting.

Case workers and community-based volunteers	What support do I need?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that it is not my responsibility alone to stop child marriages from happening. I am part of a bigger system of child protection, police and other actors. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have completed or I have access to the following training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CP case management training - GBV case management training - BIP e-learning / BIP training (refugee settings only) - Psychological first aid - Handling GBV disclosures among children and adolescents - Caring for Child Survivors of Sexual Abuse Training, IRC and UNICEF (2023) - Gender transformative programming and/or adolescent-responsive programming <p><i>Ask your manager or the local protection coordination mechanism to see what is available in your area or at national level.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will regularly assess my own attitudes and behaviours regarding issues related to child marriage, adolescent sex and pregnancy. This is to make sure that my opinions are not causing my case work to be discriminatory in any way. I will ask myself questions and reflect on how I feel. How can we make this girl feel as safe and as comfortable as possible? Am I the best person to work with her? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child marriage cases can be very complicated. I will always seek support and guidance from my supervisor before taking action. I will be guided by the best interests of the child principle. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know that it is always possible to organise a case consultation or a case conference with both CP and GBV colleagues to seek advice on the best way to support the girl, if I feel I need it. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not actively look for cases of child marriage because this can be stigmatising and disempowering for the girls involved and can create risks – both for me and for the girls. When girls at risk or ever married girls are identified, I know I need to decide when and how to engage with them based on best interest of the child to avoid exposing them to additional harm 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will always seek consent/assent from the girl before reaching out or involving anyone else in her care. This includes parents/caregivers or extended family members, community leaders and faith leaders or her husband and in-laws. <p><i>In general, it is not advisable to involve the husband or in-laws in case management. For non-offending husbands and in-laws, it may be advisable to encourage their participation in other services such as community sessions on life skills, gender equality or other sensitisation activities. It may be advisable for colleagues leading those activities to invite them so as not to affect your relationship with your the girl.</i></p>	

Case workers and community-based volunteers	What support do I need?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know that every case involving child marriage is unique. I must carefully and regularly assess each case and work together with the girl to develop a unique case action plan. <p><i>These cases are unique because of the girl's individual character; the people in her life; the individuals involved who have power; the national legal system and the girl's asylum status; the capacity of the response actors; the available services for referral, and other aspects.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For girls who are at risk of child marriage and ever-married girls who are not attending case management services, my role is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage with the girl safely; provide information about available case management and other specialised services; if she discloses anything to me, tell her that I believe her and that she will not be judged or ridiculed if she seeks support. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My role for girls in my caseload is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> prioritise the girl's needs and safety, and build a trusting relationship with her; ensure that the case action plan includes efforts to stop imminent child marriages or planning for girls' safety within a marriage. not to force married girls to separate from or divorce their husbands; Regularly update the best interest assessment and discuss possible follow up actions with the girl. <p><i>Exceptions to this are young children and younger adolescents (under ~14 years) where given their age, maturity and other factors they may not be able to make decisions alone. Other exceptions are serious cases involving very young children where additional protective measures may be needed to protect the child, or where mandatory reporting laws are in place.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most important thing for me is to secure access to a girl if she is at risk of child marriage. This may mean that in some cases I should consider and adapt how much pressure I put on the family to stop the marriage – because if I put too much the family may push me away. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I do not mediate between girls and their husbands. No child protection case worker should engage in mediation, especially in cases of child marriage. I am not a marriage counsellor. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I understand how to triage cases and who handles child marriage cases in my area. <p><i>For example, in high-prevalence areas with limited capacity, prioritisation may focus on married children who are physically with their spouse (in the camp/location); married children or children who are under 16 and at risk of child marriage; and cases with immediate risks where harm is likely.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know the laws on marriage and exemptions to marriage in my setting. I know how they are applied in the communities I work with, including refugees. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know what the mandatory reporting rules are regarding cases of child abuse, sexual violence or cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, and how they apply to me, children and adults. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I ask for technical and psychosocial support from my supervisors and colleagues when I feel overwhelmed and stressed about the case management process or particular cases. 	

UNHCR and partner staff only: I understand the potential implications of child marriage on refugee case processing and vice versa. I am fully aware of child marriage considerations in refugee protection case processing, including registration and identity management, refugee status determination and durable solutions.

Three example scenarios of what to do:

Case workers and community-based volunteers

1 When a case of an **imminent child marriage** is reported to me from the community or through a third person:

- First, I discuss with my supervisor how best to engage the girl. I do not rush to speak to the parents, community leaders, husband-to-be or other family member.
- My supervisor and I consider the safest way to approach the girl that does not put her or me in danger, or does not risk damaging the relationship between the community and my organisation.
- I remember that preventing a child marriage should make up one part of the case management action plan. This action plan should be created together with the girl and her non offending parents/caregivers or trusted adult.

2 When an **older married girl** is identified to me via the community or through a third person:

- First, I discuss with my supervisor how best to engage the married child. We decide to liaise with CP/GBV colleagues to see if the married child is already known to them.
- We consider the safest way to approach the married girl that does not put her or me in danger, or does not risk damaging the relationship between the community and my organisation.
- We know that in the next few days there will be a community sensitisation event in her area of the camp.
- A small group of protection staff decide to go to her area to conduct additional sensitisation activities for women and girls to inform them about available services. They make sure to include her homestead in the catchment so as not to stigmatise the household and put the girl in danger.
- I remember that although she is a child, she is living as a married woman and so I draw on the survivor-centred approach when we meet. I inform her about available services that are also open for girls.

3 When a **younger married girl** discloses directly to me that she is married (regardless of whether the girl mentions abuse that may have occurred):

- I ask her if she feels comfortable to speak where we are or if she would prefer to go somewhere else where she feels safer or more comfortable.
- I tell her that she is not alone. I tell her about my role. I ask her if she would like to know about what services are available to her.
- I do not ask her questions about her marriage, who her husband is, where her parents are or if she is experiencing any abuse.
- I do ask her if she feels OK to tell me where she is living and how I can contact her again.
- I do ask her if she feels safe at home.
- I ask her if she would like to visit me again to talk about things that worry her and things that make her happy. We make an appointment for the next day at the child-friendly space.
- Given her young age, she is a high risk and a high priority case. So I discuss the case with my supervisor as soon as I can to decide upon the next steps.

If in doubt, contact your supervisor for advice.

Remember, you can always email Helpdesk.ChildMarriage@plan-international.org.

This Helpdesk is specifically on child marriage and is managed by UNHCR and Plan International.

We are here to help you support the community as best we can.

Case Management Supervisors

This checklist is based on UNHCR and Plan International’s lessons learned when handling cases of child marriage in child protection (CP) and gender-based violence (GBV) case management services. Four operations in three countries participated in piloting approaches throughout 2022 and 2023. [See the full technical paper and a brief summary for more information.](#) The checklist is for **Case Management Supervisors**. Read the statements and consider how to apply this to your work. Discuss with your technical supervisor any areas where you feel you need extra support or guidance. Throughout this checklist we refer to girls. This is because girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage practices. However, we know that to boys are also affected by the practice depending on the setting.

Supervisors	What support do I need?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only staff who have received training and have prior experience should take on cases of child marriage due to their complexity. I will try to enrol and request that all my case workers attend and have regular refresher trainings. I will integrate learning into our meetings where possible. <p>Core training includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CP or GBV case management; UNHCR/Plan International e-learning module on handling cases of child marriage in case management; UNICEF/IRC Caring for Child Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For staff with experience in either CP or GBV case work, begin with a smaller caseload when beginning cases involving child marriage or child survivors – i.e. 10 to 12 cases (instead of 16). <p><i>Brand new case workers with no previous experience with other types of cases do NOT immediately begin seeing complex cases such as those involving child marriage or child survivors.</i></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will explore and ask my management to access opportunities to learn from and exchange with technical staff about child marriage. I will mentor the case workers accordingly. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I know that cases involving child marriage are complicated and I will provide extra support to case workers managing those cases. For staff managing complex cases I will increase group supervision and/or case management meetings. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will support and review the development of case action plans for child marriage cases. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I regularly check in with staff regarding risk assessments and adjust them as needed to ensure their safety, the safety of girls and our relationship with the community. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will create learning opportunities through case management meetings and group supervision to learn from mutual experiences of providing case management involving child marriage cases. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I am not sure what to do, I will seek advice from my technical supervisor or contact the UNHCR-Plan International Helpdesk. I can also suggest holding a case conference or consultation with a mix of CP and GBV staff to decide the best approach. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I recognise that handling cases of child marriage or any form of GBV affecting children can increase the likelihood of staff burnout and other forms of trauma for case workers. I will normalise and express empathy for the feelings and emotions that case workers may experience and try to monitor their mental health. 	

Supervisors	What support do I need?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will make sure that staff and volunteers understand that case management is as important for married girls as it is for cases of girls at (imminent) risk. Case management should not stop because a girl has entered a marriage. Barriers to continuing service provision and delivery should be explored with the girl, her family and in some cases, her husband. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will ensure that all staff know that any contact with married girls' husbands should be an exception and that approval from my supervisor must be granted before any engagement with a the girl's husband or anyone in their environment. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will document promising practices or challenges and share with national coordination networks and my technical supervisor to improve collective learning and best practices. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will regularly check on staff wellbeing and adjust their workload and support as needed. 	

**If in doubt, contact your supervisor for advice.
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Global and national technical leads and coordinators

This checklist is based on UNHCR and Plan International’s lessons learned when handling cases of child marriage in child protection (CP) and gender-based violence (GBV) case management services. Four operations in three countries participated in piloting approaches throughout 2022 and 2023. [See the full technical paper and a brief summary for more information.](#) The checklist is for **national coordinators, technical advisers and global technical leads**. Read the statements and consider how to apply this to your work. Discuss with your supervisor or reach out to the Helpdesk if you feel you need support.

Throughout this checklist we refer to girls. This is because girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage practices. However, we know that to boys are also affected by the practice depending on the setting.

National coordinators / technical advisers / global technical leads	What support do I need?
<p>Learning and development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I will make sure that training, mentoring and learning exchanges can be facilitated across peer agencies for complex challenges, such as child marriage. • I will arrange/request regular training on basic and advanced case management for CP and GBV actors and for handling GBV disclosures, including from children and adolescents, that are accessible in language and location. • I will encourage and support regular trainings on SOPs and how to apply them to cases of child marriage for both CP and GBV actors. • I will arrange/request training on caring for child survivors of sexual abuse that are accessible in language and location. • I will advocate for training for case workers and other frontline staff and volunteers to improve skills and competencies in line with adolescent girl-responsive services and inclusive attitudes. • To reduce internal bias, services are empowering and free of discrimination, judgement or reinforcement of harmful attitudes that might limit some adolescent girls’ participation and access. • I will circulate the new UNHCR/Plan International e-modules on adolescent girl-responsive approaches and on handling child marriage in case management across the networks. • I will ask for support from senior management or relevant partners when I cannot comply with all requests. • I will advocate for adequate resources to ensure effective learning, support and visibility for quality case management services especially on complex cases like child marriage. 	

National coordinators / technical advisers / global technical leads	What support do I need?
<p>Technical support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will review current standard operating procedures (SOPs) and coordinate with CP/GBV teams to update as needed, such as considering root causes and exacerbating factors related to child marriage, and case criteria related to cases of child marriage. I will ensure that the SOPs consider all adolescent girls, including ever-married girls and young mothers. <p>Additional guidance could be included in the SOPs on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> outreach, identification and engagement of ever-married girls; clarifying the assessment process to understand the child marriage decision-making pathways and girls' feelings about the marriage; reviewing risk ratings based on capacity and prevalence of child marriage; nuances associated with UNHCR refugee case processing (only relevant for refugee children); clarifying when and how to close and transfer cases involving child marriage – i.e. not closing cases because the girl got married or because she turned 18 years. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will review and coordinate with CP/GBV actors to ensure referral pathways are adolescent-friendly and consider services for adolescent girls, including ever-married girls and young mothers. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will encourage and support the inclusion of child marriage as a major concern in needs assessments, HNOs and HRP, multi-sector assessments and other analyses and strategy development processes. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will advocate to update standard CP and GBV case management guideline trainings, and other national resources to better reflect lessons learned when handling cases of child marriage, especially for married girls' unique needs. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will explore opportunities to establish and pilot-test the use of case management forums in my context. <p><i>Case management forums are an informal or formal group of actors from across the case management system, including representatives from CP and GBV, different referral services, UN agencies, NGOs, local and national actors meeting to improve ways of working through dialogue and sharing experiences and challenges. A recommendation from previous pilots was to include representatives from community-based (child) protection committees or other community representatives to ensure better participation and linkages with the community.</i></p> <p>This action may require additional guidance to support the optimal functioning and technical quality of the forums. It is recommended to closely monitor this approach for impact and share lessons learned.</p>	

UNHCR STAFF ONLY:

- Update and amend national UNHCR policies and processes regarding Registration, Refugee Status Determination, and Durable Solutions to outline best practice when handling cases of child marriage.
- Create learning opportunities on Best Interest Procedures and child marriage cases for UNHCR staff and partners.

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About Plan International

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

Contact us

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About UNHCR

What we want to achieve

A world where every stateless person and every person forced to flee can build a better future.

Who we are

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people.

What we do

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, leads international action to protect people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. We deliver life-saving assistance like shelter, food and water, help safeguard fundamental human rights, and develop solutions that ensure people have a safe place to call home where they can build a better future. We also work to ensure that stateless people are granted a nationality.

Why we matter

Every year, millions of men, women and children are forced to flee their homes to escape conflict and persecution. We are the world's leading organisation dedicated to supporting people forced to flee and those deprived of a nationality. We are in the field in over 130 countries, using our expertise to protect and care for forcibly displaced and stateless people, who number 114 million as of September 2023.

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For the full set of resources related to this series, please visit
<https://plan-international.org/publications/child-marriage-case-management-for-refugees/>
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