



31 May 2021

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade – Human Rights Sub-Committee

Inquiry into certain aspects of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2019-20 - child and forced marriage

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP

Chair of the Human Rights Sub-Committee

Dear Mr Andrews,

Walk Free welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. This Inquiry is timely; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the factors driving the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to child and forced marriage, require urgent action from the Australian Government.

On any given day in 2016, nearly 29 million women and girls were living in situations of modern slavery,¹ accounting for almost three quarters of the global total. In our 2020 report, **Stacked Odds**, Walk Free found that pervasive gender inequality sits at the core of women and girls' disproportionate risk to modern slavery. Many of these women and girls have been forced to marry; an increasingly common reality for many in the wake of the pandemic.

In too many regions of the world, women and girls do not even have the law to protect them against this injustice. The majority of countries have not criminalised forced marriage in national legislation and concerningly, some nations are regressing.² Somalia, for example, tabled a controversial bill in August 2020 that would allow a child to be married once they reached puberty, which can mean 10 years old.³

Walk Free urges the Australian Government to bring greater focus, coordination, and resources to the international fight against child and forced marriage. At the heart of our recommendations, Walk Free calls for the Australian Government to lead by example, and to dedicate adequate resources to the fight at home and abroad to ensure that our commitment to ending child and forced marriage goes beyond promises, and into coordinated action.

Walk Free would be pleased to assist the Committee in any way as you pursue your terms of reference. We look forward to the Committee's Report and Government response to this much needed inquiry.

Best regards,



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About Walk Free

Walk Free is an international human rights organisation working to end modern slavery globally within our generation. Walk Free is the producer of the world's leading dataset on measuring and understanding slavery and works on systems change through government, business, and faith, to ensure slavery is tackled through both a legal and cultural framework.

More at: www.walkfree.org.

Refer to **Appendix 1** for resources Walk Free has developed related to child and forced marriage.

Refer to **Appendix 2** for key definitions used in this submission.

Structure of Submission

This submission draws on the Stacked Odds report, among other sources, to provide expert guidance in respect of the Committee's focus areas, and is structured as follows:

1. Child and forced marriage: Global trends
2. Australia's current engagement to promote the elimination of child and forced marriage
3. Additional steps Australia can take to advocate for the elimination of child and forced marriage
 - a. Bilateral engagement or other diplomatic activities
 - b. Engaging with international institutions and likeminded countries
 - c. Cooperating with non-government organisations
 - d. Cooperating with faith organisations

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Summary of Recommendations

Bilateral engagement or other diplomatic activities

1. Advocate for the importance of girls' education to economic growth and social stability throughout all bilateral and diplomatic engagements and invest in programs that increase access to education for adolescent girls.
2. Engage with African and Asia Pacific nations to criminalise forced marriage and close legislative loopholes that allow child marriage to occur.
3. Embed the recommendations presented in this submission into the framework of the new *International Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery* and into Australia's domestic response to forced and child marriage.

Engaging with international institutions and likeminded countries

4. Ensure education programs that reduce risk of child and forced marriage are at the forefront of Australia's international development agenda.
5. Advocate for likeminded countries to close all legislative loopholes that allow child and forced marriage to occur, and ensure these issues are central in gender-mainstreaming efforts and associated domestic budgets.
6. Entrench child and forced marriage as key focus areas of programming and funding to progress gender equality in the *Partnerships For Recovery* framework and increase funding to the broader *Official Development Assistance* budget.

Cooperating with non-government organisations

7. Develop holistic attitudinal change programs with frontline organisations to enhance access to education and economic agency of women and girls in at-risk communities, such as through cash transfers and life skills training.
8. Ensure interventions are grounded in evidence, and that strong measurement and evaluation protocols are embedded within all projects to reduce risk of child and forced marriage supported by the Australian Government, to continue to enhance the evidence base.
9. Empower survivor-led and youth-led civil society organisations to lead the charge in reducing risks of child and forced marriage by establishing an Expert Working Group of survivor and youth advocates to advise the development of Australia's international anti-trafficking advocacy.

Cooperating with faith organisations

10. Expand the approach taken in the *Ending Violence Against Women in Afghanistan* and *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* programs by working with faith leaders to remove gender inequality from faith teachings and challenge attitudes to forced and child marriage in all high-risk countries.
11. Partner with faith-based civil society organisations and faith-affiliated educational institutions to develop training programs for youth and provide them with tools and knowledge to identify and address modern slavery risks in their communities.
12. Ensure faith leaders who are taking action to end modern slavery are represented on the Modern Slavery Working Group.



WALK FREE

1. Child and forced marriage: Global trends

Together with the International Labour Office and the International Organisation for Migration, Walk Free found that on any given day in 2016, there were 15.4 million people around the world living in forced marriages.⁴ An overwhelming majority of victims of forced marriage were women and girls (88 per cent), and almost 40 per cent of victims were under the age of 18 when they married.⁵ Further, of victims who were forced to marry before the age of 18, nearly half were married before they were 15 years old (44 per cent). Some victims of child and forced marriages also experienced other forms of exploitation, such as forced labour or domestic servitude, within the context of the marriage.⁶ These estimates are likely to be conservative; UNICEF, for example, estimates that globally, around 21 per cent of young women were married before their 18th birthday.⁷ Data gaps exist in key regions, particularly in the Arab States due to an inability to adequately survey forms of modern slavery that predominantly affect women and girls. Despite this, the Global Estimates data suggests forced marriage is most prevalent in Africa (4.8 per 1,000 people), followed by Asia and the Pacific (2.0 victims per 1,000 people).⁸

No country is free from child and forced marriage. In the United Kingdom, for example, reports of forced marriage have increased by almost 47 per cent from 2017 to 2018. Where the age of victims was identified, almost one fifth (19 per cent) of cases involved victims aged 15 and younger, and another 16 per cent involved victims aged between 16 and 17.⁹ Similarly, in the United States, of approximately 207,459 minors married across 41 states between 2000 and 2015, 10 per cent were girls younger than 16 years.¹⁰

The risk of child and forced marriage faced by a majority of victims worldwide is heightened by gender inequality and discrimination. From an early age, girls are disproportionately at risk of gender-based violence, which limits their social and economic mobility – and increases the risk of child marriage, trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation.¹¹ This risk stems from patriarchal beliefs that men should control or discipline females.¹² These social norms that devalue girls from birth are reinforced by inequality in laws and policies – for example,

laws that prevent women from inheriting land and holding assets, conferring citizenship on their children, travelling freely, and working without their husband's permission. In some countries, laws grant rapists exemptions from prosecution if they are married to, or later marry, their victims.¹³

Laws which protect women and girls from forced and early marriages are particularly rare: only 50 countries have criminalised forced marriage and only 30 have laws which set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years without exception.¹⁴ Notably, high income nations such as the US, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are among the majority of countries globally that do not set the minimum age of marriage at 18 without exception.¹⁵ Exemptions to marriage age laws typically include judicial or parental

"For now, though, I am very weak but have decided to be strong for my children. I want them not to blame me, but to blame my culture. A culture that oppresses women. A culture that forces women to marry men they don't choose. A culture which forces young girls to marry old men. A culture that does not ever listen to women and girls."

Sharon, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 11.*

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approval. However, there are some nations who are making good progress and should be applauded. The Dominican Republic, for example, banned child marriage earlier this year.¹⁶ Yet, there remain other nations who are not only making little progress but are regressing. For instance, Somalia tabled a controversial bill in August 2020 that would allow a child to be married once they reached puberty, which can mean 10 years old.¹⁷ Further, child and forced marriages can intersect with migration issues. This is even evident in Australia and New Zealand, where girls have been forcibly married with the expectation of sponsoring the husband's migration, or forced to marry overseas during family holidays.¹⁸

*Rupa's story**

Rupa grew up in Assam, India. As a child, her mother encouraged Rupa and her siblings to go to school and study. But Rupa's father, an agricultural labourer, was heavily in debt. To relieve some of his debts, and avoid taking out loans for a dowry, Rupa's father offered her for marriage. At 14 years of age, Rupa was married to a 27-year-old man.

Rupa's mother hoped that because the man's family was rich, Rupa would be in good hands. However, Rupa was forced to quit school, was physically and verbally abused by her in-laws, and pressured into having children. By 20, Rupa had given birth to two children.

Rupa and her husband moved to Kolkata at the suggestion of her husband's friends. They told him that he could find work in the city and suggested he put Rupa into sex work. As her husband had developed an addiction to alcohol that increasingly dried up their funds, he took this advice. Rupa was forced to sell sex in Sonagachi, the red light district. When she tried to refuse, her husband would beat her and his friends would threaten to harm her children.

Believing that her family and society will never accept her after she has been sexually exploited, Rupa has no support networks to help her. At 24 years of age, Rupa says she is unable to stop selling sex. She knows she will never be accepted by her family or community again. She also feels that there is no alternative way to support her children.

Rupa feels helpless, and believes that NGOs and the government have not done enough to improve her economic situation. Government officials often tell her, "*you women earn thousands on a daily basis. What would be your need for government benefits?*" Sometimes the officers take money, promising to provide ration cards. But they do not provide anything.

**Not her real name.*

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Not only do biases multiply in the face of crises – such as conflict, pandemics, or climate-related displacement – they are exacerbated for women and girls who are marginalised due to ability, ethnicity, sexuality, or other status. In the wake of the ongoing pandemic, the risk of child marriage has drastically increased. Previously, UNICEF estimated that an approximate 100 million girls would be married before the age of 18 over the course of the next decade; however, following the spread of COVID-19, more recent estimates suggest that an additional 10 million child brides will join this number.²⁰



“Providing new knowledge, skills and support to women and girls as well as opportunities to take on new or expanded roles as learners, leaders, change-makers, critical thinkers, and businesspersons – all while contributing to commonly agreed family and community aspirations – is key. This creates new role models for girls and women within their own and surrounding communities, changing the scripts of what girls and women ‘can’ or ‘should’ do while sharing, learning, and co-leading alongside men.”

Elena Bonometti, Chief Executive Officer, Tostan

In just a few months, the virus had undermined decades of progress on gender equality and placed the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in jeopardy. Girls Not Brides estimate that unless we make significant progress on child and forced marriage, we will not meet eight of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.²¹

2. Australia’s Current Engagement to Promote the Elimination of Child and Forced Marriage

International framework

The Australian Government has been active in implementing initiatives to address child and forced marriage globally.²² In previous years, this has included co-sponsoring several Human Rights Council resolutions and signing a charter committing to end child marriage at the Girls Summit in 2014.²³ Australia’s commitment to the UN’s Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda is at the core of its upcoming international actions to end child and forced marriage. For example, through the recently announced *Second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, the Australian Government has committed to supporting partner countries to strengthen gender-responsive strategies and improve legislation to prevent gendered crimes, specifically including forced marriage, over the next decade.²⁴ Similar commitments have been made pursuant to Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting Communiqués, including the Women’s Forum in 2018, which called for an increased focus on ending child and forced marriages.²⁵

However, despite these high-level commitments to ensuring child and forced marriage are addressed internationally, and particularly in the context of security, there are little other international advocacy plans that clearly address these issues. For example, child and forced marriage are not separately discussed as distinct focus areas in the 2019-20 Annual Report of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).²⁶ Rather, discussion is focused on the related but broader concepts of human trafficking, gender-based violence, child sexual exploitation, and family violence. Further, the Australian Government is still yet to finalise and make public the new *International Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery (International Strategy)*, more than a year after submissions were due.²⁷ To effectively meet the stated goals of advancing women’s economic empowerment and ending violence against women and girls,²⁸ a clearer co-ordinated focus on child and forced marriage should be incorporated in the International Strategy, specifically as these issues undermine women and girl’s health, education, and income-earning ability across their lifetime.²⁹



While the Australian Government takes important steps to address modern slavery globally, including in their role as co-chair of the Bali Process Government and Business Forum, of which Walk Free is the Secretariat, and is a member of the Global Coordinating Group, which is committed to pursuing Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, these actions do not directly address child and forced marriage. Nonetheless, other DFAT programs have worked to reduce vulnerability to child and forced marriage among women and girls. One example is the *Ending Violence Against Women in Afghanistan Program (2012-2021)* which focused on rights-based awareness raising and changing attitudes among influential community members, such as religious leaders, to combat gender biases that disempower women and girls. In one province, women's groups were organised by female participants in the program, and the groups advocated for arranged marriages to be made based on individual choices and reduced child and forced marriages in the area.³⁰ Programs with a clear focus on ending child and forced marriage should be streamlined within the upcoming International Strategy in addition to the National Action Plan to implement the WPS agenda.

"During my escape to the capital city, I was once again abused and exploited by the driver who was supposed to help me escape. In Afghan culture, it can be nearly impossible for some women to support themselves independently without being under the care of a male relative."

Maryam, in her 20s, Afghani survivor of forced marriage.*

Funding

Various Australian Government funding engagements strive to reduce the risks that increase prevalence of child and forced marriage abroad, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region and on a country-specific basis.³¹ For example, in the 2019-20 Australian Aid Budget, Australia contributed to the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, a 10 year commitment began in 2012 that currently supports over 170 gender equality initiatives across 14 Pacific Island countries.³² Many international initiatives are supported through Australia's Gender Equality Fund (GEF), established in 2015, which accelerates activities that economically empower women and girls.³³ Positive developments occurred in 2020-21, as Australia's contributions to the GEF increased from \$55 million to \$65 million.³⁴ However, despite the increased commitment to combating gender inequality, this funding represents less than 2 per cent of total overseas budget expenditure allocated in 2021-22,³⁵ and less than one per cent of national GDP based on 2019-20 figures.³⁶

Australia also funds international bodies that further the gender equality cause. Australia provided UN Women with \$7.8 million in funding in the 2019-20 FY,³⁷ and in line with having the strongest GDP in the region, is UN Women's largest contributor among Pacific nations.³⁸ Since 2015, Australia has committed to supporting two key UN Women funds to promote the WPS agenda: \$11 million was provided to the UN Women Global Facility for WPS from 2015-22, while a total of annual contributions of \$5.25 million since 2016 has been provided to the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.³⁹ In 2020-21, Australia provided \$12.725 million in core funding to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and \$21 million to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).⁴⁰ Both agencies play a critical role in reducing vulnerability to child and forced marriage. However, Australia is not among the top 10 core contributors to UNDP, despite having a higher GDP than five of the nations who are core contributors.⁴¹ Neither was Australia among the top nine core funders of UNICEF in 2019 (excluding funds from National Committees for



UNICEF), despite also having a higher GDP than five of the core contributors.⁴² This follows broader trends in Australia's international aid, with funding steadily falling despite relatively stable economic growth, in comparison to other members of the Development Assistance Committee.⁴³

However, Australia's commitment to gender-disaggregated data strengthens the capacity to collect, analyse, and make policy decisions based on evidence. For example, Australia provided \$6.5 million between 2016-2021 to UN Women's global flagship program, *Women Count* in order increase good gender data. Further, to meet the increasing need for data on the impact of the pandemic on women and girls, Australia has committed \$3.5 million to UN Women to implement *Building Back Better: Promoting a gender data-driven response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific and Southeast Asia* from 2021-22. Additionally, through a partnership with the International Women's Development Agency, Australia is supporting *Equality Insights* (\$2 million, 2020-2022) to improve gender sensitive data.⁴⁴ This data will be essential to effectively build back better in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"International cooperation in the wake of COVID-19 will be essential to economic recovery, so helping women, girls, and their communities escape and avoid modern slavery. Development partners, such as Australia and New Zealand, should help to alleviate poverty in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries through investment in local industries and by creating safe and legal pathways to employment."

Jone Dakuvula, Executive Director, Pacific Dialogue Fiji

3. Additional Steps Can Australia Take To Advocate For The Elimination Of Child And Forced Marriage

Through consultation with frontline organisations, Walk Free found that to reduce vulnerability to modern slavery among women and girls, governments must protect, invest in, and empower them. Several recommendations are outlined below to illustrate how the Australian Government can assume a stronger leadership role in the global fight against child and forced marriage.

a) Bilateral Engagements and Other Diplomatic Activities

Australia has previously focused diplomatic efforts to advance gender equality in the Asia Pacific region. However, nine of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriages globally are in Africa (**Appendix 3**). Australia only has direct diplomatic presence in two of these nations (Mozambique and Nigeria) and Australia's development program to Sub-Saharan Africa is minimal (\$31 million provided in 2019-20 compared to \$1,041 million to the Pacific in the same period).⁴⁵ Further, much of this spending involved the continuation of the Australia Awards program. Australia's efforts in reducing vulnerability for women and girls in this region need to go beyond 'gender parity of access to the Australia Awards-Africa program' and supporting 'female awardees on their return to their home countries'⁴⁶ and tackle the root drivers of risk driven by gender biases.

To do so, the Australian Government should expand its diplomatic presence in Africa, with a focus on working with high-risk countries to reduce vulnerabilities to child and forced marriage in the region. This should include investing in programs that promote access to education, particularly for adolescent girls, across the region.⁴⁷ Similar efforts to promote girls' education should be replicated in the Asia Pacific region, given the Australian Government's existing strong relationships with neighbouring countries and



higher GDP. Further, the Australian Government should leverage its position as a leader in the region to advocate that other Asia Pacific governments criminalise forced marriage and close legislative loopholes that allow child marriage to continue.

The Australian Government should raise awareness of the importance of educating girls to national economies across its bilateral engagements and diplomatic portfolio. The global society is losing US\$172 trillion in global wealth due to differences in lifetime earnings between women and men, which stems from their unequal access to education and subsequently, the labour market.⁴⁸ Gender equality policies can have strong positive impacts on GDP per capita – for example, it was estimated in 2017 that improving gender equality by 2050 would lead to an increase in GDP per capita in the European Union from 6.1 to 9.6 per cent (equating to an increase from €1.95 trillion to €3.15 trillion).⁴⁹ As such, advancing women’s empowerment and participation in the global economy could add as little as US \$12 trillion by 2025, provided that countries accelerate women’s participation in line with the best-performing country in their region; and as much as US \$28 trillion, if full gender equality is achieved.⁵⁰ Advocating for greater gender equality can therefore reduce risk to modern slavery, in addition to ensuring economies build back better.

“... Educating more girls directly impacts the achievement of nine SDGs, including helping to solve the climate crisis. Therefore, not only will these measures mitigate many of the risks facing girls, but the entire planet. Focusing on those most at-risk benefits everyone, and an empowered female population, ensured through girls’ education, is one of the best investments a country can make.”

Safeena Hussain, Founder and Executive Director, Educate Girls

“I just wish I was sent to school like other girls my age ... All of this wouldn’t have happened. I want my children to have a good education. That’s all I want now.”

Sarah, now 30, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 13.*

Finally, in order for the Australian Government to commit to enhancing its advocacy on ending child and forced marriage at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels, our recommendations presented in this submission should be built into the framework of the new International Strategy and into Australia’s domestic response to forced and child marriage.

Recommendations

1. Advocate for the importance of girls’ education to economic growth and social stability throughout all bilateral and diplomatic engagements and invest in programs that increase access to education for adolescent girls.
2. Engage with African and Asia Pacific nations to criminalise forced marriage and close legislative loopholes that allow child marriage to occur.
3. Embed the recommendations presented in this submission into the framework of the new *International Strategy on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery* and into Australia’s domestic response to forced and child marriage.



b) Engagement with International Institutions and Likeminded Countries

Engagement with international institutions and multilateral forums, such as the Beijing+25 Conference, G20 Women 20 Summit, UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF, are key avenues through which Australia can promote action to address child and forced marriage. The Government should seek to improve funding for these key organisations through its *Official Development Assistance* budget and ensure issues relating to child and forced marriage remain central to policy discussions on advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Specifically, the Australian Government should engage with these channels to fund programs to improve access to education for girls that include a focus on child and forced marriage. Educating girls is strongly intertwined with social protection, and can significantly contribute to girls' safety, wellbeing, and empowerment.⁵¹ However, the gains made in educating girls and reducing risk of child marriages over the last decade have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as prolonged school closures makes the prospect of child marriage more attractive the longer children are out of school.⁵² As such, funding initiatives to progress gender equality within *Partnerships for Recovery* should include efforts to provide alternate pathways to a primary and secondary education for girls, to reduce the risk of child marriage during shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵³

Ending child and forced marriage is essential to ending violence against women and girls, advancing women's economic empowerment, and enhancing women's voices in decision-making, leadership and peacebuilding – objectives the Government has committed to work towards throughout the region and globally.⁵⁴ Through engaging other nations with strong responses to ending modern slavery, to put modern slavery at the forefront of global agenda to advance gender equality, Australia can play a pivotal role in shaping a more just and gender-equal future. As such, Australia should actively engage with likeminded countries that also have strong government responses to combatting modern slavery to

accelerate action to end child and forced marriage.

"[It] is fundamental to actively develop joint and coordinated work with other social agents locally and nationally, creating an extensive service network capable of offering individualized, integral attention to the survivors. This will prevent some victims from falling back into the human trafficking cycle again."

Gemma Bardaji Blasco, Dominican Republic Country Director, Free the Slaves

According to Walk Free's 2019 *Measurement, Action, Freedom* report, the top ten countries taking the most action to respond to modern slavery are the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the United States, Portugal, Sweden, Argentina, Belgium, Spain, Croatia, and Australia.⁵⁵ These efforts should promote the consideration of modern slavery issues, including child and forced marriage, within all national and international gender-mainstreaming discourses and decision-making processes, including humanitarian aid, development assistance, bilateral trade, and national gender and development budgets.

In addition, the Government should lead by example and call on nations with similar strong responses to close legislative loopholes that foster risks to modern slavery. Australia is one of only a handful of countries that have criminalised forced marriage: importantly, forced marriage is criminalised under the *Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995*, which ensures it is illegal to cause a person to enter a forced marriage, and to be a party to a forced marriage.⁵⁶ While these steps are significant, Australia has not yet addressed gaps in respect of child marriages. Specifically, Australia does not have a minimum age of



marriage set at 18 years without exception. Currently, persons of 16 and 17 years of age can marry, subject to parental approval and the judge being satisfied that there the facts are “so exceptional and unusual as to justify” the marriage being approved.⁵⁷ By filling this critical gap, Australia can better reduce risks and also strengthen its position as a global anti-slavery leader by calling on likeminded nations, such as Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and United States, to ensure that there are no exceptions to laws that set the age of marriage to be equal to the age of majority. This campaign could be conducted in partnership with key organisations such as UN Women, Girls Not Brides, or other international actors with expertise in disrupting child marriage. Ensuring more girls are in school than in a marriage is a critical step towards evening the odds for women and girls around the world.⁵⁸

Recommendations

1. Ensure education programs to reduce risk of child and forced marriage are at the forefront of Australia’s international development agenda.
2. Advocate for likeminded countries to close all legislative loopholes that allow child and forced marriage to occur, and ensure these issues are central in gender-mainstreaming efforts and associated domestic budgets.
3. Entrench child and forced marriage as key focus areas of programming and funding to progress gender equality in the *Partnerships For Recovery* framework and increase funding to the broader *Official Development Assistance* budget.

c) Cooperating With Non-Government Organisations

While the Australian Government collaborates with non-government organisations to reduce risks of modern slavery,⁵⁹ there is scope to increase the role of frontline organisations in developing strategies of intervention, in addition to delivering them. When asked what three things are needed to reduce the disproportionate risk of modern slavery among women and girls, the most common solutions raised by frontline NGOs around the world were: to improve access to education, provide economic and vocational opportunities for women and girls, and work with and within communities to change harmful and gender-biased attitudes.⁶⁰

It is evident that there are lessons to be learned from frontline organisations in shaping future advocacy. Further, as highlighted by their responses, there is clearly a need to work with, and within communities, to address gender-biased

“We need to start really taking the time to acknowledge the narrative of each victim survivor.”

***Dr Carol Kaplanian, Women’s Health Coordinator (CaLD),
King Edward Memorial Hospital***

attitudes rooted in traditional attitudes and restrictive socio-cultural norms. This is also echoed among the interventions contained in Walk Free’s *Promising Practices Database* which aimed to reduce child marriage. Programs that involved conditional and non-conditional cash transfers, raised awareness through the involvement of community groups, provided safe spaces and life skills training for girls, and targeted girls before they reached puberty were often more successful in reducing risks of child marriage.⁶¹ While the state of evaluations examining the effectiveness of anti-slavery interventions is largely improving⁶² there is remains a need to develop strong evidence on what works to reduce risk to child and forced marriage, particularly given the complex drivers of child and forced marriage.



*Palwasha's story**

Palwasha is a 28-year old Afghan woman who survived continuous exploitation at the hands of her family when she lived in Logar Province of Afghanistan. Like most girls in that region, she was not allowed to go to school. She could neither read nor write and was deprived of many rights, such as the choice of whom to marry and freedom of movement. Palwasha was expected to fulfil the wishes of her large family.

Palwasha was exploited by her family when she was forced to marry three times. In the first marriage, she was a *badal* (a cultural practice which generally involves the marriage of a brother and sister to another pair of brother and sister) on behalf of her brother to another family. When her family realised that her brother's fiancée had mental health issues, they broke the *badal* agreement to please her brother.

She was made a *badal* for the brother a second time. This time it was to a man she liked, and they were both happy; but after 2 years her brother's fiancé died and the families once again broke this *badal* to please her brother, not caring about Palwasha's happiness and wellbeing.

"My father promised to protect me from this bad cultural practice that exploits women but he did not keep his promise. He gave me away as badal for the third time," she said.

The third time was the worst. This husband abused her, but she was not able to return home because she would have faced grave consequences. She went to the *woloswali* (local police station) but was advised to return to her husband. She later escaped and got in touch with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

"I had to leave the situation or be killed. I know I can never return home because I am considered a dead person for breaking the culture and bringing shame to the families. According to my father, I am dead."

At [NGO]'s protection centre, she was able to become more resilient. At the centre, she had access to education, and programs that taught her life and job readiness skills. These prepared her for her first job as well as living on her own. She now works at an orphanage as a house mother. Through her job, she can now live in a decent and safe place.

"My past life motivates me to have a better future and develop skills that will enable me to survive on my own. I am happy that I was given the opportunity to set goals for my future. I became brave and courageous enough to live in the community again."

**Not her real name.*

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Further, in line with the recently launched *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery 2020–25*, the Australian Government should enhance ways for survivor and youth advocates to contribute to shaping the development of Australia's response to modern slavery at an international level. By empowering survivor-led and youth-led civil society organisations to take action to reduce risks of child and forced marriage, the effectiveness of interventions could be improved as activities can be grounded in lived experiences and appropriate cultural contexts.

Recommendations

1. Develop holistic attitudinal change programs with frontline organisations to enhance access to education and economic agency of women and girls in at-risk communities, such as through cash transfers and life skills training.



2. Ensure interventions are grounded in evidence, and that strong measurement and evaluation protocols are embedded within all projects to reduce risk of child and forced marriage supported by the Australian Government, to continue to enhance the evidence base.
3. Empower survivor-led and youth-led civil society organisations to lead the charge in reducing risks of child and forced marriage by establishing an Expert Working Group of survivor and youth advocates to advise the development of Australia's international anti-trafficking advocacy.

d) Cooperating with Faith Organisations

As approximately 75 per cent of the world's population identify with a religious faith⁶⁴ and projections indicate that this will grow,⁶⁵ faith leaders have a significant role to play in empowering communities with the faith-based information and tools necessary to combat modern slavery. Faith leaders are often respected members of the community and as such, can assist in dismantling harmful beliefs and practices that place women and girls at risk of modern slavery.⁶⁶ Supporting and working with faith leaders and grassroots community organisations is an important key to changing community attitudes, including disrupting norms surrounding child and forced marriage.

In many cases faith leaders are already taking an active role in their communities in combating practices that impact girls such as child marriage and female genital mutilation – practices that have been linked to religious teachings in parts of the world.⁶⁷ In West Africa, faith leaders have supported communities in ending gender-based violence, such as child marriage,⁶⁸ and in Nepal, a religious network launched a campaign to combat child marriage.⁶⁹

"In addition, using faith, including the church, mosques, and other religious denominations as a platform to teach parents and children about the detriment of child and forced marriage will reduce the risk of this form of modern slavery. Figures of religion are influential agents of change who can positively impact large sections of the community."

Mary Saruni, Co-Founder, The Children of Maasai Educational Programme

The Australian Government already has experience working with faith leaders and communities of faith to disrupt norms that devalue women and girls. For example, faith leaders are among the target beneficiaries of attitude change programs under the *Ending Violence Against Women in Afghanistan Program*⁷⁰ which aimed to eliminate stereotypes that drive gender-based violence.⁷¹ Faith leaders are also included in collaborative initiatives supported by *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* together with UnitingWorld, the Pacific Council of Churches, and

the Anglican Church, who sought to develop a curriculum that would disrupt patriarchal interpretations of the Bible and instead foster an inclusive faith framework, built with gender equality at the core.⁷²

Civil society are also taking an active role in involving the faith community in anti-slavery initiatives. For example, Walk Free's own Global Freedom Network (GFN), a network that aims to raise awareness of modern slavery risks and impact among communities of faith, is working to disseminate modern slavery awareness raising campaigns directly to faith communities. A new campaign delivered via a phone App purpose-built by GFN for faith leaders, clergy, and other stakeholders, will share clear and concise information about modern slavery, including how to identify and engage with potential victims, and methods to address modern slavery among faith communities. The App is being piloted in Ghana, after which rollout will expand to other countries. Further, the GFN is including youth in its raising awareness



activities through the development of curricula on modern slavery, to be distributed through faith-affiliated higher education institutions.⁷³

Recommendations

1. Expand the approach taken in the *Ending Violence Against Women in Afghanistan* and *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development* programs by working with faith leaders to remove gender inequality from faith teachings and change attitudes to forced and child marriage in all high-risk countries.
2. Partner with faith-based civil society organisations and faith-affiliated educational institutions to develop training programs for youth and provide them with tools and knowledge to identify and address modern slavery risks in their communities.
3. Ensure faith leaders who are taking action to end modern slavery are represented on the Modern Slavery Working Group.



Appendix 1

Useful Resources

Walk Free is the producer of the *Global Slavery Index*, the world's leading dataset on measuring and understanding modern slavery, and acts as the Secretariat for the *Bali Process Government and Business Forum*, an initiative bringing together business and government leaders to combat modern slavery in the Indo-Pacific region. Our *Global Freedom Network* is committed to delivering systemic change by engaging faith leaders around the world to take action to end modern slavery. Walk Free, led by our Chairman, Dr Andrew Forrest AO, was a leading advocate for an Australian Modern Slavery Act and continues to engage with governments around the world on modern slavery issues. The 2018 edition of the *Global Slavery Index* can be downloaded here: <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/>.

Through our *Promising Practices Database*, Walk Free collates evaluations of anti-slavery and counter-trafficking programs to determine what works to eradicate modern slavery, including child and forced marriage. The Database was created so policy makers, donors, and program designers can quickly identify best practices through a simple search by country, target population, type or sector of slavery, or type of intervention. *The Promising Practices Database* can be downloaded here: <https://www.walkfree.org/projects/promising-practices/>.

Walk Free's 2020 report, *Stacked Odds*, examines why the majority victims of modern slavery are female. The report sets out the impact of social, cultural, economic, legal, political, and geographic factors on the vulnerability of women and girls to modern slavery, including child and forced marriage, and how these factors shape experiences of modern slavery at each stage of life, from conception to late adulthood. The report also steps out actions that can improve the situation for women and girls. *Stacked Odds* is the leading gender analysis of modern slavery globally and was launched in partnership with UN Women. *Stacked Odds* can be downloaded here: <https://www.walkfree.org/reports/stacked-odds/>.



Appendix 2

What is Modern Slavery?

Modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and the sale and exploitation of children. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term that focuses attention on the commonalities across these legal concepts. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power.

What is Child and Forced Marriage?

Child and forced marriage are forms of modern slavery and defined as practices 'similar to slavery' in the 1956 Slavery Convention and refers to any institution or practice where:

- A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group; or
- The husband of a woman, his family, or his clan, has the right to transfer her to another person for value received or otherwise; or
- A woman on the death of her husband is liable to be inherited by another person.

More recent interpretations of forced marriage are broader than the practices defined in the 1956 Slavery Convention. In 2006, the United Nations Secretary-General noted that "a forced marriage is one lacking the free and valid consent of at least one of the parties". Forced marriage therefore refers to any situations in which persons, regardless of their age, have been forced to marry without their consent.

Child, early, and forced marriages are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. Some child marriages, particularly those involving children under the age of 16 years, are considered a form of forced marriage, given that one and or/both parties have not expressed full, free, and informed consent (as noted in the joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women). It is important to note that in many countries 16 and 17-year-olds who wish to marry are legally able to do so following a judicial ruling or parental consent.



Appendix 3

Table 1: Diplomatic presence of Australian Government in nations with highest prevalence of females married by 18 years of age

COUNTRY	PREVALENCE ^a	AUSTRALIAN DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE
Niger	76%	None. Limited consular services from the Australian High Commission in Nigeria.
Central African Republic	68%	None. The Australian Ambassador to the Central African Republic is resident in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Chad	67%	None. Australia's Ambassador to Chad is resident in Paris, France.
Mali	54%	None. Australia's diplomatic representation to Mali is from the High Commission in Accra, Ghana.
Mozambique	53%	Australian Consulate – Maputo, Mozambique.
Burkina Faso	52%	None. Australia's diplomatic representation to Burkina Faso is from the High Commission in Accra, Ghana.
South Sudan	52%	None. Australia's diplomatic representation to South Sudan is from the Australian Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
Bangladesh	51%	Australian High Commission – Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Guinea	47%	None. Australian diplomatic representation to Guinea is through Australia's High Commission in Accra, Ghana
Nigeria	43%	Australian High Commission – Lagos, Nigeria.

^a Source: UNICEF global databases, 2019, based on DHS, MICS, and other national surveys from 2007-2017.



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