



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Human Rights sub-committee of the Joint Standing
Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade report:

Advocating for the elimination of child and forced
marriage

APRIL 2022

The Australian Government welcomes the report of the Human Rights sub-committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Advocating for the elimination of child and forced marriage*, as tabled on 2 December 2021.

The Government is strongly committed to combating child and forced marriage¹ domestically and advocating for the elimination of child and forced marriage internationally. The government is committed to addressing these practices through better understanding (research and gender disaggregated data); addressing the drivers that make individuals vulnerable to these practices, particularly using development assistance to address gender inequality, improve access to education, and improve livelihoods; and engaging with NGOs and relevant authorities to support victims, including through the provision of consular services to Australians in or at risk of forced marriage overseas.

Australia's national action plan to combat modern slavery 2020-25, and *Australia's international engagement strategy on human trafficking and modern slavery: delivering in partnership* set out specific actions and commitments that the Australian government has made to address child and forced marriage, as well as other forms of human trafficking and modern slavery (HTMS).

The government agrees or agrees in principle with all recommendations in the committee's report.

¹ Under Australian law, forced marriage occurs where someone is married without freely and fully consenting to the marriage because of threats, deception or coercion, or the individual is incapable of understanding the nature and effect of the marriage ceremony, or the individual is under the age of 16 years.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian government support efforts to collect gender-disaggregated data on the prevalence of child and forced marriage globally.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Government supports efforts to collect gender-disaggregated data on the prevalence of child and forced marriage globally and commends the organisations who work to quantify the prevalence of these hidden practices.

Australia contributes unearmarked funds to the International Labour Organization (ILO), who in partnership with the International Organization of Migration (IOM) and Minderoo Foundation's Walk Free initiative, produces the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, a key source of data on the prevalence of forced marriage globally.

Australia continues to support UN Women's flagship gender data program *Women Count* (<https://data.unwomen.org/women-count>) to close data gaps on priority gender equality issues in the Indo-Pacific region, including on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality and the rights and empowerment of women and girls.

Through DFAT's core contributions to UNICEF, we support UNICEF's global data collection efforts: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/gender/harmful-practices-and-intimate-partner-violence/>

Australia contributes gender-disaggregated country data to these international organisations, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for its Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, which includes data on trafficking for the purpose of forced marriage.

Australia supports UN Population Fund's (UNFPA) kNOwVAWdata initiative which helps countries in Asia and the Pacific to undertake violence prevalence surveys in line with international best practice, mostly using the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence survey and/or the Domestic Violence module of the Demographic and Health Survey. These surveys measure intimate partner violence and non-partner violence. Further work is being done by the international community to measure child marriage. (<https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/knowvawdata>).

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government improve the publication of data on the child and forced marriage rates within Australia, and in particular improve communication of this data to non-government organisations supporting individuals in, or at risk of, child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

Since 2007, the Australian Institute of Criminology's (AIC) Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Research Program has contributed to understanding of child and forced marriage in Australia through the dissemination of research.

The AIC continues to build the evidence around the nature and prevalence of child and forced marriage in Australia and is undertaking scoping work to develop the Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery National Minimum Dataset (NMDS).

Informed by the draft International Classification Standard for Administrative Data on Trafficking in Persons recently developed by the IOM in partnership with the UNODC, the proposed NMDS will provide unit-record level information about individuals suspected of experiencing and perpetrating HTMS-related offences in Australia on an ongoing basis. Key information proposed for inclusion as part of the NMDS includes but is not limited to:

- sociodemographic characteristics of individuals suspected of experiencing and perpetrating modern slavery (eg. gender, age, country of birth and visa status);
- report source (government and non-government) and government agency contacts;
- form of modern slavery detected; and
- outcome of report/investigation.

Consistent with the IOM data collection principles, the AIC proposes that the development and implementation of the NMDS will involve multiple phases. The first phase involves the establishment of the basic infrastructure of the HTMS NMDS, including the development of simple indicators that provide information about the characteristics of suspected victims and perpetrators of HTMS-related offences, the characteristics of incidents and outcomes. The first phase will focus on key Commonwealth government entities involved in Australia's response to HTMS and is anticipated to be finalised in 2022.

It is intended that further phases of the development of the NMDS will explore options for sharing of aggregate-level findings from the analysis of NMDS data with non-government entities as appropriate.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government include support for initiatives to eliminate child and forced marriage as part of Australia's aid program.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

Australia provides significant Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding to programs and activities to address forced marriage directly in high prevalence countries, as well as investments that address the broader drivers of these practices and reduce the vulnerability of potential victims. In particular, gender inequalities are a key driver of child and forced marriage, as it impacts girls' education, women's livelihoods, and women's and girls' health and wellbeing, legal rights and access to justice, being a form of violence against women and girls.

Australia supports efforts to end violence against women and girls in all its forms through our development and humanitarian programs. In the Indo-Pacific region, our targeted assistance to address, prevent and respond to gender-based violence includes additional funding of \$10 million to UN Women (2020-22) to support essential services for survivors, delivery of prevention activities and assistance to local women's organisations. Australia's humanitarian support focuses on ensuring basic assistance to at-risk households to reduce dependence on negative coping mechanisms, including child and forced marriage.

Australia also supports bilateral programs in 17 countries in the Indo-Pacific to address, prevent and end violence against women and girls in all its forms, including child and forced marriage. Australia's work on gender-responsive social protection, girls' access to education, and in the health sector contributes to addressing drivers for early and forced marriage. In December 2021, the Philippines Government enacted legislation criminalising child marriage, as part of strengthening development cooperation, including on ending gender-based violence. Australia's work and support on Women, Peace and Security includes support for initiatives to eliminate child and forced marriage investments. Globally, Australia is supporting the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (\$5.4 million, 2020-22), a global financing mechanism to prevent conflict related sexual and gender-based violence, including child and forced marriage.

Our work with the Pacific on gender equality through the Pacific Women Lead program addresses gender inequality targeting both young girls and women and young boys and men to address the gaps they face in services, rights and opportunities. The *Pacific Girl* program is an example of a gender equality initiative that has a strong focus on adolescent girls to ensure inter-generational change. Australia's partnership with the SPC (Pacific Community) Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) is working to increase

observance to international human rights standards through improved service delivery, access to justice and effective governance.

DFAT provides funding support to international organisations and local civil society organisations in a number of high prevalence countries for child and forced marriage, whose work includes advocacy and policy advice to governments on legal and policy reforms and engagement at the community level to shift attitudes and provide services and support to persons (primarily girls) at risk of child and forced marriage.

Key examples of these investments include funding for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in Iraq and Syria which includes the goal of advocating for the eradication of child marriage; funding for Caritas and Plan International in Lebanon to provide support to survivors of gender-based violence, including child and forced marriage, and awareness sessions with men which seek to change social norms on these issues. In Pakistan we support policy and community dialogue on early and forced marriage through funding for Trocaire and Oxfam.

In Indonesia, DFAT provided funding to local civil society organisations through the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MAMPU) and Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice - Phase 2 (AIPJ2) to work with the government to change Indonesia's Marriage Law to prevent child marriage. We are now supporting civil society organisations to work with local governments at the community level to socialise, implement and monitor these legal reforms in high prevalence regions.

In Nepal, our Comprehensive Sexuality Education Program, with UNFPA, is providing adolescent girls and boys with education on their sexual and reproductive health rights and is helping to address harmful social norms regarding child marriage. In Zimbabwe we support a number of NGOs that build community support for ending gender-based violence in rural Zimbabwean communities, including child and forced marriage; and support Childline Zimbabwe to expand its call centre to provide Zimbabwean girls with access to dedicated phone counselling and psychological support services.

Many Australia Awards alumni – those who have studied in Australia through the Australia Awards program – continue to be advocates for gender equality and empowerment of girls. Several Australia Awards alumni in Africa lead activities in their communities to end child and forced marriage. Our Posts will continue to identify suitable activities in Africa for Australian support, particularly at the community level, and including Australia Awards alumni.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continues to support efforts to improve education outcomes for women and girls, particularly in regions with high rates of child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

Improved access to education has been shown to increase the age at which girls marry. When they do marry, they are more likely to choose their partner and to marry closer in age. Girls with fewer than seven years' schooling are more likely to be married by age 18.

Educating girls improves labour market outcomes, reduces poverty, delays marriage, reduces mortality and fertility rates, and increases GDP. A child whose mother can read is 50 per cent more likely to live past the age of five, 50 per cent more likely to be immunised, and twice as likely to attend school. There is evidence that ensuring that all girls finish secondary education by 2030 could boost GDP by 10 per cent on average over the next decade.

The DFAT 2020-21 budget outcome for education (including scholarships) is \$530 million. Bilateral, regional and global education programs prioritise equity, particularly for girls, promoting safe, equitable and effective education systems in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia has a longstanding relationship with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The GPE is increasing opportunities for girls by mainstreaming gender equality across all programming. Gender equality features strongly in GPE Strategic Plan (2021-2025) for the delivery and strengthening of education systems to address the specific gendered barriers girls face. The Strategy includes specific actions (gender-responsive planning and policy development, and sex disaggregated data) and additional financing to countries where girls' education has been identified as a main challenge. The GPE is strengthening the inclusion of gender equality in education programming in the COVID-19 response. GPE uses rates of early marriage as one of the indicators for countries' eligibility for an additional financing window for priority countries through the Girls' Education Accelerator (GEA).

Some specific examples of aid investments directed towards education outcomes for women and girls in high prevalence countries for child and forced marriage include: in Jordan supporting a project with the Jordanian Ministry of Education to increase access to quality education for over 144,000 Syrian refugees, support for out of school adolescents to return to learning through non-formal, certified education pathways, and support for digital learning platforms to enable young people (particularly young women) to continue their studies despite physical barriers to school

attendance; projects delivered by international organisations that supported women and girls' access to education in Chad; and small-scale projects to improve education, literacy and skills for women and girls in Kenya, Nigeria and Cameroon.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continues to enhance its engagement with community and faith-based groups both in Australia and globally to hold dialogues and support work in shifting social norms in relation to child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Government's *National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020–25* (National Action Plan) recognises that modern slavery is a complex crime and government action is only part of the solution. Over the life of the National Action Plan, the Government will continue to prioritise collaboration with civil society, business, unions and academia, including community and faith-based groups. This includes the provision of grant funding to support the efforts of these groups to combat forced marriage in Australia.

Human Trafficking Contact Officer Network

The Australian Border Force (ABF) has dedicated Human Trafficking Contact Officers (HTCOs) who are onshore specialist officers located in all states and territories. HTCOs are responsible for the Department of Home Affairs' and ABF's operational responses to modern slavery (including forced marriage) identified onshore, including by managing all referrals to the Australian Federal Police and liaising with the Human Trafficking Unit in the Department of Home Affairs. In the course of their duties, HTCOs may also engage with civil society on modern slavery issues at a local level.

Community Liaison Officer Network

The Department of Home Affairs' Community Liaison Officer (CLO) Network continues to build trusted relationships with community and faith-based leaders across Australia. CLOs have an essential role in supporting the social cohesion mission by building and maintaining relationships with a wide range of cultural, religious and ethnic communities around the country including disseminating information to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, reinforcing critical messaging, and understanding the impact of the messaging on CALD communities. The CLO Network facilitates open dialogue between communities and the Department by delivering and seeking community feedback on whole-of-government policy and program information.

The CLO Network has shared information about forced marriage with community and faith-based groups, including by:

- disseminating the Department of Social Services' *Family Safety Pack* (which includes a factsheet on Forced and Early Marriage and is available in 47 languages);
- amplifying the ABF's 2021 *World Day Against Trafficking in Persons* social media campaign, which included posts about forced marriage, what it looks like in Australia and where to find help;
- regularly engaging with key community organisations to discuss forced marriage and other forms of modern slavery in both physical and online forums, including:
 - the Forced Marriage and Human Trafficking Network meetings convened by Anti-Slavery Australia and the Australian Red Cross; and
 - community organised meetings and forums to inform the community of the Government's commitment to combating modern slavery through the National Action Plan.

The CLO Network will continue to engage in open dialogue with community and faith-based leaders across Australia to share information and hear and respond to community concerns in relation to forced marriage.

AFP Community Liaison Teams

Community Liaison Teams (CLTs) provide pathways through which the AFP and the community can build meaningful and productive relationships. Though CLTs are focused on the prevention of terrorism and radicalisation, they allow the AFP to build trust among vulnerable groups in the community. The AFP have engaged with women leaders through these CLTs to grow awareness and education on forced marriage. These community leaders have expressed an interest in working more closely with these teams in future to prevent a broader range of crime types.

'Look a Little Deeper'

The AFP Human Trafficking frontline officer awareness package, "Look a Little Deeper" (LALD), is currently delivered by the AFP to a vast array of frontline responders across government, non-government organisations; community; universities; and state and territory police. Recently sessions have expanded to fields including education, medical, religious institutions, financial institutions and industry. The LALD program aims to equip participants with the skills necessary to identify and respond to indicators of human trafficking and enhance victim safety. The AFP is currently developing a bespoke version of the LALD package which will specifically focus on education relating to forced marriage. The package will be delivered to the community through our CLTs and is the first of its kind in Australia.

Internationally

Australia continues to engage closely with community and faith-based groups and their leaders, in our bilateral and multilateral investments to end violence against women and girls. Our partners implement strong monitoring, learning and evaluation approaches which enable continuous improvement and fine-tuning of our engagement in accordance with the context and the drivers of changes in social norms.

For example, the Pacific Church Partnerships Program (PCPP, \$2 million 2019-2023) aims to build the leadership capabilities of Pacific Island church leaders to contribute to development outcomes in the Pacific. The PCPP provides bilateral and regional capacity building opportunities for Pacific island church leaders, including female and young church leaders, and strengthened partnerships between Pacific island and Australian church leaders. The program is being adapted to assist Pacific churches to manage the ongoing socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on their communities, while fostering links and cooperation with Australian churches and church organisations. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/people-connections/church-partnerships-in-the-pacific>

Australia is also embarking on a four-year partnership with four Women Funds, specifically, Women's Fund Asia, Urgent Action Fund Asia-Pacific, Women's Fund Fiji, and later, a new Pacific Feminist Fund to expand their work with women's rights organisations and human rights defenders and their advocacy to draw more resources for work towards gender equality into these regions. Women's Funds are particularly well positioned to mitigate and address the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic, and potential future health, social, or economic crises.

In Africa, the Australian Government supports community and faith-based organisations working to eradicate child marriage. One such example is Zambia Anglican Council Outreach Programme (ZACOP) which coordinate 'Gender Action Groups' to support women and girls in their communities and prevent child marriages.

Australian Awards alumni also engage community elders, faith-based leaders and political representatives to advocate for the elimination of child and forced marriage.

The AFP works with our Pacific partners in combatting transnational crime through information and intelligence sharing through the Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN).

Through the Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Corporation (PCLEC), the AFP works closely with its Pacific partners to address Gender and Family Harm, one of five strategic priorities of the PICP. PCLEC has developed a number of initiatives to support enhanced capability and consistent standards for policing Gender and Family Harm in the Pacific.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government identify opportunities to improve communication channels with key civil society organisations, including leading a multi-stakeholder group of government and key civil society organisations to develop a repatriation protocol that enables prompt and streamlined assistance to Australians overseas that are in, or at risk of, child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

DFAT works closely with relevant NGOs and other whole-of-government partners to assist Australians who are victims of forced marriage overseas or are at risk of forced marriage. DFAT has well-established communication channels with Anti-Slavery Australia and other NGOs who provide support to victims or potential victims of child and forced marriage. DFAT's Smartraveller website includes information on how these cases can be referred to consular officers, including in countries where Australia does not have an Embassy or Consulate.

DFAT works closely with relevant NGOs and other whole-of-government partners to assist with the repatriation of vulnerable individuals on a case-by-case basis. The circumstances of each case vary greatly and require a tailored response and support. Repatriation to Australia is considered in cases where it is considered in the best interests of the client. Repatriation to Australia is not always the preferred outcome for the client, who may prefer to remain in the country if they have necessary support networks, or even be assisted to move to a third country.

The Government will work with NGOs to ensure communication channels are well-understood and flexible to the needs of Australians who are victims or could be victims of child and forced marriage overseas.

Australian consular officers take a victim-centred approach and take special care to ensure the victim's welfare is handled appropriately and sensitively. We note that for consular purposes, the concept of 'victim' in a forced marriage case includes clients who believe they are at a risk of forced marriage as well as those already forced to marry.

Many high prevalence locations are countries where our capacity to provide consular assistance is low. This includes locations where there is no Australian representation or where adverse security conditions prevail. Due to their extremely vulnerable position, consular officers provide these clients the highest level of support available in the circumstances, noting that:

- a) direct communication with the client may be difficult, and extreme caution is exercised to guard against the risk of further harm; and
- b) special assurances on confidentiality are likely to be required.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continues and enhances funding to NGOs to counter child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

Since 2008, the Government has awarded over \$7.8 million to support civil society, business and academia to combat modern slavery in Australia, including through awareness-raising and education initiatives. The 2020-21 Budget included \$10.6 million over five years to implement the National Action Plan, including \$4.4 million in new grant funding.

The 'National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-25 Grant Program' (Grant Program) funds civil society, business and industry groups and academia to deliver projects to combat modern slavery in Australia, including research to support evidence-based policy.

The Grant Program is comprised of two multi-year grant funding opportunities:

- Round One provides \$1.67 million over a two-year period (2021/22–2022/23), with \$200,000 allocated to research.
 - reflecting priorities and actions set out in the National Action Plan, Round One includes a dedicated forced marriage stream.
- Round Two will provide up to \$2.7 million over a three-year period (2022/23–2024/25), with \$200,000 allocated to research.

Round One of the Grant Program awarded \$1.67 million to seven organisations, including three projects aimed at combating forced marriage in Australia.

DFAT provides funding support to international organisations and local civil society organisations in a number of high prevalence countries, whose work includes advocacy and policy advice to governments on legal and policy reforms and engagement at the community level to shift attitudes and provide services and support to those at risk of child and forced marriage. Please see response to Recommendation 3 for examples.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government maintains Australia's commitment as a regional and international leader by conducting targeted and careful advocacy of efforts to prevent and combat human trafficking and slavery, including child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

As reflected in *Australia's international engagement strategy on human trafficking and modern slavery: delivering in partnership*, the Government advocates on child and forced marriage issues bilaterally and multilaterally, and will continue to do so, taking into account local context and seeking out governments in high-prevalence countries to encourage them to adopt relevant laws.

This has included through co-sponsoring the biennial resolution in the UN General Assembly Third Committee (Human Rights) on early and forced marriage. It has also included support for the Human Rights Council (HRC) resolutions on: child, early, and forced marriage; child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including COVID-19; trafficking in persons, especially women and children

Noting the prevalence of early and forced marriage in fragile and conflicted affected states, on 12 April 2021 the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Women, along with Minister for Defence and Minister for Home Affairs, launched Australia's next National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031 that seeks to reduce sexual and gender-based violence, support law and justice efforts and meet the needs and rights of women and girls.

Australia's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2031 includes a medium term outcome (MTO) indicator, 2.2.2 on the 'Proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18' (<https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/second-australian-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2021-2031>) which will be reported to Government in 2023, 2025, and 2028.

Consistent with our approach of regular advocacy on human rights issues, the Australian Government regularly raises concerns about Child and Forced Marriage with government officials. In Zimbabwe, for example, Australian officials have encouraged amendments to the Marriages Act under the Marriages Bill – a focus of which is the abolition of child marriage, and the extension of minimum age requirements to customary law marriages and civil partnerships. The Bill is currently awaiting review by the Senate.

Australian Embassies/High Commissions in Africa will continue to use their respective social media platforms to raise awareness about gender-based violence and the rights of women and girls. This is a particular feature during the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. For example, in 2021 the Australian Embassy in Harare hosted a roundtable discussion for 'International Day of the Girl Child' to discuss the drivers of child marriage in Zimbabwe and the impacts of COVID-19 in increasing vulnerability of women and girls.

Regional engagement on human trafficking and related forms of exploitation is addressed through the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. The Trafficking in

Persons Working Group of the Bali Process (co-chaired by the Australian Border Force and Indonesia) has identified trafficking for the purposes of forced marriage as an issue for consideration under its *Forward Work Plan 2021–23*.

The issue of trafficking for child or forced marriage has been identified by DFAT's ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking program as an emerging issue in some countries in Southeast Asia, to further examine this, ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking program (ASEAN-ACT) has commissioned a study looking at the wide range of child protection risks facing children in the ASEAN region.

Australia is a strong advocate for gender equality in bilateral and regional forums in the Pacific and supports the Pacific's regional commitments and plans for gender equality, including the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration 2012 and the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (PPA). The PPA includes the right for women and men of all ages to have equal rights in all areas of life including "the right to choose their own partner" and "the right to decide for themselves the future they want".

AFP International Engagement and Capacity Building:

The AFP's International Network provides investigative assistance and capacity uplift to foreign law enforcement in relation to a range of crime types including modern slavery and human trafficking. The AFP has 166 members posted to 33 countries, all of whom are provided with LALD training.

The AFP continues international efforts, co-hosting international workshop and conferences aimed at boosting the skills, confidence and influence of local and cross-border police investigators, including:

- International delivery of a four-day Human Trafficking Investigations Program.
- Support and participation in International Human Trafficking Investigation Workshops which reflects the importance of international partnerships in countering human trafficking and slavery-related matters.
- Ongoing support to the World Congress on Family Law and Children's Rights, which the AFP has supported for over 15 years.
- AFP Human Exploitation Command working with International Command on the development and delivery of LALD awareness packages internationally.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continues and enhances its engagement in bilateral and multilateral dialogues to eliminate child and forced marriage.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

As reflected in *Australia's international engagement strategy on human trafficking and modern slavery: delivering in partnership*, Australia addresses forced marriage with international partners through bilateral, regional and multilateral engagement, development programming, humanitarian assistance and advocacy.

Australia draws on our extensive diplomatic network to inform our policy approach, influence partner government policy and make strategic contributions both in bilateral and multilateral forums to end the practice of child and forced marriage.

Agencies across the Australian Government contribute to the multilateral fora that address human trafficking and other forms of modern slavery, which include human rights bodies, such as the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly Third Committee; and criminal justice-related bodies, such as meetings of the States Parties of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

The Australian Government regularly makes recommendations to encourage countries to adopt legislation to ban early and forced marriages through our country statements through the Universal Periodic Review Process of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Recent examples include country statements for Mozambique (2021), and Somalia (2021).

In particular, the Australian Government has a strong record of advocacy in multilateral human rights forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly, ensuring the language agreed by UN member states to characterise child, early and forced marriage reflects the seriousness of these violations and the complexity of the drivers.

Australia continues to advocate for the elimination of child, early and forced marriage through our multilateral engagement. For example, in 2021, Australia:

- Co-led with Spain of a Joint Statement on Afghanistan women's and girls' human rights at the 31st Special Session of the Human Rights Council on 24 August 2021, which was supported by 69 member states. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/hrc-statements/31st-special-session->

[human-rights-council/joint-statement-afghanistan-womens-and-girls-human-rights-24-august-2021](https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/hrc-statements/47th-session-human-rights-council/joint-statement-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-during-annual-full-day-discussion-human-rights-women-6-july-2021)

- Joined a statement on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights at the 47th Session of the HRC (June-July 2021), which highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on child and early forced marriage - <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/hrc-statements/47th-session-human-rights-council/joint-statement-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-during-annual-full-day-discussion-human-rights-women-6-july-2021>
- Delivered a joint statement on trafficking in persons, especially women and girls at the 47th Session of the HRC (June-July 2021) - <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/themes/human-rights/hrc-statements/47th-session-human-rights-council/joint-statement-interactive-dialogue-special-rapporteur-trafficking-delivered-australia-29-june-2021>
- Co-sponsored a resolution on Child Early and Forced marriage in times of crisis, including COVID-19 at the 48th Session of the HRC (September-October 2021) - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/287/57/PDF/G2128757.pdf?OpenElement>
- Co-sponsored a resolution on the Rights of the Child at the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly (September-November 2021) – which condemns child, early and forced marriage - <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/402/13/PDF/N2140213.pdf?OpenElement>

