

Child Marriage is Child Labour

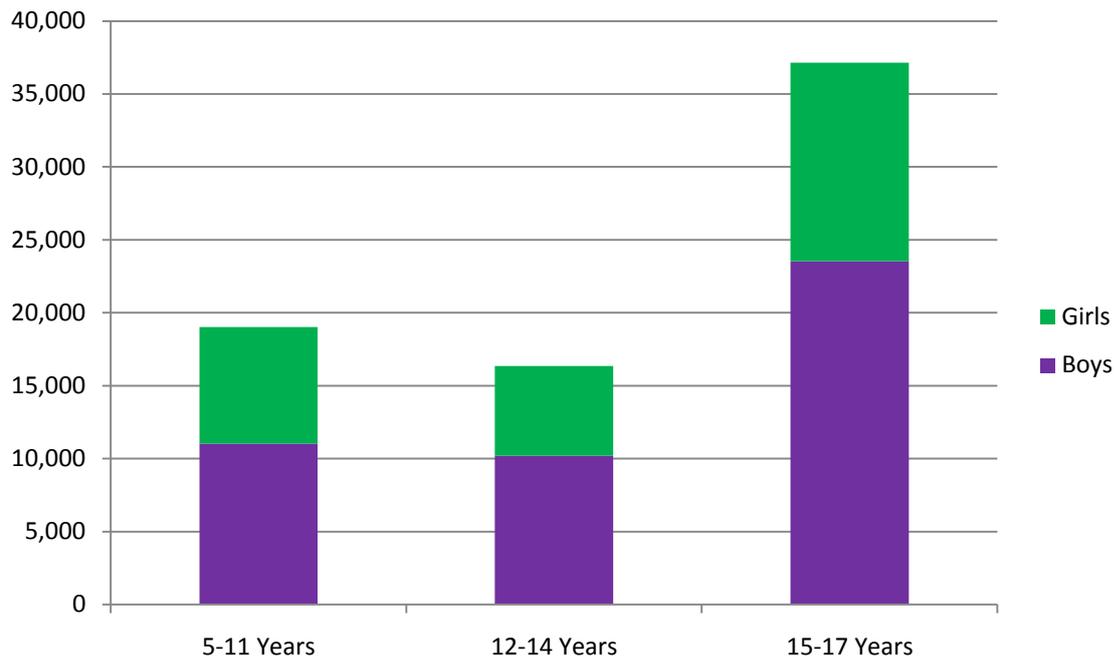
Every year an estimated 15 million girls are forced into child marriages and exposed to one the worst forms of child labour. Until now, the United Nations’ International Labour Organisation (ILO) has done little to stop this devastating crime. In fact, the ILO’s estimates of child labour have ignored the labour performed by the millions of girls in illegal child marriages. UNISON is campaigning for child marriage to be recognised amongst the worst forms of child labour, and for the ILO to take an active role in global efforts to eliminate it.

ILO statistics show 23 million more boys than girls in child labour and 17 million more boys than girls in hazardous work. The statistics also show a gender gap that increases in age, with the difference in child labour incidence rising from less than one percent for ages 5-11 year-olds, up to five percent for 15-17 year-olds. Why the difference? The ILO admits that “it is possible that these figures understate girls’ work relative to that of boys,” and that there may be under-reporting of domestic services that are disproportionately performed by girls. What they don’t consider is that their own policies are hiding millions of girls from child labour statistics, girls who have been condemned to one of child labour’s worst forms – child marriage.



Child marriage is illegal because it is a violation of a girl’s human rights. Girls are taken from their home, often trafficked or sold, and denied the right to an education, recreation and other fundamental freedoms. They are forced to perform hazardous, unpaid work for long hours. They are repeatedly raped, subjected to high-risk pregnancies, life-threatening childbirth complications and increased exposure to sexually transmitted infections such as HIV.

Children in hazardous work, by sex and age group



Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016, ILO, 2017. P. 42.

Child marriage is child labour, but the ILO does not see it that way. The ILO definition of the worst forms of child labour includes slavery and practices similar to slavery, the trafficking and sale of children, forced and compulsory labour and hazardous work. If these practices happen within an illegal child marriage, the ILO do not consider it to be economic activity, as it takes place in a child's own home and it therefore doesn't fit within their definition of labour. Sadly, this flawed assumption, that a girl in an illegal marriage lives in her own legal home, means that millions of girls are missing from the labour statistics and the protection of the ILO.

The ILO is a unique part of the United Nations. It brings together governments, workers and employers and sets the world's standards for labour rights and for eliminating child labour. If the ILO amended its categorisation of child marriage it could invest its substantial resources and work with governments to enforce laws and develop programmes to end this terrible crime.

UNISON's 2017 national delegate conference overwhelmingly called for our union to campaign for the ILO to recognise that child marriage is child labour. UNISON believes that child marriage is a complete violation of a girl's human rights. With the recognition and support of the ILO, we could make huge strides in the elimination of one of the worst forms of child labour.



Is child marriage child labour?

How does child marriage measure up against the ILO's criteria for the worst forms of child labour?	Child Labour	Child Marriage
Any form of child labour		
Is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous to children	✓	✓
Interferes with children's schooling	✓	✓
The worst forms of child labour		
Including slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children	✓	✓
Hazardous work		
Exposes children to physical, psychological and sexual abuse	✓	✓
Forces children to work long hours and night shifts	✓	✓
Unreasonably confines children to the premises of the employer	✓	✓
Could result in a child's injury, illness, permanent disability or death	✓	✓
Should not be done by a person under 18	✓	✓

What do other United Nations agencies say?

- World Health Organisation: "girls married young are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence and sexual abuse than those who marry later,"
- United Nations Population Fund: "complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls" and "child marriage robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects."
- UNAIDS: "the HIV infection rate among married adolescents is 50% higher than that among their unmarried, sexually active peers"

Take action

- Find out more at childmarriageischildlabour.com
- Ask your branch to support the child marriage is child labour motion below
- Support UNISON and AIDS-Free World actions on child marriage



Model branch motion

This branch notes that every year an estimated 15 million girls are forced into “child marriages”. Instead of receiving an education alongside their peers, child “wives” are forced to work long hours cooking and cleaning. They work night shifts caring for babies and younger children. Under the control of older “husbands” they are physically and psychologically abused and raped repeatedly. They work in conditions that threaten their lives and their health, suffer human rights and labour violations on a daily basis, and many die as a result.

If these activities were performed in a third-party household, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) would count them as work, and they would be included in child labour statistics, and in international action to end child labour. But because the children are married – albeit illegally – the ILO regards their workplace as their valid household and excludes them.

This branch believes that “child marriage” is not merely a harmful traditional practice: it is a crime; it is child labour in its worst form, and a complete violation of a girl’s human rights.

This branch further believes that “child marriage” should be included amongst the worst forms of child labour as defined by the ILO core convention 182, Worst forms of child labour. This would enable the ILO to work with governments to enforce laws against “child marriage” – first exposing and then ending one of the worst forms of child labour.

This branch welcomes UNISON’s campaign to demand that the ILO recognise that “child marriage” is child labour and takes action to end it.

This branch resolves to support and promote the campaign and encourage members to take action on the issue.



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