



Technical Guidance and Toolkit

FROM GLOBAL EVIDENCE TO PRACTICAL GUIDANCE: Leveraging Gender-Responsive Social Protection to End Child Marriage

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I welcome the publication of *From Global Evidence to Practical Guidance: Leveraging Gender-Responsive Social Protection to End Child Marriage: Technical Guidance and Toolkit*.

This timely and practical resource reflects a powerful collaboration across UNICEF's Prevention of Harmful Practices, Child Protection, and Social Protection and Social Policy teams. It brings together global evidence, country experience, and operational insight to support governments and partners in addressing one of the most persistent violations of girls' rights.

Child marriage remains both a consequence and a driver of poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to essential services. Growing evidence shows that well-designed gender-responsive social protection can play a critical role in breaking these cycles—by reducing economic vulnerability, supporting girls' education and agency, and strengthening systems that protect and empower them.

This Toolkit directly supports the achievement of child marriage prevention outcomes under the UNICEF Strategic Plan and contributes to global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 1.3 (social protection for all) and SDG 5.3 on the elimination of harmful practices.

Importantly, this guidance moves beyond theory to action. It provides concrete tools and step-by-step approaches to help practitioners design, implement, and scale programmes that reach the most vulnerable girls—especially those at greatest risk of being left behind, including those already married, out of school, or affected by crisis and displacement.

Ending child marriage at scale will require sustained investment, strong government leadership, and integrated, multisectoral systems. Social protection offers one of the most promising pathways to accelerate progress.

I encourage all partners—across governments, development agencies, civil society, and communities—to use this Toolkit and to champion social protection as a cornerstone of efforts to end child marriage and advance the rights of every child.

Please join me in promoting social protection as an essential pathway towards ending child marriage and ensuring the fulfilment of children's rights everywhere.

Sheema Sen Gupta

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Acknowledgements

UNICEF led the development *From Global Evidence to Practical Guidance: Leveraging Gender-Responsive Social Protection to Prevent and Respond to Child Marriage*. The work was jointly advanced by UNICEF's Child Protection and Economic and Social Policy teams, reflecting a shared commitment to strengthening cross-sectoral, evidence-based action to end child marriage.

The guidance was developed through a collective effort, with thanks to Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed as lead drafter and with sustained technical leadership from a core team including:

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UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence - Innocenti: Manahil Siddiqi

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The conceptualisation of this practical Toolkit emerged from UNICEF's analysis of what works to prevent child marriage, which highlighted the importance of social protection as an effective pathway to prevent child marriage at scale. Building on this evidence, UNICEF teams came together to strengthen collaboration and support for more integrated, evidence-informed programming.

The team is deeply grateful to colleagues from UNICEF country offices and to practitioners in programme countries who generously shared their experiences implementing gender-responsive social protection programmes that address child marriage. Their practical insights, lessons learned, and constructive feedback significantly strengthened the relevance, applicability, and usefulness of this guidance.

This Toolkit reflects a collective effort and a shared commitment to advancing gender equality, eliminating harmful practices, protecting children's rights, and supporting the well-being of girls through social protection.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full term
AGI-K	Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya
ASP	Adaptive Social Protection
BCC	Behaviour Change Communication
CCCs	Core Commitments for Children
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CCRIF	Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWAC	Community Welfare Assistance Committee
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
EWS	Early Warning System
FbF	Forecast-based Financing
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
GRSP	Gender-Responsive Social Protection
HFA	Humanitarian Food Assistance
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISNP	Integrated Safety Net Programme
ISS	Integrated Social Services
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
LEPI	Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCDSS	Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (Zambia)
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MIS	Management Information System
MKUY	Mukhya Mantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding

Acronym	Full term
NDRMC	National Disaster Risk Management Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PF4C	Public Finance for Children
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
PSEA	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
SBC	Social and Behaviour Change
SCT	Social Cash Transfer
SCTP	Social Cash Transfer Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SP	Social Protection
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRSP	Shock-Responsive Social Protection
STAAR	Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources Facility
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

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Executive Summary

The Challenge: Child Marriage – A Persistent and Costly Issue

Child marriage is a violation of girls' fundamental rights and a persistent barrier to economic growth, poverty reduction, and gender equality. It is also entirely preventable. Yet today, child marriage affects 640 million women and girls. At current trends, ending child marriage will take nearly 300 years, far beyond the 2030 SDG 5.3 target (UNICEF, 2023).

Driven by poverty, limited education, gender inequality, and discriminatory norms, the practice undermines girls' rights, increases risks of early pregnancy and gender-based violence (GBV), and perpetuates intergenerational poverty. The cost of inaction is staggering, with annual losses of up to 175 billion due to lost productivity and increased health burdens (Columbia University Center for Global Development, 2026).

The Opportunity: Gender-Responsive Social Protection

Gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) stands out as one of the most scalable, evidence-backed solutions available. When intentionally designed, GRSP tackles the root causes of child marriage by reducing household poverty, expanding girls' access to education and health services, and shifting the social norms that sustain the practice.

Five Key Messages for Decision-Makers

- 1. There is strong evidence that gender-responsive social protection can reduce child marriage at scale** when intentionally designed, adequately financed, and linked with essential social services.
- 2. Cash-plus approaches deliver strong results.** These models combine economic strengthening with complementary services such as life skills, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), case management and community engagement to shift harmful social norms.
- 3. Design quality determines impact:** Predictable and adequate payments, safe delivery mechanisms, and adolescent-friendly grievance and response systems are foundational.
- 4. Case management and service referrals are essential.** They connect girls and families to services and address risks and barriers such as GBV, household tensions, limited school access, social vulnerabilities, and service gaps.
- 5. Scale requires systems.** National impact requires government-led, scalable systems, backed by sustained financing. Without this, promising pilots will remain small-scale efforts rather than lasting solutions.

Designing Programmes That Work

Translating evidence into effective programmes requires attention to both what is delivered and how. **Cash transfers must be predictable, adequate, and delivered safely** through gender-responsive mechanisms that strengthen economic security, reduce reliance on negative coping strategies, and lighten girls' unpaid domestic and care work burdens. Linkages to economic empowerment opportunities create a pathway from poverty for adolescent girls.

Programmes should **avoid punitive conditionalities** that may exclude vulnerable families. Instead, participation can be encouraged through positive incentives, behavioural nudging, and soft co-responsibilities: encouraged, monitored, or expected behaviours that do not lead to automatic sanctions or loss of benefits. Examples include school attendance, participation in information sessions, case management meetings, and health visits or referrals.

Coverage must reach the most marginalized. Programmes must explicitly extend beyond general household targeting to reach married adolescents, out-of-school girls, those with disabilities, those with children, and displaced populations. Adolescent-friendly grievance and response mechanisms, safe reporting options, and GBV referral pathways are essential components of rights-based, gender-responsive social protection.

Delivering at Scale: Lessons from National Programmes

Recent large-scale national programmes illustrate the potential of government-led, multi-sectoral approaches in improving outcomes for adolescent girls.

- ▶ **In Zambia**, the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) 1000 Days programme combined cash top-ups with community-based case management and nutrition support, generating strong service linkages, including almost 12,000 referrals to nutrition services and support for nearly 1,000 adolescent girls to return to school after dropout linked to early marriage or pregnancy.
- ▶ **In Ghana**, the Integrated Social Services (ISS) model strengthened coordination across social protection, child protection, education, health, law enforcement, and GBV systems, reaching more than 180,000 children through multisectoral case management. Ghana's Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion (LEPI) programme further demonstrates how vocational training, education, and livelihood pathways can reach out-of-school adolescent girls and young mothers at scale.

Together, these examples show how government-owned, multi-sectoral systems can reduce child-marriage-related risks and improve outcomes for adolescent girls.

Gaps and Emerging Priorities

The evidence base on social protection programmes to address child marriage remains heavily concentrated in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with limited data from Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern and Central Asia, and humanitarian or climate-affected settings. Nevertheless, emerging evidence suggests that shock-responsive and adaptive social protection can help prevent child marriage as a negative coping strategy during crises by maintaining continuity of support to families. Evidence gaps also persist around cost-effectiveness, long-term norms change, and married adolescents.

From Evidence to Action: What this Toolkit Enables You to Do

This Technical Guidance and Toolkit translates global evidence into practical action for UNICEF Country Offices, governments, and partners. It provides step-by-step operational guidance across three phases:

- ▶ **Assessment and design** — setting explicit child marriage objectives, designing gender-responsive and age-sensitive cash transfers, identifying at-risk girls, and pinpointing entry points in existing programmes;
- ▶ **Implementation and delivery** — addressing payment mechanisms, multi-sectoral coordination, service linkages, crisis adaptation, safeguarding, and accountability;
- ▶ **Scale-up and sustainability** — strengthening national systems, securing predictable domestic financing, bridging humanitarian-development approaches, and institutionalizing learning.

The guidance also includes considerations for supporting adolescent girls who are already married, pregnant, divorced, or adolescent mothers, groups often overlooked in social protection design and implementation.

Five core tools — with three integrated sub-tools (Tools 2.1, 2.2, and 3.1) — support practitioners across the programme cycle:

- 1 **Country Diagnostic Checklist** — Assesses child marriage prevalence, drivers, and the social protection landscape. Use this when entering a new context or initiating programme design.
- 2 **Social Protection Programme Readiness Assessment** — Assesses whether an existing social protection programme is ready to integrate child marriage prevention and response objectives. This includes two sub-tools: an Operational Checklist for Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity, and a Crisis Adaptation Guide for fragile, conflict-affected, humanitarian, or climate-vulnerable settings.
- 3 **Stakeholder Mapping and Service Linkage Tool** — Identifies key actors, mandates, coordination structures, and opportunities to link transfers with complementary services, including education, SRHR, GBV, child protection, and case management.
- 4 **Programme Design Tool** — Supports teams to define programme logic, link GRSP interventions to child marriage outcomes, and identify relevant monitoring indicators. Use this after completing the diagnostic, readiness, and stakeholder mapping tools, or to review an existing programme design.
- 5 **Monitoring and Learning Tool** — Provides suggested gender-responsive and age-sensitive indicators, including a minimum core set, to support monitoring, evaluation, learning, and adaptive programme management.

Principles for Action

All guidance is grounded in six principles:

- ▶ Do no harm
- ▶ Gender and age responsiveness
- ▶ Participation and inclusion
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Systems strengthening
- ▶ A human rights-based approach prioritizing the most vulnerable



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PART I

ORIENT:
Why this Toolkit matters
and how to use it

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and User Guide

1.1 Purpose of the Toolkit

This Technical Guidance and Toolkit supports UNICEF Country Offices, government partners, and policymakers in leveraging gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) to prevent and respond to child marriage. Developed jointly by UNICEF Child Protection (Prevention of Harmful Practices), UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti, and UNICEF’s Economic and Social Policy Team, it offers practical entry points, evidence-based strategies, and ready-to-use operational tools for every stage of the programming cycle –including programme design, im-

plementation, administration, delivery, and monitoring to achieve transformative and sustainable outcomes for girls.

This toolkit is a practical resource for UNICEF Country Offices, government counterparts, development partners, and implementing agencies working on GRSP, child marriage, or gender equality. It provides actionable steps, tools, and examples to help integrate child marriage prevention and reduction into social protection systems.

Summary message:

This toolkit helps practitioners move from principles to practice — designing, implementing, and scaling programmes to show how gender-responsive social protection can address child marriage.

1.2 Who This Toolkit is For

This guidance is intended for:

- ▶ UNICEF Country Offices
- ▶ Government counterparts
- ▶ Social protection specialists
- ▶ Child protection and gender advisors
- ▶ Programme managers and implementing partners
- ▶ Policymakers working on social protection, child marriage, or gender equality

It is especially relevant for teams seeking to integrate child marriage prevention into national social protection systems, cash transfer programmes, cash-plus models, case management, referral systems, and shock-responsive social protection.

1.3 How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed as a **practical, step-by-step resource** to support the integration of child marriage prevention into gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) systems. It is organised into four parts:

Section	Focus	Purpose for users
Part I	Orient: Why this Toolkit Matters and How to Use It	Understand the purpose of the Toolkit, who it is for, and how to apply it in your context.
Part II	Understand: Evidence and Case for Action	Quickly grasp what works to address child marriage through social protection, using a clear evidence synthesis and practical insights.
Part III	Apply: Design, Deliver, and Scale	Translate evidence into action through practical guidance on programme design, delivery, systems strengthening, and scale-up.
Part IV	Practical companion: Tools and Templates	Apply the guidance using five core tools and targeted sub-tools for assessment, programme design, service linkages, and monitoring.

Readers already familiar with the evidence base may go directly to Part III (Apply: Design, Deliver, and Scale). Those seeking a specific tool can turn to Part IV.

Users should adapt the tools and guidance to local context,

considering system maturity, institutional capacity, and available data. The traffic-light and icon system allows teams to prioritise feasible actions. To support practical use, this Toolkit includes visual signposts that help practitioners identify priorities and actions quickly.

1.4 Principles for Action

The development and application of this Toolkit are grounded in the following principles:

- 1. Do no harm:** Safeguard children and avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.
- 2. Gender responsiveness and age sensitivity:** Tailor approaches to the distinct needs of girls and boys across age groups.
- 3. Participation and inclusion:** Engage adolescents and communities as partners in design, monitoring, and accountability.
- 4. Accountability:** Promote transparent, rights-based systems that reach the most marginalised.
- 5. Systems strengthening:** Build national capacities, institutions, and sustainability into all actions.
- 6. Human rights approach:** Guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UNICEF prioritises the poorest and most vulnerable children, aiming to break cycles of disadvantage across generations. These principles underpin efforts to prevent and reduce child marriage while promoting universal, rights-based social protection.

1.5 Alignment with Global Commitments and UNICEF priorities

This guidance supports UNICEF's mandate to promote gender equality and the realisation of child rights, aligning with UNICEF's frameworks, commitments, and evidence. This includes the

[Strategic Plan \(2026-2029\)](#), [Gender Policy \(2021-2030\)](#) and [Gender Equality Action Plan \(2026-2029\)](#), [Global Social Protection Programme Framework](#), and [Adolescent Girls' Programme Strategy, 2022-2025](#).

It also builds on the [UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage \(Global Programme\) Phase IV Strategy](#), its [Technical guide for humanitarian settings](#), and the [Evidence Paper on "What Works to prevent and respond to child marriage."](#) It supports global targets under SDG 1.3 (social protection for all), SDG 5.3 (eliminating harmful practices), and SDG 5.4 (addressing unpaid care work).

Established in 2016, the Global Programme operates in 12 high-prevalence countries, empowering adolescent girls aged 10–19 at risk of or affected by child marriage. It advances girls' rights through life skills education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) access, re-enrolment in education, and alternative pathways, while advocating globally to prioritise ending child marriage.

The programme also aims to foster an enabling family and community environment, and responsive systems, services, and normative frameworks that support girls in exercising their rights. Building on this foundation, UNICEF has launched a new partnership between the Economic and Social Policy team and the Global Programme to harness the potential of GRSP in addressing the economic and gendered drivers of child marriage.





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PART II

UNDERSTAND:
Evidence and case
for action

CHAPTER 2

Child Marriage and Why Social Protection Matters

2.1 Child Marriage at a glance and the case for social protection

BOX 1: CHILD MARRIAGE IN NUMBERS

- ▶ **640 million** women and girls alive today were married as children.
- ▶ **Nearly half (45%)** of all child brides live in **South Asia**, followed by **Sub-Saharan Africa (20%)**, **East Asia and the Pacific (15%)**, and **Latin America and the Caribbean (9%)**.
- ▶ At current rates, ending child marriage will take **almost 300 years**, well beyond the 2030 SDG 5.3 target.
- ▶ Key drivers include **poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, and discriminatory social norms**.
- ▶ Progress has largely benefited wealthier girls, **girls in the poorest quintile are 2.5 times more likely to marry in childhood** than those in the wealthiest.

Child marriage is a harmful practice and a violation of girls' rights, with profound and lifelong impacts. It is associated with lower educational attainment, early pregnancy, maternal and child health risks, and exposes girls to higher risks of gender-based violence (UNICEF, 2021). It also reinforces cycles of intergenerational poverty by limiting girls' opportunities, autonomy, and access to services.

Evidence shows that married girls often take on a significantly higher burden of unpaid domestic and care work, further limiting their education, mobility, and future livelihood opportunities. In this way, child marriage is both a consequence and a driver of poverty, gender inequality, and social exclusion (Girls Not Brides, 2022; Young Lives, 2025).

⚠ CAUTION

Progress in addressing child marriage is being undermined by overlapping crises:

- Conflict doubles the risk, with a tenfold rise in conflict-related deaths linked to a 7% increase in child marriage.
- Climate shocks intensify vulnerability, as a 10% rainfall deviation correlates with a 1% rise in child marriage.

Source: UNICEF, 2023



The economic cost of inaction is substantial, with annual losses of up to 175 billion due to lost productivity and increased health burdens (Columbia University Center for Global Development, 2026). At the same time, progress is increasingly under threat. Conflict, climate shocks, displacement, and other overlapping crises are deepening household vulnerability and increasing the risk that families turn to child marriage as a negative coping strategy.

This makes investment in evidence-based solutions more urgent than ever. Over the past two decades, research has established the determinants of child marriage, such as poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality, and its wide-ranging impacts on health, safety, and well-being (Siddiqi & Mann, 2024). Evidence also points to several effective and promising approaches to prevention, including keeping girls in school, expanding access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services, strengthening social and behaviour change, and supporting girls' economic security and agency (Siddiqi & Mann, 2024).

Among these, gender-responsive social protection systems (GRSP) offer a particularly strategic entry point. Social protection prevents child marriage primarily by reducing household

poverty - a foundational driver pushing families toward survival decisions, including marrying daughters early. Poverty reduction is therefore a core pathway through which GRSP responds to child marriage, with education access, agency-building, and norm change reinforcing and amplifying this effect (See Chapter 4 on Pathways and Framework). Cash can reduce the financial drivers of child marriage, support households' income security, and help families afford the costs of schooling.

AT A GLANCE

Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Malawi, and the Philippines shows that regular, predictable cash transfers, especially when linked to education or cash-plus interventions, can delay marriage, improve household resilience, and strengthen girls' agency (Girls Not Brides, 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

Cross-reference: See *Part II - Understand: Evidence and Case for Action* for a summary of global evidence and programmatic lessons.



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CHAPTER 3

What Works: Evidence and Lessons for Practice

3.1 From Cash to Gender-Responsive Social Protection

The design of the transfer matters significantly for effectively preventing child marriage and improving outcomes.

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs), particularly those linked to school attendance, are among the most consistently evidenced interventions for delaying child marriage by keeping girls in school. However, conditions carry risks. They often rely on education or health compliance conditions that may unintentionally exclude the poorest or most vulnerable households unable to meet requirements due to structural and resource barriers, such as distance to schools, limited infrastructure, or caregiving responsibilities.

Conditions also place disproportionate burdens on adolescent girls and women, limit household autonomy, reinforce gender stereotypes, increase unpaid care work, and negatively affect mental health. They can further undermine the human rights-based entitlement to social protection (Baird et al., 2013; Cookson, 2018; Molyneux, 2006; Palermo et al., 2025; Prencipe et al., 2021).

For these reasons, UNICEF does not promote the use of conditions in cash transfer programmes. Preferred alternatives include earmarked or labelled cash, positive incentives, non-punitive soft co-responsibilities, and milestone-based commitments, such as pledges not to marry before age 18 (Palermo et al., 2025). Regardless of conditionality design, unpredictable or delayed payments further erode trust and reduce effectiveness (CRANK, 2023; Tirivayi et al., 2023).

Unconditional cash transfers (UCTS) can achieve equal or greater impacts on mental health, agency, and economic outcomes compared to conditional transfers, while also reducing high-risk sexual behaviour and improve overall well-being. They can further advance broader gender equality outcomes by not increasing time poverty and giving vital time back to female caregivers in the household.

However, design considerations remain important. In dowry contexts, for example, UCTs without complementary community sensitisation and household decision-making support may inadvertently increase marriage risk. Furthermore, transfers tied to adolescent behaviours can impose additional burdens on girls in households heavily dependent on their labour or income (Cirillo et al., 2021; Mathers, 2021).

Evidence shows that combining cash with complementary services—education, health, livelihoods, and social and behaviour change interventions (cash-plus)—significantly strengthens impact. These integrated approaches improve girls' agency, decision-making, and access to opportunities, while addressing the multiple, intersecting drivers of child marriage (Siddiqi & Mann, 2024).

Countries are increasingly embedding these approaches within national systems. For example, Ghana and Zambia (see Box 2) are integrating gender-responsive design features, case management, and adolescent-focused services into national social protection programmes—demonstrating how gender-responsive social protection can move from pilots to scalable, system-level solutions (UNICEF, 2023; SWAZ, 2025).

BOX 2: COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND ADOLESCENT-SENSITIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION

Zambia – SCT1000 Days (cash-plus care)

Zambia's Social Cash Transfer (SCT) Nutrition 1000 Days (SCT1000) initiative, under the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) provided cash top-ups combined with nutrition support and community-based case management for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and adolescent girls with children under age two. Delivered by para-social workers, specifically social welfare system volunteers known as Community Welfare Assistance Committees (CWACs), the programme integrated four interventions: household case management and referrals, Family Group Conferencing to address GBV and child marriage risks, community dialogues on GBV/PSEA, SRH and nutrition, and community radio outreach. These services helped link families to essential health, education, and protection support. The programme generated strong results, including 11,930 referrals to Nutrition Support Groups and 974 adolescent girls supported under the re-entry policy after having dropped out due to early marriages, teenage pregnancies, lack of educational materials and support, negligence, loss of morale in education, and peer pressure, demonstrating the potential of a scalable cash-plus care model to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen protective environments for young mothers and their children.

Ghana – Gender Roadmap, Integrated Social Services (ISS), and the Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion (LEPI)









Ghana has integrated gender and adolescent priorities across its national social protection system. The Gender Roadmap for the Social Protection Sector guides programmes to better meet the needs of the poorest adolescent girls and their families. Through the Integrated Social Services (ISS) approach, coordination across social protection, child protection, GBV, education, health, and law enforcement has improved, providing case management and multisectoral referrals to over 180,000 children and scaling to 210 districts (80% of the country). The Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion (LEPI) programme, launched in 2024, delivers vocational training, education, and livelihood support to adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage, aiming to reach at least 10,000 out-of-school girls and young mothers by leveraging the national Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer programme, child protection, and health systems.

3.2 What the Evidence Shows (Traffic-Light Synthesis)

► Purpose of this section

This section translates the latest evidence on gender-responsive social protection into practical insights and actions for UNICEF Country Offices, government counterparts, and partners.

Table 2: Icon guide and definitions





Icon	Meaning
 Strong evidence	Positive and consistent findings based on findings from multiple systematic, narrative, scoping reviews of studies using randomised control trials and/or quasi-experimental designs.
 Emerging evidence	Promising findings, requires further rigorous evaluation before conclusions can be generalised.
 Evidence gap	Requires further rigorous evaluation.
 Summary	Brief message/overview.
 At a glance	Key insight or takeaway.
 Tool or cross reference	Practical tool or guide to support design or implementation.
 Practitioner tip	Practical advice for implementers.
 Caution	Risk or design consideration to avoid harm.

The evidence classifications (i.e. strong evidence, emerging evidence, evidence gap) in this toolkit are based on a scoping review of 86 studies across low- and middle-income countries, comprising 64 systematic, narrative, and scoping reviews and syntheses, and 22 individual studies, including RCTs, quasi-experimental designs, qualitative, mixed-methods, and policy analyses (see Annex for more detail; see also Siddiqi and Mann, 2024 on intervention effectiveness classification and definition).

While this guidance focuses primarily on adolescent girls as the population most affected by child marriage, boys are not

spared its consequences. In some contexts, families arrange early marriages for boys for economic or social reasons. In others, boys face pressure to assume adult breadwinner responsibilities prematurely. This carries documented consequences for gender socialisation, including the reinforcement of toxic masculinities and negative coping strategies such as alcohol abuse (Samuels and Ghimire, 2021). Well-designed GRSP that reduces household poverty and strengthens community norms can address these drivers for boys as well. Programmes should ensure that outreach and service linkages explicitly reach adolescent boys at risk.

Table 3: Summary of evidence: social protection and child marriage

 AT A GLANCE		
Evidence strength	Topic	Key findings
 Strong evidence	Cash-plus approaches and Conditional Cash Transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash-plus models combining transfers with services (e.g. livelihood training) improve education, health, and agency outcomes. • CCTs linked to schooling consistently delay marriage by improving enrolment and retention. • Predictable, adequate transfers to households with girls — paired with targeted social services — enhance protective effects. • Avoid direct cash targeting of girls due to protection concerns, unless they are of age or parents themselves. • For extremely poor or excluded households, strict conditionalities risk exclusion. Light-touch conditions and positive behavioural nudges show promise without punitive effects. • Integration with education, health, nutrition, and GBV systems amplifies results. • Evidence is strongest in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
 Mixed/emerging evidence	Unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) — general impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UCTs can reduce early pregnancy and delay sexual debut, but show mixed or null effects on marriage outcomes. • Impacts are stronger when UCTs include “plus” components such as case management. • UCTs can reduce time poverty and support gender equality by giving female caregivers vital time. • Children in recipient households benefit from improved nutrition, healthcare access, and educational investment — adolescent girls and children of adolescent parents are key beneficiaries.
	UCTs in crisis and fragile contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence in humanitarian, climate-affected, and fragile contexts remains limited, though emerging programmes show promise. • Strong coordination with protection systems is essential.
 Evidence gaps	Areas requiring further learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-effectiveness, sustainability, and long-term impacts remain under-studied. • Married and out-of-school adolescents are underrepresented in existing studies. • Evidence on how child benefits affect adolescent mothers themselves (not just their children) is thin — monitoring adolescent mother wellbeing as a distinct outcome is needed. • Interventions must differentiate between age groups (10–14 vs. 15–19). • Limited operational guidance on engaging fathers, brothers, potential grooms, and male community leaders to shift social norms. • Comparative data on efficiency and mechanisms of change remain scarce. • Little evidence on social insurance or labour market interventions. • Limited research from the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East and Central Asia.

BOX 3: HOW TO USE THIS EVIDENCE **Practitioner Tip:**

1. Apply the traffic-light system above to prioritise where to act or invest.
2. Link with Part III (Apply: Design, Deliver, and Scale) for operational “how-to” steps to adapt design and delivery systems to a given context.

3.3 Understanding Gender-Responsive Social Protection

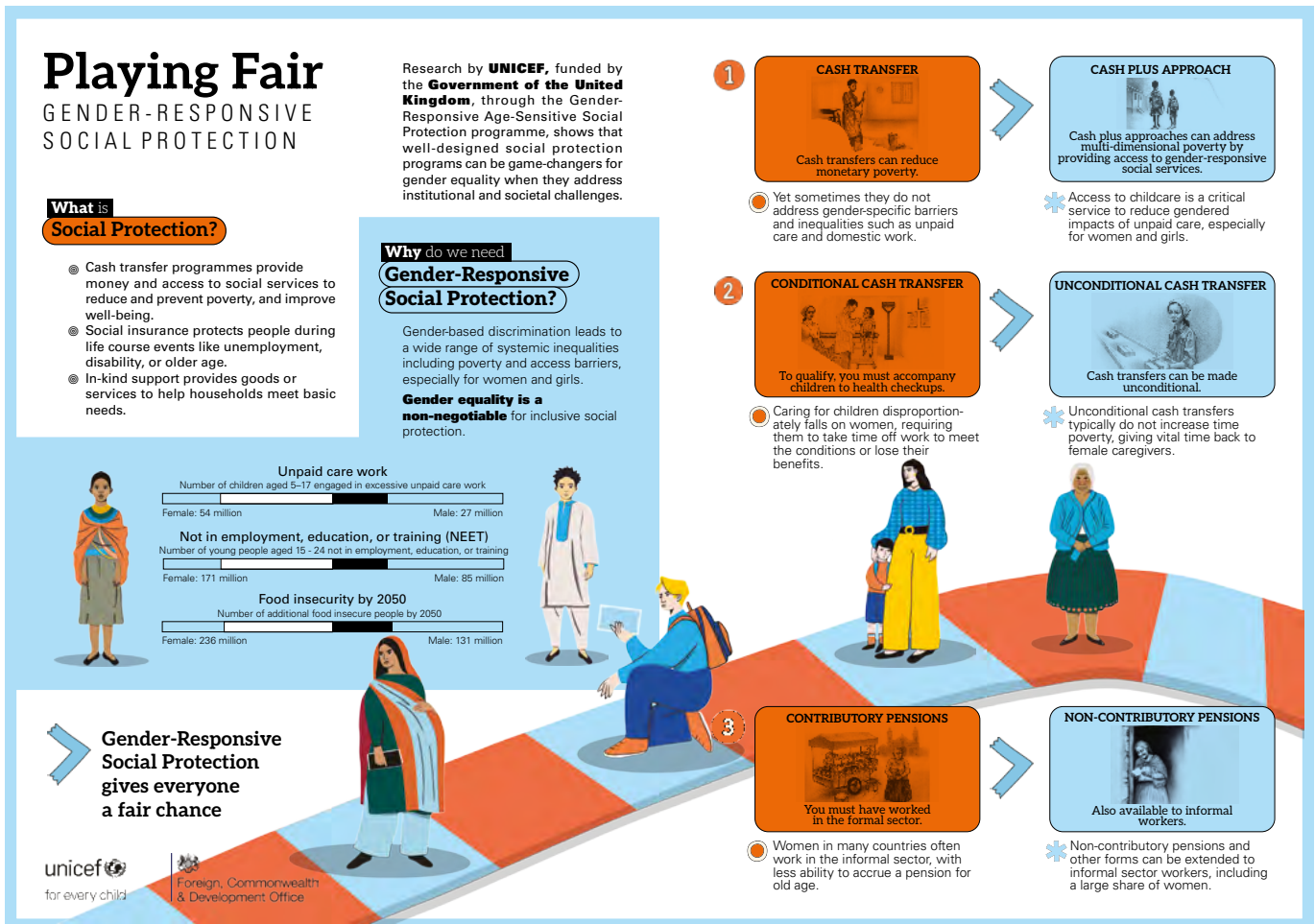
Gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) integrates gender equality across all stages of policy and programme design - from setting objectives and allocating resources to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Kuss et al., 2024). Critically, GRSP is not a parallel add-on to social protection - it strengthens the core performance of SP systems themselves. This includes improving coverage of the most vulnerable, the accuracy of who receives benefits, the adequacy of transfers, and the accountability of delivery. In doing so, GRSP addresses gender-specific risks and inequalities that women and girls face at different stages of life, such as unpaid care responsibilities, limited economic opportunities, and exposure to gender-based violence (GBV), among others (see Figure 1).

When well-designed, GRSP ensures equitable access to resources and services, often by identifying women as direct recipients, adding “plus” components often specifically for

(adolescent) girls, such as life skills, education, SRHR information or case management, or ensuring safe, accountable delivery with GBV safeguards and grievance mechanisms. Together, these measures help reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience, and expand girls’ and women’s agency to make informed life choices.

While gender-responsive social protection sets an overarching objective, it can be useful to define different levels of gender integration to support more intentional design (see Box 4). For instance, an approach to social protection for addressing child marriage with transformative potential to change harmful gender norms requires programmes to go beyond delivering income support to tackle the structural and societal drivers of gender inequalities that place adolescent girls at risk. This means designing interventions that intentionally shift power relations, challenge harmful norms, strengthen girls’ agency, and engage families, communities, and institutions.

Figure 1: Playing fair: Gender responsive social protection



Source: UNICEF, 2025.

BOX 4: GENDER INTEGRATION CONTINUUM

UNICEF Innocenti's Gender Integration Continuum (GIC) provides a practical framework for categorising social protection programmes according to their intentionality in addressing gendered risks, vulnerabilities and inequalities (Kuss et al., 2024). At the lower end, gender-blind or gender-discriminatory programmes fail to account for gendered risks and may inadvertently reinforce inequality. At the higher end, gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative programmes progressively recognise and address gendered vulnerabilities—from ensuring equitable access to services to challenging discriminatory norms and power relations (UNICEF, 2020). Applying the GIC to social protection programming aimed at preventing child marriage can help clarify the ambition and design of interventions, ensuring they not only mitigate immediate risks for girls but also contribute to longer-term shifts in harmful gender norms.

To be transformative, programmes should also address root causes and intergenerational gender inequalities for example, when defining programme objectives, criteria for ensuring coverage reaches households with adolescent girls, and enrollment processes. Since gender gaps do not close automatically through social protection, programmes require mechanisms that promote transformation over time. This includes prioritising the most marginalised girls, such as those with disabilities, out of school, married adolescents, displaced girls, or those in rural or minority communities; and actively removing barriers to access.

3.4 Eight Key Evidence Insights for Practice

The eight insights below are best understood through the five pathways by which GRSP influences child marriage outcomes (see Table 5, Chapter 4 on Pathways and Framework). The pathway depends significantly on programme design. Cash transfers work primarily through economic security and poverty reduction. By easing financial pressure on households, they reduce the likelihood of child marriage as a coping mechanism. They also address paid and unpaid labour, reducing the domestic and care work burden that keeps girls out of school. However, gender-responsive design is essential here, to avoid girls absorbing additional care work when women caregivers participate in public works or income-generating activities.

Earmarked transfers, stipends, or attendance-linked incentives support the education and skills pathway. These directly improve school attendance and retention, one of the strongest protective factors against child marriage. Cash-plus design, combining cash with life skills, mentoring, livelihoods training, SRHR education, or GBV service linkages, builds agency and voice, strengthening girls' confidence and decision-making capacity. Finally, cash-plus models that incorporate community dialogues and structured engagement with parents, men, boys, and community leaders can shift knowledge and attitudes, challenging norms around girls' marriageability and fostering collective commitment to alternative futures for girls.

Insight 1: Economic strengthening through cash transfers addresses the poverty drivers of child marriage by reducing household and child poverty, improving food security, and easing economic pressures (Palermo et al., 2025;

Siddiqi & Mann, 2024). Impacts are strongest when transfers are predictable, adequately sized, and linked to schooling, though effectiveness remains context-dependent (Mathers, 2021). Evidence from Turkey's conditional cash transfers for education (CCTE), delivered through the Kızılaycard, shows that when transfer amounts are low, they fail to fully cover education-related costs, such as stationery, school fees, food, and transportation, continuing to constrain access and still making schooling a financial burden (Ceylan, 2024). Across diverse contexts, conditional cash transfers (CCTs) offer the most potential for delaying child marriage (Mathers, 2021).

Example:

The cash component of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) reduces the incentive to marry girls for a bride price and increases school enrolment and attendance for girls, and shifts household labour responsibilities (Palermo et al., 2025).

CAUTION

Irregular or delayed payments or gender-neutral targeting can erode trust or reinforce harmful practices, including the use of transfers for dowry payments.



Use Tool 4 – Programme Design Tool to set transfer value and frequency benchmarks.

Insight 2: Cash-plus models strengthen outcomes compared with cash alone: Cash alone rarely shifts harmful gender norms in the short term and may not support child marriage reduction when it is not intentionally designed. The strongest evidence comes from cash-plus interventions that combine transfers with life-skills training, mentoring, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) education, livelihoods support, social norm change, or community norm engagement (Malhotra & Elnakib, 2021; Kuss et al., 2024). These approaches can enhance girls' confidence, knowledge, and decision-making power while addressing social norms and reducing economic stressors for the household. They consistently improve

intermediate outcomes, such as agency, SRH knowledge, and reduced transactional sex, that are pathways to delayed marriage. When paired with education and community engagement, including dialogue with parents, men, and boys, cash-plus programmes empower girls, support autonomy in marriage decisions, and foster broader shifts in norms, creating sustained protective environments for delayed marriage (Mathers, 2021).

Examples:

- In Ethiopia, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) complementary “plus” components under the Integrated Safety Net Programme (ISNP) shifted gender attitudes among recipients by pairing transfers with social worker engagement that promotes girls’ education, delayed pregnancy and marriage, and more equitable gender roles (Palermo et al., 2025).
- In Kenya, the AGI-K trial - a two-year multisectoral cash-plus intervention for girls aged 11–14, increased school enrolment within two years and reduced child marriage and pregnancy at four-year and six-year follow-ups, with effects concentrated among girls who were out of school at baseline; among this group, marriage and pregnancy fell by roughly a quarter to 40% relative to control (Austrian et al., 2024).



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BOX 5: “WE DESERVE BETTER” - GIRLS’ VOICES ON SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Participatory consultations with girls and young women through the We Deserve Better initiative revealed a clear and consistent message: economic insecurity, particularly during crises and climate shocks, is experienced as a direct driver of child marriage risk. Girls described how financial pressure on families increases the likelihood of early marriage as a coping strategy, and how access to cash transfers, education support, and basic services can meaningfully reduce that pressure. When families receive financial assistance, or when girls have support to stay in school, participants explained, the perceived need for early marriage decreases.

Girls were equally clear that social protection alone is insufficient. They emphasised the importance of combining SP with community dialogue, awareness-raising, and programmes that support education, skills, and autonomy — and stressed that when girls are consulted directly and included in programme design, interventions are far more likely to address both the economic and normative drivers of child marriage. These perspectives reinforce the value of participatory approaches not as an add-on but as a design principle for gender-responsive social protection.

Source: UNICEF, 2024a

Insight 3: Education-linked cash transfers frequently show protective effects against child marriage.


Transfers, scholarships or stipends conditioned on school attendance or girls' secondary education, increase enrolment and retention, counter family and social pressures for child marriage, reduce reliance on girls' labour, and protect against early pregnancy, a common driver of marriage (Greene et al., 2023; Mathers, 2021). Evidence across settings, including the Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K), conditional cash transfers in rural Malawi, and policies reducing the cost of schooling in Kenya and Ghana, shows that transfers or fee waivers tied to schooling can delay marriage and fertility, with strongest effects among the most at-risk girls and those out of school at baseline (Araujo and Macours, 2021; Austrian et al., 2024; Boahen and Yamuchi, 2018; Duflo et al., 2021). While the impacts may diminish over time and not sustain into later adolescence, exposure to CCTs is associated with marrying and childbearing later than peers, and early interventions may buffer against shocks such as COVID-19 school closures (Austrian et al., 2024).

Examples:

- Pakistan's Female Secondary Stipend Programme successfully increased the age of marriage by about 1.2 years for older adolescent girls (15–19) by providing incentives for continued education, and significantly increases the proportion of girls (15–16) who complete middle school (Cirillo et al., 2021).
- In Punjab, Pakistan each potential year of exposure of a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) for Girls' Education reduced the risk of child marriage by 3.5%. It also increased the probability of completing secondary school by 1.9% and showed intergenerational effects (reduced child stunting/underweight in women exposed to the programme) (CRANK, 2023).
- In some countries, such as India, milestone-based approaches have been used, for example, commitments not to marry before age 18, rather than mandatory performance conditions, which may be unfair where structural barriers persist (Palermo et al., 2025 for further discussion).


CAUTION

UNICEF does not promote the use of strict conditionalities in cash transfer programme, as this risk excluding the poorest and most vulnerable households where structural barriers to compliance persist and can place disproportionate burdens on adolescent girls and women. Instead, preferred approaches include earmarking or labelling cash, positive incentives, non-punitive soft co-responsibilities, or milestone-based commitments such as pledges not to marry before age 18.

 **See Tool 3.1** – Linking Transfers with Complementary Services.

Insight 4: Programme design and implementation matter:

Effective gender-responsive social protection depends on comprehensive coverage, adequate and predictable transfers, and gender and inclusive delivery, including identifying households with women and girls, using gender-sensitive payment modalities, grievance mechanisms, and overall implementation. Essential for impact are robust social accountability, adolescent-sensitive grievance and safeguarding mechanisms, alongside meaningful participation of women and girls in design and delivery. Weak or non-existent grievance mechanisms can undermine safety and inclusion, while case management is critical for addressing intrahousehold tensions, including conflicts over who controls cash transfers and risks of backlash. The integration with complementary services, such as education and sexual and reproductive health, is also crucial, as well-designed interventions can delay child marriage and empower adolescent girls. However, poorly designed schemes risk reinforcing inequalities through increased unpaid care or male backlash (Kuss et al., 2024; Oosterhoff and Yunus, 2022).

 **Review every programme using Tool 2.1** – Gender and Age Sensitive Checklist.

Practitioner tip:

Most social assistance programmes target households rather than adolescent girls directly, yet household-targeted benefits can still positively impact girls by reducing poverty, improving food security, increasing school attendance, and supporting coping strategies during shocks (Palermo et al., 2025).

Example:

Tanzania's Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) targets adults with cash transfers and livelihoods support, but two "plus" initiatives extend benefits to adolescents in PSSN households (Palermo et al., 2025):

- Ujana Salama: Life skills and livelihoods training, mentoring, health service linkages, and productive asset transfers, aligned with household support.
- Timiza Malengo: Direct cash transfers to adolescent girls. Amounts exceeded adult transfers, causing household tensions and community complaints (Cirillo, Palermo, & Viola, 2021).

These initiatives illustrate both the potential and the need for careful design when extending social protection to adolescents.

Insight 5: Unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) show mixed or limited impact on child marriage. While they consistently reduce household economic stress and improve school attendance, they generally show little to no direct effect on marriage outcomes. UCTs do, however, contribute to a range of gender equality outcomes including increased decision-making power for women in the household, reduced time poverty from additional care responsibilities, and delayed sexual debut or early pregnancy (Kuss et al., 2024; Tirivayi et al., 2023). Impact also improves significantly when UCTs include "plus" components such as case management, multisectoral referrals, or livelihood training. For example, Zambia's SCT1000 Days, an unconditional transfer combined with case management and community capacity-building, improved maternal and child nutrition and addressed barriers such as GBV and intrahousehold decision-making (SWAZ, 2025). Variation in impacts may also reflect programme contexts, in some settings, limited impacts on child marriage may reflect that recipients of UCTs were already at lower risk of child marriage, limiting programme effects (Mathers, 2021). In others, UCTs have not shifted the existing rates of child marriage, which, when left unaddressed, have continued to rise over time (Mathers, 2021).

Examples:

- Kenya's UCT to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (12–24) increased age at first pregnancy, but *not* age at first marriage. The positive effect was attributed to increased schooling, financial security, and delays in sexual debut (Greene et al., 2023; Handa et al., 2015).
- In Malawi, in a UCT vs. CCT comparison lower rates of early pregnancy and marriage were observed in the UCT group (Greene et al., 2023).

Insight 6: State-led social protection programmes show strong potential when integrated into national systems, even if they do not explicitly target child marriage (Mathers, 2021). Evidence on their impact remains mixed, with most insights drawn from large-scale unconditional cash transfer programmes (see above). In Kenya and South Africa, UCTs have been associated with delayed sexual debut and childbearing - outcomes closely linked to child marriage, but evidence on direct effects remains limited (Gavrilovic et al., 2020). Several impact evaluations in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia found no measurable effects of government cash transfers on child marriage outcomes (Gavrilovic et al., 2020).

However, integrated, multisectoral models show promise. In Ghana, the Integrated Social Services (ISS) approach, implemented across 210 districts and coordinated by seven ministries and agencies (including finance, planning, health, social protection and gender, local government, and health insurance), leverages the national LEAP cash transfer programme to address multiple vulnerabilities of children, including those at risk of or affected by child marriage. Through cross-sectoral case management and referrals, ISS has reached over 180,000 children. Complementing this, the Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion (LEPI) programme links social protection, child protection, and livelihoods to support out-of-school adolescent girls and young mothers, illustrating how state-led systems can move beyond income support to address the multidimensional drivers of child marriage.

Example:

In Lesotho, receipt of government-provided social protection, particularly unconditional cash transfers, such as the Child Grant, was associated with higher odds of school enrolment and educational attainment for both boys and girls, compared with non-governmental programmes, and a reduced likelihood of child marriage among girls (Hertzgog et al., 2024).

Insight 7: Emerging evidence from humanitarian, conflict, pandemic, and climate contexts show promise for social protection to reduce child marriage risks by easing economic stress and limiting negative coping strategies such as marrying off daughters aftershocks (Holmes and Lowe, 2023; UNICEF, 2025). The use of cash transfers in humanitarian settings has expanded, with demonstrated benefits, particularly for education access, but remains constrained in some contexts due to restrictions on cash movement, concerns about diversion to non-state actors, donor funding limitations, and government fears related to dependency or misuse (Girls Not Brides, 2024a).

show promise for social protection to reduce child marriage risks by easing economic stress and limiting negative coping strategies such as marrying off daughters aftershocks (Holmes and Lowe, 2023; UNICEF, 2025). The use of cash transfers in humanitarian settings has expanded, with demonstrated benefits, particularly for education access, but remains constrained in some contexts due to restrictions on cash movement, concerns about diversion to non-state actors, donor funding limitations, and government fears related to dependency or misuse (Girls Not Brides, 2024a).

Predictable and adequate social assistance also helps avert maladaptive responses during climate and other crisis shocks (Hidrobo et al., 2025). However, effectiveness depends on a nuanced understanding of how child marriage operates in specific humanitarian contexts, including whether transfers are delivered as one-off support or over time. Rigorous evaluations are needed to clarify what works, for whom, and under what conditions (Girls Not Brides, 2024a).



Practitioner tip:

Integrate early-warning and scalable mechanisms in national social protection systems.



See Tool 2.2 – Context Adaptation Template to adjust design for fragile or climate-affected settings.

Evidence from climate shocks and pandemics further shows that scalable and adaptive social protection can help avert harmful coping strategies which families may turn to in its absence. COVID-19 responses demonstrated that social protection can be flexibly scaled for temporary emergencies (Gentilini et al., 2022), while climate-linked programmes have supported resilience and reduced distress migration (Costella et al., 2023). In conflict settings, aligning humanitarian assistance with longer-term social protection systems has improved social stability and reduced inequities (e.g., Birch et al., 2024 in Sudan) and reduces tensions by engaging diverse stakeholders (as under the Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme, see Birch and Carter, 2023). The rise of “shock-responsive” and “adaptive” social protection reflects this shift, and global reports, such as the World Social Protection Report 2024–26 (ILO, 2024) now position universal and scalable social protection as central to crisis response (Lambin et al., 2025).



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Despite these advances, evidence from these contexts on effects for child marriage remains thin, and effectiveness depends heavily on predictable delivery, market functionality, operational feasibility, and coordination with protection and humanitarian systems. Poorly designed assistance may inadvertently increase child marriage if underlying drivers are not well understood or if services remain inaccessible. For example, where households apply large cash transfers to dowry payments to marry girls off during crises. In such contexts, cash should be carefully adapted or delivered as part of multi-component interventions that strengthen positive coping mechanisms, agency, community sensitization, and access to essential services, while minimizing risks of harm (Girls Not Brides, 2024a).

Examples:

- In Lebanon, the World Food Programme's basic assistance cash transfers reduced the recurrence of child marriage among Syrian refugee girls (Bastagli et al., 2020). The same study also notes that physical security and safety within the household also seemed to improve (Holmes and Lowe, 2023).
- In Somalia, delivery of unconditional cash transfers was successful in reducing child marriage in target communities, with evidence of transfers being spent on education and income generation (Girls Not Brides, 2024b).

Insight 8: Despite growing evidence, major knowledge gaps persist across the evidence base on social protection and early child marriage. Most research remains concentrated in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with limited evidence from Latin America, East and Central Asia, and Middle East and North Africa, as well as humanitarian, climate-affected, and fragile settings (UNICEF, 2025). More is also needed to understand which social protection modalities are most effective, how they interact with protection systems, and how market and operational constraints influence outcomes. Rigorous primary evaluations that explicitly measure child marriage as a primary outcome are rare (Kuss et al., 2024). Most studies rely on secondary analyses or proxy indicators, such as girls' schooling or household welfare, limiting causal attribution. Few include long-term follow-up to determine whether short-term gains translate into lasting reductions in child marriage (Kuss et al., 2024), and evidence suggests effects may fade once programmes end (Greene et al., 2023). Sustained engagement over five years or more is recommended to achieve durable change (UNICEF, 2025).

Evidence on cost-effectiveness is also limited, constraining policy prioritisation and scale-up. While direct incentives for girls show potential for cost efficiency, comparative evidence across modalities remains inconclusive (Peterman et al., 2024). Critical knowledge gaps persist on how contextual factors, such

as gender norms, household composition, and market access, shape outcomes, and on which mechanisms drive impact. Married adolescents remain largely invisible in programme design and evaluation (Siddiqi et al., 2024), and few studies disaggregate outcomes by age or marital status, leaving uncertainty around whether benefits extend equitably to younger (10–14) and older (15–17) girls. Finally, social insurance and labour market interventions are still underexplored in relation to adolescent outcomes and child marriage prevention.

3.5 Contexts Matter: Humanitarian, Climate, and Fragile Settings

In recent years, social protection programmes have increasingly focused on cushioning shocks and strengthening household resilience (Lambin et al., 2025). While many of the climate- and crisis-responsive initiatives (see Table 4 below; glossary in annex for definitions of terms such as basis risk, triggers, forecast-based financing, and pre-arranged financing) do not explicitly target child marriage, their design and operational approaches offer transferable lessons for strengthening GRSP.

For example, in Kenya, national social protection programmes and humanitarian schemes have linked their registries for information sharing, improving targeting and coverage (Lambin et al., 2025). By reducing economic stress and preventing negative coping strategies, these approaches can indirectly lower child marriage risks (Holmes and Lowe, 2023; UNICEF, 2025).

Summary message:

The relationship between gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) and child marriage is highly context-dependent, shaped by social norms, state capacity, service readiness and exposure to shocks. Effective GRSP adapts across humanitarian, climate-affected and development settings, but across all contexts, three design anchors remain constant: predictability, gender-responsiveness and age-sensitivity, and linkages to complementary services and accountability systems.



Table 4: Select examples from crises-contexts with potential learnings for child marriage reduction

Programme	Country	SP component	Key outcomes	Lessons	Potential child marriage reduction
Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) & Humanitarian Food Assistance (HFA)	Ethiopia	Public works + direct support; shock-responsive top-ups	Mitigated food insecurity; supported drought-affected households	Coordination between SP and humanitarian systems enhances synergies and effectiveness	Reduces household economic stress, lowering incentives for child marriage as a coping strategy
Wadata Talaka	Niger	Trigger-based adaptive UCT pilot programme for drought response	Increased food security by 15% in 18 months	Climate-responsive SP builds resilience and reduces economic stress	Improved food security reduces economic vulnerability, lowering child marriage pressures
Bolsa Família	Brazil	Conditional cash transfer (CCT) with shock-responsive flexibility	Protected households during May 2024 floods, reducing vulnerability to shocks	Long-term government run SP with climate-responsive features can absorb climate shocks	Stable, predictable support reduces household vulnerability post-disaster, decreasing likelihood of child marriage
Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Programme (SASPP)	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Niger	Adaptive cash transfers, productive inclusion, climate shock-responsive delivery systems, and institutional strengthening	Strengthened household resilience across six countries.	Combining government and humanitarian delivery for timely cash transfers ensures scale and responsiveness	Cash support during crises reduces economic stress and the likelihood of negative coping strategies including child marriage
Social Protection in the Sahel Joint Project	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger	Twin-track approach: Track 1 (Government) expands existing national programmes, reinforcing ownership and sustainability. Track 2 (Aligned): Enables coordinated partner delivery (UN/NGOs) where government capacity or access is limited	Ensures continuity of assistance and adaptive scalability, expanding coverage or benefit levels during shocks, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts	Requires strong coordination, capacity assessment, and alignment between humanitarian and government systems to avoid duplication and maintain efficiency	By protecting household income and ensuring continuity of support during crises, the approach reduces economic stress and vulnerability that can drive child marriage

Approaches	Country	SP Component	Key outcomes	Lessons	Potential child marriage reduction
Anticipatory Action and Shock-responsive social protection	Philippines	Vertical expansion financing mechanism for existing UCT to rapidly scale up	Enabled timely response to COVID-19	Anticipatory funding is critical for rapid crisis response	Prevents sudden economic shocks that might push families to consider child marriage
Data and information systems	Chile	Linked Early Warning Systems (EWS) and social registries	Integrated social information systems and registries enable efficient post-disaster assessments and rapid resource allocation.	Integrated data vital for informed, timely assistance	Timely support helps households cope with shocks, indirectly reducing child marriage risk
Forecast-based Financing (FbF)	Bangladesh	Forecast-triggered UCT (anticipatory cash sent four days before the floods)	Protected assets and food security for 145,000 people	Early action in a crisis allows households to prepare and reduce losses	Prevents asset depletion and food insecurity, reducing negative coping mechanisms including child marriage
Anticipatory cash transfers	Somaliland	Anticipatory (early) UCT triggered by seasonal rainfall forecast	No floods occurred, but temporary food security and well-being improvements	Risks and challenges to forecast-based design for anticipatory SP - must be linked to broader disaster risk reduction system and wider resilience-building initiatives	Early cash can provide temporary relief, but needs long-term integration for lasting effects
Climate insurance/disaster risk finance (e.g., CCRIF, index-based, microinsurance)	Caribbean countries, including Jamaica	Pre-arranged financing earmarked for shock responses channeled through social protection systems via parametric/ index-based insurance	Enables swift post-disaster payouts to stabilise incomes, prevent negative coping mechanisms, and enhance resilience	Diverse applications of climate insurance, but these mechanisms also face challenges that limit their effectiveness, including basis risk, data gaps, financial & institutional constraints	Stabilising household income can reduce the need for child marriage as a coping strategy

Source: author's own adaptation of examples provided in Lambin et al., 2025

CHAPTER 4

From Evidence to Action: Pathways and Framework

4.1 Pathways of Change


The framework presented in this chapter builds on the evidence summary presented in this guidance and aligns with the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (Global Programme) Phase III Theory of Change (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2025), drawing on its adolescent girl-centred and approach with transformative potential to change harmful gender norms. It emphasises a multisectoral approach linking social protection, education, health, and protection systems.

The framework envisions a world where all adolescent girls, especially the most marginalised, enjoy childhoods free from the risk of child marriage, supported by families, communities, and systems that value their rights and potential. Achieving this vision requires simultaneous action across five interlinked pathways through which GRSP influences child marriage out-

comes (see Table 5). Through well-designed gender-responsive social protection systems, these pathways can reinforce one another to create an enabling environment for girls' empowerment and delayed marriage.

These pathways reinforce one another by expanding access to adolescent-friendly, gender-responsive services, using the reach of social protection programmes to identify girls at risk and connect them to support through strengthened referral systems. Case management is a core cross-cutting enabler, addressing vulnerabilities such as gender-based violence, school dropout, intrahousehold tensions, and limited decision, linking girls to appropriate health, education, and protection services, which cash transfers alone cannot resolve for the most at-risk households.

Table 5: Pathways through which GRSP influences child marriage reduction outcomes

 AT A GLANCE		
Pathway	How it works	Illustrative practice
Economic security and poverty reduction	Cash can ease financial pressure for the household, reducing the risk of child marriage as a negative economic coping mechanism. Predictable, adequate support helps families meet basic needs and keep girls in school during hardship or crisis	Ethiopia's PSNP cash component reduces the incentive to marry young girls in exchange for a bride price, increases school enrollment and attendance for girls, and shifts household labour responsibilities (Palermo et al., 2025) A midline evaluation of Malawi's social cash transfer programme (SCTP) reported increased school enrolment and attendance and a notable decline in child marriages and pregnancies among girls (UNICEF, 2024b)
Paid and unpaid labour	Cash can generally reduce (unpaid) domestic, care, and support work demands for girls and families, enabling girls to stay in school and build skills rather than contribute to household or income-generating work. However, without gender-responsive design, girls may take on extra care work when women participate in public works or income activities	Angola's Child Grant (<i>Valor Criança</i>) supporting primary caregivers improved women's financial inclusion but reinforced traditional care roles. In contrast, Uruguay's National Care Policy provides a more transformative model, explicitly designed to ensure the right to care for children, people with disabilities, and the elderly, while reducing and redistributing unpaid care work between women and men (Kuss et al., 2024)
Education and skills	Earmarking or labelling cash, using positive incentives, or stipends linked to schooling attendance offset costs and incentivize attendance and completion, reinforcing education as one of the strongest protective factors that supports girls' learning continuity during hardship to significantly delay marriage age	Pakistan's Female Secondary Stipend Programme increased school retention and delayed age at marriage (Cirillo et al., 2021). Nepal's <i>Beti Padhau Beti Bachao</i> programme pairs a fixed deposit education insurance scheme - releasing funds to girls upon completing secondary education or reaching age 20 without marrying - with bicycle distribution to improve school access and retention, and has raised community awareness of the harms of early marriage and pregnancy (Samuels and Ghimire, 2021)

 **AT A GLANCE**

Pathway	How it works	Illustrative practice
Agency and voice	<p>Cash-plus models that pair transfers with life skills, mentoring, livelihoods training, and SRHR education enhance girls' confidence, decision-making power, and access to supportive networks.</p> <p>Linking recipients to GBV response and prevention and psychosocial services further reduces risk. Introducing livelihoods and economic opportunities can help girls build financial independence</p>	Kenya's AGI-K combined cash, mentoring, and SRHR training, strengthening girls' autonomy and delaying marriage (Austrian et al., 2024)
Knowledge and attitudes	<p>Cash-plus models integrated with community dialogues, campaigns, and engagement with parents, boys, men, community leaders, social workers challenges beliefs around girls' value, marriageability, and gender roles, fostering collective commitment to gender equality and alternative life options for girls</p> <p>Programmes should also monitor shifts in attitudes among girls, boys, caregivers, and community leaders regarding early marriage and gender norms</p>	In Ethiopia's PSNP's complementary "plus" components under the Integrated Safety Net Programme (ISNP) have helped shift gender attitudes among recipients, influencing adolescent girls, their parents and other influential adults. These attitudinal changes are driven by interactions of PSNP recipients with social workers who promote girls' education, delayed pregnancy and marriage, and equitable gender roles and practices (Palermo et al., 2025)

Across these pathways, GRSP systems can generate a sequence of change in three ways:

- ▶ In the *short term*, adolescent girls gain access to resources, knowledge, and essential services that enhance their well-being and decision-making. Families and communities become more aware of the harms of child marriage and the benefits of girls' education and empowerment. Household labour demands and economic pressures are mitigated through cash, reducing reliance on girls' unpaid labour or child marriage as an economic strategy. Systems, especially those in education, health, child protection, and social protection, strengthen their capacity to deliver coordinated, adolescent-friendly, and gender-responsive services.
- ▶ In the *medium term*, these shifts lead to behavioural and institutional changes: girls exercise greater agency and decision-making power; families invest in girls' education and well-being rather than expecting contributions through unpaid household or income-generating work; communities adopt positive gender attitudes, valuing girls' education and skill development over child marriage; and systems respond effectively to girls' needs.
- ▶ Over the *longer term*, these combined outcomes reduce the incidence of child marriage and early pregnancy and enable adolescent girls to thrive with expanded life choices including future economic opportunities.

4.2 A Framework for Leveraging GRSP

To support these changes, the framework highlights three intermediate outcomes:

- ▶ First, adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage can make informed decisions regarding marriage, education, SRHR, and participation in paid or unpaid work (including care and support work), supported by life skills, information, and social networks.
- ▶ Second, sectoral systems, including education, health, GBV prevention, social protection, and child protection are strengthened to deliver quality, coordinated, and gender-responsive services that reach adolescent girls and their families.
- ▶ Third, legal, policy, and governance environments are enhanced to prevent child marriage and to support girls who are married, pregnant, divorced, or engaged in labour, through costed, multisectoral national action plans aligned with human rights standards.

The framework assumes that sustainable change requires:

- ▶ Long-term, multisectoral action addressing structural and social drivers of child marriage.
- ▶ Predictable, inclusive, and safe gender-responsive social protection systems that reduce economic pressure and promote resilience.

- ▶ Sustained community engagement to shift gender and social norms regarding the value of girls' education and equitable labour responsibilities.
- ▶ Strong government leadership, equipped with evidence, partnerships, and fiscal space for sustainable action.
- ▶ Integration of child marriage reduction outcomes into national social protection policies, financing frameworks, and monitoring systems for long-term impact.
- ▶ Engage policy champions and technical working groups for policy coherence, institutional coordination, and sustainable financing.

Finally, this framework emphasises equity, accountability, learning, and adaptation. Interventions must ensure that the most marginalised girls, including those affected by displacement, are reached. Programmes should use disaggregated data (e.g., by sex, age, marital status) to track outcomes in education, agency, and norms. Participatory monitoring of quantitative indicators (e.g., school retention, age at marriage) and qualitative outcomes (e.g., empowerment, norm change), along with feedback from girls and communities strengthen transparen-

cy and continuous improvement. In humanitarian and fragile contexts, adaptive approaches, such as scalable mechanisms, where cash transfer programmes can rapidly expand coverage or benefit levels in response to shocks are essential to maintain continuity and impact.

Example:

The Government of Malawi has established a scalable mechanism within its flagship Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) to expand support to additional beneficiaries during shocks. This shock-responsive approach is a core pillar of Malawi's Disaster Risk Financing Strategy. First implemented during the 2021/22 rainfall season in Blantyre, Ntcheu, and Thyolo districts, the mechanism provided cash transfers to 74,000 vulnerable households affected by drought and related shocks. In 2022/23, it was expanded to over 100,000 households in six districts, with the long-term aim of achieving nationwide coverage (World Bank, 2023).



Table 6: A framework for leveraging GRSP for child marriage reduction and prevention

Vision	Gender-responsive social protection enables all adolescent girls, especially the most marginalised, to enjoy childhoods free from child marriage and to transition safely into adulthood, making informed choices about education, livelihoods, economic futures, sexuality, and relationships.				
Five pathways	Economic security Cash can ease financial pressure for the household, reducing the risk of child marriage as a negative economic coping mechanism.	Paid and unpaid labour Cash can generally reduce (unpaid) domestic, care, and support work demands for girls and families, enabling girls to stay in school and build skills rather than contribute to household or income-generating work	Education and skills Earmarking or labelling cash or stipends linked to education, or other behavioural nudges, support school attendance and completion, while building skills for future livelihoods	Agency and voice Cash-plus models combine transfers with life skills, mentoring, and SRHR education, strengthening girls' confidence and decision-making.	Knowledge and attitudes Cash-plus models integrated with transformative community dialogues and engagement for social norms change challenge harmful norms about girls' value and marriageability.
Sequence of change	Short-term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls gain access to resources, information, and essential services. Household labour pressures are reduced. Families and communities recognise the harms of child marriage. Systems build capacity for coordinated, gender-responsive delivery. 	Medium term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls exercise greater agency and decision-making power. Families invest in girls' education and well-being. Communities adopt positive gender norms. Systems respond effectively to girls' diverse needs. 	Long term <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced rates of child marriage and associated early pregnancy. Adolescent girls thrive with expanded life choices including economic opportunities. Sustainable transformation in girls' lives. 		
Intermediate outcomes	Adolescent girls can make informed decisions regarding marriage, education, SRH, and participation in household labour, supported by life skills and social networks.	Education, health, GBV prevention, social protection, and child protection systems are strengthened to deliver quality, coordinated services that account for girls' labour contributions and opportunities.	Legal, policy, and governance environments prevent child marriage through costed, multisectoral action plans.		
Key assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term multisectoral action - addressing structural and social drivers Predictable, inclusive social protection - reducing economic pressure and promoting resilience Social protection systems are shock-responsive - able to adapt coverage, transfer values, and delivery during crises, climate shocks, and conflict, sustaining GRSP's protective effects. Adolescent-friendly accountability and grievance mechanisms are in place Case management and multisectoral referral systems function effectively Sustained community engagement - shifting gender and social norms Strong government leadership - with evidence, partnerships, and fiscal space Integration into national policies - embedded in financing and monitoring systems Policy champions and coordination - for coherence and durable financing 				

4.3 What “Leverage” means in Practice

BOX 6: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “LEVERAGE” GENDER-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE?

To *leverage* gender-responsive social protection means intentionally designing, adapting, and implementing programmes and systems to prevent, delay, or mitigate the drivers and consequences of child marriage. This involves aligning social protection objectives with gender equality, adolescent wellbeing, and child marriage outcomes, while also incorporating participatory approaches and social accountability mechanisms to ensure programmes respond to the needs and priorities of women and girls.

Four levels of leverage (often overlapping in practice):

1. Design leverage: Integrate child marriage objectives into programme design, transfers, and monitoring frameworks. This could include ensuring scaled social protection systems reach households with adolescent girls, particularly those in remote areas or facing multiple deprivations, while directing targeted social services to girls with specific needs, such as those out of school, married, or in remote areas. **Additional design levers include** labelling or incentivizing cash to support school attendance, tailoring transfer amounts to cover secondary schooling costs, and setting measurable targets for delayed marriage. Participatory design approaches, involving women, girls, and communities, strengthen programme relevance and social accountability.

Example: Pakistan’s Female Secondary Stipend Programme increased girls’ age of marriage by linking cash to school enrolment (Cirillo et al., 2021).

2. Implementation leverage: Strengthening social protection delivery ensures adolescent girls and their families can access benefits safely, predictably, and with dignity. This involves building inclusive payment and delivery mechanisms, capacity-building for frontline workers to identify child marriage risks, and linking girls to complementary services such as education, health, and protection. Effective implementation leverage also requires coordination with government, NGO, and humanitarian actors to reach at-risk populations and respond to emerging needs.

Example: Although child marriage prevention is not an explicit objective of Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme 4 (PSNP4), behaviour change communication (BCC) interventions disseminate messages on delaying marriage and pregnancy, and in some Amhara woredas, social workers actively intervene to prevent child marriage and harmful traditional practices (Gavrilovic et al., 2020).

3. Programmatic leverage: Combining transfers with complementary “plus” components—life skills, SRH education, GBV services, livelihoods, and community engagement—to address the multi-dimensional drivers of child marriage.

Example: Kenya’s AGI-K trial combined cash with education, health, and community services, delaying marriage and improving SRH outcomes (Austrian et al., 2024). Ethiopia’s PSNP also paired cash with social worker engagement, promoting girls’ education and more equitable gender norms (Palermo et al., 2025).

4. Systems leverage: Build coordination across social protection, education, health, gender, and child protection sectors for a coherent, multi-sectoral response. This can include policy alignment, data sharing, and harmonised social registries to target adolescent girls across programmes.

Example: in Ethiopia, the PSNP and Humanitarian Food Assistance (HFA) programmes are effectively coordinated by the National Disaster Risk Management Committee (NDRMC) at the federal level, enhancing synergies and complementarities (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2022).

In humanitarian, fragile, and climate-affected contexts, leveraging further means maintaining support through shock-responsive systems and ensuring displaced, refugee, and crisis-affected adolescent girls are explicitly included in national programmes. Given service disruption and heightened protection risks, programmes should ensure the mobility and continuity of transfers during displacement, rely on flexible and primarily unconditional support where conditionalities are not feasible, and integrate anticipatory or forecast-based financing to enable early action and prevent negative coping strategies such as child marriage. At the same time, programmes must strengthen inclusion for refugees, internally displaced and undocumented adolescent girls through flexible identification and registration approaches, ensure that scaled social protection systems reach households with adolescent girls while directing targeted social services to girls’ specific needs, establish adolescent-friendly grievance, safeguarding, and referral mechanisms that remain functional during crises, and embed gender-based violence risk mitigation across delivery systems, including safe payment modalities and strong links to protection services.



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PART III

APPLY:
Design, deliver, and scale

➤ Purpose of this section

This section provides operational guidance for integrating child-marriage prevention and response into gender-responsive social protection. It covers:

- assessment and design, incorporating child marriage considerations from the outset;
- implementation, addressing payment mechanisms, coordination, multi-sectoral linkages, crisis adaptation, and safeguarding;
- and enabling conditions for sustainability, strengthening national systems, promoting humanitarian-development coherence, and fostering strategic partnerships to secure political and financial commitment

Building on the evidence and the framework this section translates the conceptual pathways into practical steps for UNICEF Country Offices, governments, and partners.

CHAPTER 5

Design Programmes that Work

5.1 Identifying Drivers and Risks

Effective GRSP design begins with a clear understanding of the drivers of child marriage, the needs of adolescent girls and their families, and the opportunities within existing national and subnational social protection systems. Making child marriage an explicit objective from the outset, such as embedded in programme logic, coordination mechanisms, and monitoring frameworks, ensures that interventions are intentional, measurable, and accountable.

Displaced and crisis-affected populations often face deeper and more complex vulnerabilities than host communities due to losses, limited networks, assets, livelihood opportunities, and legal rights. They generally require different types and higher-than-average levels of support than host populations because their needs are often greater and more persistent. To be effective, social protection and humanitarian assistance

must be complemented by broader legal and policy frameworks (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2022).



Practitioner tip:

Simplified documentation and adaptive eligibility systems can improve access for displaced populations, though bureaucratic barriers often persist. Colombia's 2011 Victims' Law, one of the world's most comprehensive frameworks for IDPs, provides entitlements to state assistance, including preferential social assistance. In low-income neighbourhoods of Bogotá and Cúcuta, this appears to have supported higher coverage among IDPs, with 76% receiving routine or pandemic-related transfers versus 62% of host community households (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2022).



Table 7: Evidence-based design features in gender-responsive social protection for addressing child marriage

Design element	Evidence-based practice	Notes / Risks / Action Required
Identifying (i.e., ensuring SP reach HHs with girls)	<p>Directly reaching adolescent girls aged 10 – 19 or caregiver or households with adolescent girls/female heads shows stronger protective outcomes.</p> <p>Earmarking, labelling, or incentivizing cash for girls - even when provided to caregivers, parents, or guardians - to support schooling, menstrual hygiene, or reproductive health needs.</p> <p>Tailor to girls' specific needs, risks, and capacities.</p> <p>Address equity gaps (e.g., disability, ethnicity, caste, rural remoteness) to ensure outreach to girls who face unique barriers to accessing benefits, and monitor inclusion/exclusion errors.</p>	<p>UNICEF recommends leveraging large-scale national social protection programmes as a key vector for providing cash transfers to families to benefit adolescent girls. Or directly to adolescent parents, particularly for their children.</p> <p>Direct cash to girls should be approached cautiously to avoid risk, backlash, stigma, or conflict, with parental consent, monitoring use, small transfer amounts relative to household income and other transfers, safeguards, and risk mitigation.</p> <p>Where direct transfers to adolescent girls are appropriate (for example, where girls are of legal age or are mothers themselves), programmes must carefully consider household context, risk of exploitation, age-linked risks, and relative transfer size compared to other existing household transfers (e.g. child benefits, family allowances or disability allowances) to avoid backlash or harm.</p> <p>Take care not to exclude married or out-of-school girls.</p>
Conditionality	<p>Cash transfers linked with education (e.g., school attendance or enrolment) appear effective where conditions are feasible to monitor and do not impose excessive burdens on families/girls.</p> <p>For extreme poor households or socially marginalized/excluded households, conditionality may pose significant risk.</p> <p>In fragile settings, conditionality may be less feasible.</p> <p>UCTs that are predictable and adequate may perform better.</p>	<p>UNICEF does not actively promote conditions; their use depends on national priorities. UNICEF does promote incentives, behavioural nudges, labelling, and earmarking.</p> <p>Unrealistic or punitive conditions can reduce household autonomy, increase unpaid care work, reinforce gender stereotypes, and negatively affect adolescent girls' and women's mental health.</p> <p>Unconditional cash transfers often have equal or greater impact on mental health, agency, economic outcomes, and school attendance compared to conditional transfers.</p>
Transfer design	<p>Irregular payments undermine intended impacts; Larger, regular, and predictable transfers are linked to higher educational attainment and delayed marriage.</p> <p>Directing transfers to women or adolescent girls boosts agency but requires safeguards, including against intra-household tension or exploitation (see caution under ensuring households with girls are reached).</p> <p>Where national IDs are a prerequisite, programmes must facilitate ID acquisition or provide alternative verification (e.g., community validation) to avoid exclusion.</p>	<p>Avoid large disparities vs. other household transfers to prevent intra-household tensions.</p>
"Plus" components	<p>Cash combined with age-sensitive "plus" components, such as education support, SRHR information and services, life skills, livelihood training, or community norm interventions, strengthens protection pathways, delays marriage, and promotes long-term impact by enhancing girls' confidence, resilience, and ability to make informed life choices.</p> <p>Case management supports holistic assessments, addresses household-level risks, and links girls to multisectoral services.</p>	<p>Stand-alone cash without plus components with links to education, SRHR, or GBV services may yield less substantial impact.</p>

Design element	Evidence-based practice	Notes / Risks / Action Required
Safeguards	<p>Prevent unintended consequences such as backlash, intra-household tensions, increased unpaid care and support work, dowry inflation, or reinforced inequalities.</p> <p>Embed GBV risk mitigation measures, especially critical in humanitarian contexts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct GBV and risk assessments prior to implementation. • Integrate GBV risk mitigation and safe referral pathways into payment and grievance redress mechanisms. • Train frontline workers on gender, child safeguarding, and safe communication. • Continuously monitor for unintended consequences. <p>Ensure clear communication and proactive community engagement to maintain trust and safety (Palermo et al., 2025). Effective engagement includes involving families, community leaders, and men/boys to address harmful social norms—fostering stronger shifts in attitudes and behaviours.</p>	<p>Ignoring GBV risks or lacking complaint channels and grievance response mechanisms.</p>

5.2 Setting Explicit Child Marriage Prevention Objectives

What it is: Defining clear goals that link gender-responsive social protection interventions to reducing child marriage risks and responding to child marriage survivors, empowering adolescent girls, including supporting those already married, pregnant, divorced, or young mothers, recognising their heightened risks and distinct service needs.

Why it matters: Explicit objectives drive alignment across programme logic, coordination, and monitoring systems, ensuring accountability for gender equality and adolescent outcomes.

How to do it:

- ▶ Make child marriage prevention and response an explicit goal linked to GRSP pathways (economic security, household labour, education, agency, knowledge and attitudes).
- ▶ Conduct gender, adolescent, and context analyses to identify drivers (poverty, norms, education gaps).
- ▶ Integrate objectives into programme logic, coordination structures, and M&E frameworks.
- ▶ Embed child marriage reduction/response indicators in results systems, including outcomes (e.g., delayed marriage, school retention) and processes (e.g., agency, social norms).
- ▶ Clarify whether prevention and response are primary or secondary objectives, depending on context.
- ▶ Align indicators with outcomes such as age at marriage, school retention, adolescent pregnancy, and agency measures.

- ▶ Ensure sustainable financing through domestic budgeting to incorporate child marriage reduction/response design, interventions, and measurement



Practitioner tip:

Example objective – “Reduce the economic and social vulnerabilities contributing to child marriage among adolescent girls.”



Use Tool 1 – Country Diagnostic Checklist.

5.3 Designing Gender-Responsive Transfers

What it is: Designing cash transfer schemes that address gender dynamics, life stage, and the distinct vulnerabilities of adolescent girls. Where feasible, programme objectives should aim to challenge harmful norms, addressing unequal power relations, and strengthening girls’ agency.

Why it matters: Properly designed cash transfers ease financial pressures for households, strengthen agency, and enhance girls’ access to education and services.

How to do it:

- ▶ Ensure predictable, adequate, and gender-responsive transfer amounts.
- ▶ Consider who receives and controls the transfer; direct payments to girls should either be avoided or approached with caution and in collaboration with trained partners (see Table 7).

- ▶ Select the most appropriate delivery modality for cash based on context and access (digital payments, accessible collection points, etc).
- ▶ Integrate cash-plus components to build skills and economic opportunities: life skills, SRHR education, mentoring, or financial literacy.
- ▶ Prioritise safe, dignified delivery with GBV referral pathways and “do no harm” safeguards.
- ▶ In humanitarian settings, use flexible, unconditional cash where conditionalities are less effective.



Practitioner tip:

Pair cash transfers with complementary mechanisms, such as capitation grants (fixed per capita payments provided by governments or donors to essential service providers to cover service costs and promote universal access) to local schools, to increase benefits for adolescent girls without raising household transfer amounts. This approach can prevent backlash, improve acceptance, and ensure that girls receive additional support while minimising intra-household or community tensions (Palermo et al., 2025).



Use Tool 2.1 – Checklist for Gender- and Age-Responsiveness

⚠ CAUTION:

Avoid punitive or exclusionary conditions and setting adolescent transfers higher than those provided to households or adults within the same programme, as this may create tension.

5.4 Identifying Target Populations

What it is: Identifying and reaching girls most vulnerable to child marriage.

Why it matters: How a programme identifies and reaches girls determines who benefits. Scaled social protection systems should ensure coverage reaches households with adolescent girls, with targeted social services directed to meet girls’ specific needs, rather than creating parallel cash transfer structures. Direct cash transfers to girls may be appropriate where girls are of legal age or are mothers themselves, but carry protection risks in other circumstances that must be carefully considered (see also Table 7).

How to do it:

- ▶ Use gender-responsive and age-sensitive criteria (e.g., poverty, school dropout, early pregnancy, disability, displacement) based on the previously conducted assessments.
- ▶ Conduct community mapping and outreach to identify excluded groups (e.g., out-of-school girls, married adolescents, adolescent mothers, girls with disabilities, girls lacking national ID, girls in remote rural areas, girls in conflict or climate-affected communities).
- ▶ Ensure confidentiality to avoid stigma or backlash.
- ▶ In crises, adapt coverage and service delivery through shock-responsive systems to ensure SP reaches households with adolescent girls and that targeted social services remain accessible when girls are most at risk.



Practitioner tip:

UNICEF does not take a global position on whether to target adolescents directly with cash transfers or households with adolescents within them. Some programmes have directly targeted adolescent girls. When this is the case, it is crucial to consider the broader context and existing social protection schemes. For instance, in order to mitigate the risk of backlash, the size of cash transfers for adolescent girls should be considered with reference to the size of transfer provided to adults in the household, especially when distributed as part of the same or linked programmes (Palermo et al., 2025).



Use Tool 2.1 – Checklist for Gender- and Age-Responsiveness

⚠ CAUTION:

Mainstream social protection criteria can exclude displaced or highly vulnerable populations. In crisis settings, do not rely solely on existing SP methods of identifying households with adolescent girls; instead, adapt criteria or develop new shock-responsive programmes with displacement-specific eligibility.



5.5 Identifying Entry Points in Existing Programmes

What it is: Building on, adapting, and strengthening the gender-responsiveness of existing social protection systems to address child marriage.

Why it matters: Leveraging and strengthening existing programmes enhances sustainability, efficiency, and scale.


How to do it:

- ▶ Adapt and strengthen the gender-responsiveness of existing social protection programmes rather than creating new ones - recognizing that cash-plus is one approach among several, and that core SP design improvements can directly address child marriage drivers without parallel structures.
- ▶ Strengthen core SP design to reach adolescent girls: ensure transfer values are adequate to cover education-related costs (or provide in-kind support where cash is not feasible); use transfers to cover safe transport to school; enable adolescent mothers to be registered as direct transfer recipients; and disaggregate SP registry data by gender, age, and marital status to make girls visible within national systems.
- ▶ Identify entry points across the programme cycle:
 - ▶ **Design:** add child marriage indicators, safeguards, and gender-disaggregated criteria to ensure scaled SP programmes reach households with adolescent girls and directing targeted social services to girls' specific needs, unless girls are of legal age or are parents themselves.
 - ▶ **Implementation:** where appropriate, integrate "plus" components (life skills, SRHR, livelihoods) as complements to - not substitutes for - strong core transfer design.

- ▶ **Scale-up:** expand coverage in high-prevalence or fragile areas, prioritising integration into existing national programmes.
- ▶ Integrate case management early in programme design to identify girls' specific risks (e.g., domestic violence, school re-entry barriers, pregnancy-related needs), strengthen household engagement, and ensure referral pathways to protection, GBV, health, and livelihood service.
- ▶ Foster cross-sector coordination for social service linkages with education, health, gender, and child protection systems.
- ▶ In crises or climate-affected settings, design must include anticipatory or forecast-based triggers, scalable mechanisms, flexible transfer rules, continuity for displaced or mobile populations, and harmonised humanitarian-government registries.

Practitioner tip:

Combine cash transfers with SRHR education specifically for adolescents (see Ujana Salama in Tanzania) or link child grants to school retention.

 **Use Tool 3.1** – Linking Transfers to Education, SRHR, and GBV Services

CAUTION:

Requires clear institutional roles, shared accountability, and aligned communication across sectors.



CHAPTER 6

Deliver and Strengthen Systems

6.1 Payment and Delivery Mechanisms

Even the best-conceived social protection programmes can fall short in addressing child marriage if delivery systems are not inclusive, gender-responsive and age-sensitive. Effective implementation ensures adolescent girls, and their families can access benefits safely, predictably, and with dignity.

What it is: Ensuring households receive cash transfers - for adolescent girls' outcomes - that are safe, predictable, and accessible in all contexts.

Why it matters: Gender-responsive and age-sensitive delivery systems prevent exclusion, reduce gendered risk, and strengthen trust in programmes.

How to do it:

- ▶ Conduct a feasibility study to determine the most appropriate delivery method, considering factors such as gendered access to mobile phones, literacy levels, network coverage, and availability of payout points or merchants in marginalised areas.
- ▶ Identify the most appropriate communication channels, particularly to reach girls who may be marginalized and living in poverty
- ▶ Ensure payment mechanisms integrate GBV mitigation, adolescent-safe communication, and clear referral pathways.
- ▶ Offer choice of delivery modality to empower recipients.
- ▶ Direct transfers to girls should be avoided or approached cautiously with parental consent, monitoring use, small transfer amounts relative to household income to prevent intra-household tensions, safeguards, and risk mitigation.
- ▶ Allow for both women and men to be listed as household head or recipient where feasible. Allow for adolescent mothers to be listed to receive transfers when they have children of their own.
- ▶ Allow women to nominate a proxy to receive transfer on her behalf if unable due to pregnancy, caregiving, or other unforeseen obligations, but allow her to remain listed.
- ▶ Co-locate transfer payment location (if manual) near to frequented spots for women such as markets, clinics, and the like; careful to avoid instrumentalization of women as caregivers.
- ▶ Manual pay points must be scheduled to avoid school hours and increased care responsibilities, located near safe, familiar locations (markets, health centres), and staffed by trained personnel.
- ▶ Engage all members of households in communication messaging on programme objectives and the intended use to prevent intrahousehold conflicts.



Practitioner tip:

For manual payments, ensure payout locations are safe, accessible, and do not impose excessive time burdens on women and girls. For electronic payments, support financial inclusion by increasing access to mobile phones and addressing network coverage challenges.



Use Tool 2.1 – Checklist for Gender- and Age-Responsiveness



CAUTION:

Girls without phones, IDs, or digital access risk exclusion. Account for potential loss of social interaction and networking opportunities that come with electronic delivery.

6.2 Coordination across Systems and Actors

What it is: Establishing strong coordination to ensure coherent, efficient, and accountable GRSP delivery.

Why it matters: Coordinated delivery prevents duplication, expands reach, and strengthens national systems. Evidence further highlights the importance of clear coordination and complementarity between social protection and humanitarian responses, with well-defined institutional responsibilities and mandates within the broader social protection ecosystem.

How to do it:

- ▶ Delivery should explicitly involve Child Protection, GBV, Education, and Health systems to ensure referrals, case management, and accountability.
- ▶ Create inter-ministerial working groups or task forces across Social Protection, Gender, Education, Health, Child Protection, and Finance sectors.
- ▶ Formalise collaboration with NGOs, CSOs, and youth groups to strengthen outreach, build community trust, and support monitoring, social accountability, and feedback mechanisms.
- ▶ Develop joint planning and data-sharing protocols.
- ▶ In crises, harmonise registries, transfer values, grievance systems, and coverage criteria across humanitarian and national programmes, ensuring that scaled social protection reaches households with adolescent girls and that targeted social services are directed to girls' specific needs, to avoid duplication and gaps in protection.

**Practitioner tip:**

Use joint review missions to identify delivery gaps and share lessons across sectors.

**Use Tool 3 – Stakeholder Mapping Template****CAUTION:**

Ensure quality and safeguarding standards are applied consistently across partners.

6.3 Linking Social Protection to Services

**Summary message:**

Evidence from Cameroon, Colombia, and Greece highlights the need for social protection to go beyond cash and in-kind transfers, linking support with education access, protection from violence, land and work rights, and psychosocial services. These integrated approaches strengthen resilience and reduce drivers of child marriage among displaced and crisis-affected girls and their families (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2022).

What it is: Connecting cash transfers to complementary services that address the multi-dimensional drivers of child marriage. These include education, health, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, vocational training, livelihood support, digital and financial inclusion, and gender-based violence prevention and care. In contexts where adolescent girls face complex or intersecting vulnerabilities, such as exposure to GBV, household conflict over cash use, pregnancy, disability, or displacement, case management should accompany social protection delivery to assess risks, facilitate referrals, and ensure follow-up.

Why it matters: Integrated service linkages can strengthen outcomes related to child marriage reduction and response, supporting sustainability beyond the programme period (see Chapter 7).

How to do it:

- ▶ Facilitate access to adolescent-friendly, tailored, and complementary services that reflect girls' priorities and needs. This includes identifying out-of-school girls through social protection registries and linking them to re-enrolment, re-entry into education, or skills pathways; referring married adolescents, pregnant girls, and young mothers to confidential SRHR, maternal health, and nutrition services; and embedding GBV-sensitive grievance and referral mechanisms within payment and case management systems. Where appropriate, programmes should also involve parents,
- caregivers, community leaders, men, and boys through social and behaviour change strategies to reinforce positive norms around girls' education, safety, and delayed marriage.
- ▶ **Education linkages** are particularly critical. Social protection programmes can support enrolment, retention, and re-entry by using labelled or earmarked cash, stipends, or fee waivers to offset direct and indirect schooling costs, and by establishing referral pathways to alternative or second-chance education. Experiences from Kenya's AGI-K show that prioritising out-of-school girls and girls at transition points can significantly delay marriage. However, practitioners should avoid rigid attendance-based conditionalities that may exclude girls facing structural barriers such as distance, disability, or caregiving responsibilities.
- ▶ **Health, SRHR, and nutrition linkages** are essential for girls who are married, pregnant, or young mothers. Co-locating enrolment or payment days with health outreach, and using case management to facilitate discreet referrals, can improve access to adolescent-friendly services while minimising stigma. Zambia's SCT 1000 Days programme illustrates how combining unconditional cash with nutrition support, counselling, and case management can address both immediate needs and underlying risks. Programmes should ensure confidentiality and avoid overburdening girls with multiple requirements that could increase unpaid care work.
- ▶ Social protection can also serve as a platform for **GBV prevention and response** and **child protection**. Embedding GBV risk screening within case management, establishing safe referral pathways, and integrating GBV-sensitive grievance mechanisms help ensure that girls experiencing or at risk of violence receive timely support. Ethiopia's PSNP demonstrates how trained social workers can address harmful practices, including domestic violence and child marriage. At the same time, programmes must manage risks of retaliation, stigma, or over-surveillance through confidentiality safeguards and survivor-centred approaches.
- ▶ Linkages with **livelihoods, skills, and productive inclusion** programmes are particularly relevant for older adolescents (15–19), out-of-school girls, and young mothers, offering economic alternatives to early marriage. Coordination of cash transfers with training schedules, childcare support, and transport can improve participation and outcomes, as seen in Ghana's LEPI programme. Training that is disconnected from labour market opportunities or girls' caregiving realities risks exclusion and low impact.
- ▶ **Digital and financial inclusion** is a critical enabler across all service linkages. Many vulnerable girls lack national identification, mobile phones, or access to financial services, creating barriers to receiving transfers and participating in livelihoods programmes. Integrating support for ID acquisition, mobile money access, and financial literacy, often in partnership with civil registration authorities and financial service providers, can prevent exclusion. Ghana's LEPI programme demonstrates how embedding ID support within mentoring and safe spaces strengthens girls' economic

agency and enables effective linkage to social protection and financial systems. Practitioners should remain alert to risks of digital exclusion, particularly for girls without phones, literacy, or safe access.

- ▶ Across all service areas, **case management functions as a cross-cutting mechanism** to coordinate support for girls facing multiple vulnerabilities. Where capacity is limited, programmes should start with light-touch case management and prioritise a small number of high-impact linkages, such as education retention and GBV referral, before expanding. Clear institutional roles, strong coordination mechanisms, and continuous monitoring are essential to ensure that integration improves outcomes without causing harm.



Practitioner tip:

Operationally, teams should map available education, health, nutrition, GBV, child protection, and financial inclusion services and assess their accessibility and adolescent-friendliness; embed linkages into delivery systems such as registries, case management, referral pathways, and grievance mechanisms; and manage risks and adapt, using non-punitive approaches, confidentiality safeguards, and flexible delivery modalities.



Use Tool 3.1 – Guidance on Linking Transfers to Education, SRHR, and GBV Services



CAUTION:

Ensure referral systems are well-coordinated to avoid overburdening local services.

6.4 Adapting Programmes in Crises Contexts

What it is: Building flexibility into gender-responsive social protection to sustain delivery during shocks, crises, or displacement, ensuring adolescent girls continue to receive support when vulnerabilities are heightened.

Why it matters: Crisis-affected girls often face heightened risks and vulnerability, and continuity of support is critical to prevent negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and school drop-out. Adaptive and shock-responsive GRSP can stabilise household livelihoods, protect assets, and maintain access to education, health, and protection services.

How to do it:

- ▶ Maintain comprehensive data collection and management information systems with disaggregation of data by gender and age to ensure ability to quickly identify and scale
- ▶ Establish shock-responsive mechanisms for rapid scale-up or top-up approaches, including horizontal (more households) and vertical (higher benefit levels) expansions.

- ▶ Shift to flexible, unconditional transfers, simplify enrolment and ID requirements, and ensure displaced adolescent girls (including IDPs and refugees) are not excluded, using alternative verification where needed.
- ▶ Use early warning systems and data-driven triggers to pre-emptively allocate resources, as seen in Bangladesh's forecast-based financing ahead of 2020 flash floods (see Chapter 3.4).
- ▶ Coordinate with humanitarian cash actors to align transfer amounts and accountability systems, and integrate social protection and humanitarian registries, as in Kenya, the Dominican Republic, and Chile (see Chapter 3.4).
- ▶ Strengthen protection case management and outreach, including mobile teams and partnerships with women-led, youth, and refugee organisations to reach the most marginalised.
- ▶ In climate-affected contexts, link climate-sensitive cash with school feeding, livelihoods, and resilience initiatives; use tools such as the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) to stabilise incomes and prevent negative coping (see Chapter 3.4).
- ▶ Strengthen social registries, early warning mechanisms, and data systems to ensure scaled social protection programmes reach households with adolescent girls, and that targeted social services are directed to girls' specific needs, following examples from Zimbabwe and the Sahel countries.



Practitioner tip:

Evidence from Sahel countries show that aligning the technical aspects of social protection and humanitarian schemes, such as payment mechanisms and actor collaborations, is generally easier than modifying eligibility criteria or transfer values, partly due to financing constraints.



Use Tool 2.2 – Practical Steps for Adaptation in Fragile, Conflict, or Climate-Affected Settings



CAUTION:

Ensure referral systems are well-coordinated to avoid overburdening local services. In Malawi, parallel systems with differing provisions created social tension and complicated the development of a single shock-responsive system (O'Brien et al., 2018; Sabates-Wheeler & Longhurst, 2020). In Ethiopia, unequal transfer values between the PSNP and Humanitarian Food Assistance (HFA) limited convergence and led to undesired beneficiary behaviour, such as double-dipping or movement between benefits, as well as social tension (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2022).

6.5 Safeguarding, Accountability and Do No Harm

What it is: Ensuring all GRSP participants, especially adolescent girls, can access benefits safely, with mechanisms to prevent, report, and address harm.

Why it matters: Safeguarding and accountability are central to trust, dignity, and the prevention of gender-based violence.

How to do it:

- ▶ Align programmes with UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) and the UNICEF Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment.
- ▶ Conduct GBV risk assessments at programme design and midline.
- ▶ Establish adolescent-sensitive, confidential grievance mechanisms that are accessible without ID and available across multiple channels (e.g. hotlines, SMS/WhatsApp, helpdesks, and in-person), and ensure girls are safely informed about how to raise concerns.
- ▶ Train implementers and frontline workers, including the social service workforce, to safely identify, respond to, and confidentially refer GBV cases, and ensure grievance systems are linked to functioning GBV referral and case management pathways.



Practitioner tip:

Build the capacity of frontline workers to deliver holistic services and meet the specific needs of adolescent girls, including training on new programme activities and hiring additional staff to manage increased demand as programmes expand.



CAUTION:

Design grievance systems that are adolescent-friendly, private, and safe.

6.6 Participation, Transparency, and Continuous Learning

What it is: Building trust and adaptability through open communication and community participation.

Why it matters: Transparent systems enhance inclusion and accountability, while transparent communication increases participation and programme credibility, and feedback informs continuous improvement.

How to do it:

- ▶ Publicise programme information, including eligibility, payment schedules, and grievance procedures.

- ▶ Engage adolescents in participatory monitoring, social audits, and youth-led oversight to ensure responsiveness and social accountability.
- ▶ Close feedback loops by responding to community input and reporting back on actions taken.
- ▶ Use community monitoring committees, satisfaction surveys, and data analytics to identify delivery gaps and inform adaptive management.
- ▶ Incorporate gender, age, and equity considerations into monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess programme impacts on adolescent girls and households



Practitioner tip:

Conduct community sensitisation to explain programme objectives, how social protection reaches households with adolescent girls through scaled systems, and how targeted social services are directed to girls' specific needs - fostering buy-in and gender-equitable attitudes. Communicate eligibility, entitlements, and complaint procedures transparently to participants, including for vulnerable groups. Where direct cash transfers to girls are considered, this should be limited to girls of legal age or adolescent mothers, with appropriate safeguards in place.



CAUTION:

Transparency must balance openness with protection of sensitive beneficiary data.



CHAPTER 7

Scale and Sustain Impact

Sustaining and expanding gender-responsive social protection for child marriage response and prevention requires strong national systems, institutional leadership, and predictable long-term financing. Scale-up is best understood as a process of progressive institutionalisation. This involves embedding effective approaches into government policy frameworks, delivery systems, and budgets. Building shock-responsiveness into SP systems from the outset ensures continuity of support for adolescent girls even in contexts of crisis, fragility, or displacement.

From donor-funded pilot to national system: key considerations for practitioners

Programmes frequently begin as donor-funded pilots and face significant challenges in transitioning to sustained government-led systems. The following considerations provide a practical framework:

- 1. Design for scale from the outset.** Embed pilots within existing national delivery infrastructure rather than creating parallel systems. Alignment with existing social registries, payment systems, and case management platforms from day one reduces transition costs and builds government familiarity. In low-capacity or fragile settings, pilots should be embedded within existing delivery platforms and accompanied by targeted capacity-building for the social service workforce, clear institutional mandates, and strengthened coordination across social protection, child protection, education, and health sectors.
- 2. Secure government co-ownership early.** Involve Ministries of Social Welfare, Finance, and relevant line ministries from the design stage, not only at handover. Co-ownership of data, learning, and programme identity is as important as co-ownership of financing.
- 3. Build the evidence base for domestic financing.** Use cost-benefit analyses and Public Finance for Children (PF4C) tools to demonstrate return on investment to finance ministries. Linking GRSP outcomes to national development priorities, education, labour force participation, reduced adolescent pregnancy, strengthens the fiscal case.
- 4. Phase the handover deliberately.** Plan a structured transition from donor to government financing, with clear milestones, joint reviews, and contingency financing to prevent coverage gaps during the transition period.
- 5. Institutionalise learning.** Embed child marriage-related indicators into national social registries and management information systems so that girls' needs remain visible and actionable, as programmes scale.



BOX 7: MALAWI'S SOCIAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME: FROM DONOR PILOT TO NATIONALLY EMBEDDED CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION

Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally, around 42% of girls marry before 18, with poverty the key underlying driver. Children from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry early, and three of the five poorest districts record the highest child marriage rates. The SCTP has emerged as one of Malawi's most significant gender-responsive social protection instruments for child marriage prevention.

What the SCTP does

The SCTP targets ultra-poor, labour-constrained households - most likely to resort to child marriage under economic stress. Transfers include a school bonus conditional on enrolment, addressing one of the strongest protective factors against early marriage. Each additional year of secondary school reduces child marriage likelihood by 3.7 percentage points.

Evidence on child marriage outcomes

A midline evaluation reported increased school enrolment and attendance among girls in recipient households, alongside a notable decline in child marriages and pregnancies (UNICEF, 2024). SCTP allocations within the government's ECM budget grew year-on-year between FY 2016-17 and FY 2018-19, even as other ECM budget lines declined. Poverty alleviation was the intervention most frequently cited by research participants as a priority for future ECM investment.

From pilot to national system

Beginning as a donor-supported pilot, the SCTP was progressively embedded within Malawi's national social protection architecture, aligned with the national social registry, integrated into programme-based budgets, and institutionalised as a standing government commitment. It sits within the National Strategy on ECM and the MGDS III growth framework, giving it political legitimacy beyond the gender sector alone.

UNRESOLVED CHALLENGES: WHAT THE BUDGET DATA REVEAL

The SCTP's institutionalisation is not yet complete. The 2019 budget scoping exercise identified three structural constraints:

<p>Fiscal dependency</p> <p>73% of ECM resources came from external sources in 2016-19, all off-budget. MoGCDSW allocations fell from 2.2% to 0.3% of the national budget between 2012 and 2019, even as the SCTP line grew.</p>	<p>Sub-national reach</p> <p>District councils received ~US\$125/month for child protection in 2018-19. Without adequate sub-national resourcing, the case management and referral services that make cash transfers most effective cannot function.</p>	<p>System cost gaps</p> <p>The National Strategy excludes the child protection workforce, case management, and data systems. Cash transfers alone do not prevent child marriage; they require a functioning referral and support infrastructure alongside them.</p>
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WHAT THE MALAWI SCTP EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

► **Cash transfers are most protective when embedded in a system.**

The SCTP's school bonus reduces child marriage risk through the education pathway; but girls also need case management, referral, and psychosocial support. Plan complementary services alongside the transfer, not as afterthoughts.

► **Fiscal space constraints are real but not fixed.**

Building the investment case — including cost-benefit evidence and PF4C tools — is essential to protect GRSP financing when fiscal pressure intensifies, as Malawi's experience shows.

► **Institutionalisation requires more than a budget line.**

Embedding child marriage-specific indicators, performance targets, and sub-national delivery resources into the programme architecture is what converts a budget line into a functioning system.

► **Geographic equity matters.**

The highest child marriage rates (Phalombe 68%; Mulanje 62%) do not align with where NGOs concentrate. Government-led programmes like the SCTP offer coverage depth project-based delivery cannot — but only with adequate sub-national transfers.

Sources: Government of Malawi / UNICEF (2019), Budget Scoping on Programmes and Interventions to End Child Marriage in Malawi; UNICEF (2024), SCTP midline evaluation.

Table 8: Enabling conditions for sustainability

Enabling area	Why it matters	Key considerations	Examples or Notes
Strengthen national systems	System-embedded GRSP is not dependent on pilots or donor cycles; effects persist across political cycles and shocks. Mature SP systems can be leveraged in crises.	Integrate child-marriage prevention into national SP systems; align with registries/MIS; build institutional capacity; strengthen institutional capacity for cash-plus delivery and adolescent girls' empowerment.	Ethiopia PSNP: Long-standing, government-led SP mitigates drought impacts and supports household preparedness (Lambin et al., 2025). Note: the PSNP remains substantially donor-funded; its value as a model lies in its consistency of delivery and scale, rather than domestic financing. This can help to reduce economic stress, which is a major driver of child marriage during crises.
Bridge humanitarian-development delivery	Girls' access to cash and services must not collapse during shocks, when marriage risks rise.	Design shock-responsive and gender-responsive mechanisms that maintain coverage during crises; align registries and transfer values; maintain continuity of education/SRHR/GBV services; establish joint coordination platforms.	Kenya: National SP and humanitarian schemes connect registries for information sharing (Lambin et al., 2025). This can ensure vulnerable households, including those with adolescent girls, continue receiving support during shocks.
Secure financing for scale	Predictable, domestic finance transforms GRSP into a sustained government obligation, protecting adolescent-focused components when budgets tighten.	Align transfers and eligibility with national systems, integrate GRSP and child marriage objectives into budget processes so governments can link spending to outcomes, identify resource gaps, and ensure equitable allocation; use Public Finance for Children (PF4C) tools to demonstrate cost-benefit and link spending to outcomes for costing and scale-up, and build capacity for transparent, accountable budgeting; generate and use data on child marriage to cost and scale GRSP programmes effectively; strengthen government and civil society capacity for participatory, transparent, and accountable budgeting. In shock-affected contexts, use pre-arranged financing (e.g. contingency funds, forecast-based financing, scalable cash); in displacement settings ensure long-term financing for both host and displaced populations, and uphold international commitments to shared responsibility.	Malawi: In 2019, 86.4% of domestic funding for ending child marriage was channeled through education (bursaries, hostels), while the social welfare sector, including the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP), accounted for 8.4% (UNICEF, 2019). A SCTP mid-line evaluation found increased school enrolment and reduced child marriages and early pregnancies (UNICEF, 2024), demonstrating the potential of domestic SP financing to contribute to child marriage prevention. Further evidence is needed to clarify the most effective fiscal approaches to inform future budget priorities and more equitable and sustainable results for children (see also UNICEF, 2020b on UNICEF's PF4C).
Forge accountable partnerships	Drivers of child marriage are multi-sectoral and cannot be addressed by a single ministry or siloed programme.	Coordinate across ministries, civil society, and private sector; support inter-ministerial collaboration; engage youth-/women-led CSOs;	Bihar's Mukhya Mantri Kanya Suraksha Yojana (MKUY) integrates 11 interventions for girls from birth to the age of 21 interventions via inter-ministerial collaboration (Palermo et al., 2025). This collaboration model can show how aligning sectors can address drivers of child marriage.
Institutionalise learning and iteration	Systems improve in real time; learning is converted into insights, raising fidelity and cost-effectiveness at scale.	Pilot, evaluate, and scale programmes; embed feedback loops in pilots; scale cash-plus based on evidence; track outcomes and norm change; facilitate peer learning platforms and regional exchanges.	The Girls Not Brides network facilitates global convenings and online learning sessions for national and state coalitions, strengthening cross-regional relationships and peer-to-peer learning (Girls Not Brides, 2021).



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PART IV

PRACTICAL COMPANION: Tools and templates

➤ Purpose of this section

This section is a hands-on companion for practitioners. It translates the evidence, frameworks, and implementation steps from Parts II and III into practical, ready-to-use tools. Each tool includes: i) Purpose and when to use it; ii) Step-by-step instructions; iii) Templates and checklists; and iv) Expected outputs. Together, these tools support the design, assessment, and adaptation of Gender-Responsive Social Protection (GRSP) interventions that prevent and respond to child marriage.

How to use these tools

This toolkit contains eight tools (five main tools, with three sub-tools integrated within them) to support the design, implementation, and monitoring of gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) interventions to end child marriage. The tools are organised around four areas: Define, Assess, Link, and Monitor. Together they provide an overall framework, but each tool can also stand alone. Each tool includes cross-references to the others so you can move between them as needed.

TOOLS AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **Tool 1. Define | Country Diagnostic Checklist:** Assesses child marriage prevalence, drivers, and the social protection landscape. Start here if you are new to the context or initiating programme design.
- ▶ **Tool 2. Assess | Social Protection Programme Readiness Assessment:** Evaluates whether an existing SP programme is ready to integrate child marriage objectives. Use this when adapting or scaling an existing programme.
 - ▶ **Tool 2.1: Assess | Operational Checklist for Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity:** Integrated sub-tool. Use alongside Tool 2, or independently during design or periodic programme review, to audit gender and age-responsiveness across all programme dimensions.
 - ▶ **Tool 2.2: Assess | Adaptation in Fragile, Conflict, or Climate-Affected Settings** Guides adaptation in fragile or crisis contexts. Use when designing or adjusting programmes in humanitarian, conflict-affected, or climate-vulnerable settings.
- ▶ **Tool 3: Link | Stakeholder Mapping and Service Linkage:** Identifies actors, mandates, and coordination structures. Use early in programme planning or when entering a new context.
 - ▶ **Tool 3.1: Link | Guidance on Linking Transfers to Complementary Services:** Integrated sub-tool. Use alongside Tool 3 to map and formalise education, SRHR, and GBV service linkages, or independently when reviewing cash-plus service integration.
- ▶ **Tool 4: Design | Programme Design Tool:** Structures the programme design logic, theory of change, and monitoring indicators. Use once you have completed Tools 1–3, or to review an existing programme design.
- ▶ **Tool 5: Monitor and Learn | Suggested Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Indicators:** Provides a curated indicator menu with a minimum core set. Use when designing or strengthening your MEL framework.

USING THE TOOLS

- ▶ **Sequential (recommended for new programmes):** Work through the tools in order: define the context using **Tool 1: Country Diagnostic Checklist**; assess programme readiness using **Tool 2: Social Protection Programme Readiness Assessment** and **Tool 2.1: Operational Checklist for Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity**; adapt for context using **Tool 2.2: Adaptation in Crises Contexts**, if relevant; map stakeholders and service linkages using **Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping Template** and **Tool 3.1: Linking Transfers to Complementary Services**; design the programme using **Tool 4: Programme Design Tool**; and set up monitoring and learning using **Tool 5: Suggested Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Indicators**. Each tool builds on the last, and the outputs feed forward.
- ▶ **Plug-and-play (for ongoing programmes):** If you are working with an existing programme, go directly to the tools most relevant to your current need. Use **Tool 2.1: Operational Checklist for Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity** to assess an ongoing programme, **Tool 3.1: Linking Transfers to Complementary Services** to review service linkages, or **Tool 5: Suggested Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Indicators** to strengthen your monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework. The tools are designed to slot into existing workplans without requiring the full sequence.
- ▶ In pieces, with or without a consultant: Teams do not need to complete all tools at once. Prioritise the two or three tools most relevant to the immediate decision. A facilitator or external consultant can lead structured workshops using individual tools, such as a stakeholder mapping session with **Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping Template** or a design workshop using **Tool 4: Programme Design Tool**. Smaller teams can also self-facilitate using the embedded guidance in each tool. There is no wrong starting point.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Start with what you have.** These tools are designed to complement, not replace, existing programme and M&E tools. If you already have a stakeholder map, a programme logframe, or a risk register, use those as inputs rather than starting from scratch. The toolkit adds gender-responsiveness and child marriage lenses to work you may already have done.
- ▶ **Be reflective.** Not every row in every tool will be relevant to every context. Skip rows that genuinely do not apply (marking them N/A with a brief note) and spend your time on the rows that surface the most critical gaps or decisions for your programme.
- ▶ **Work collaboratively.** The tools work best when completed with a diverse team, including programme staff, gender advisers, and community or civil society voices where possible.
- ▶ **Revisit and iterate.** These are not one-off exercises. Ratings and assessments will evolve as programmes mature, evidence accumulates, and contexts shift. Build periodic reviews into the programme cycle, using **Tool 2.1: Operational Checklist for Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity**, **Tool 3.1: Linking Transfers to Complementary Services**, and **Tool 5: Suggested Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Indicators** to track progress and adapt over time.

Tool 1: Define Country Diagnostic Checklist

★ Purpose:

To assess the prevalence, drivers, and context of child marriage; review existing social protection programmes; identify gaps and opportunities; and pinpoint entry points for integrating child marriage objectives into gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) interventions.

Output:

A concise diagnostic snapshot summarising child marriage risk drivers, SP coverage, and integration priorities used to inform design and resource planning for new or adapted programmes.

How to use:

- ▶ Work through each row using available data and programme knowledge.
- ▶ Engage ministries of Social Protection, Gender, Education, and Health during completion.
- ▶ Use findings to inform Tool 2 (Programme Readiness Assessment) and Tool 2.2 (Adaptation in Crises Contexts).
- ▶ Rate each item and add a brief note explaining your rating. Three rating scales are used with the relevant one shown in each row:
 - › **High / Medium / Low: for prevalence, risk, and gap items**
 - › **Yes / Partial / No: for presence/absence items**
 - › **Strong / Partial / Weak: for systems and capacity items**

Where a row offers a bespoke scale (e.g., *Transformative to Neutral for gender integration, or Enabling/Mixed/Constrained for system feasibility*), apply the scale as labelled.

Using N/A:

Only mark N/A where an item genuinely does not apply to the country context. For example, displacement questions in a country with no displaced population. N/A is not appropriate where data is simply unavailable: in those cases, write 'Data not available' in the Notes column and assign a priority based on likely importance. When in doubt, rate rather than mark N/A.

Section	Checklist item	Notes	Rating
Example completed entry: Section = Child marriage prevalence Item = National prevalence (%) 10–14 / 15–17 Notes = DHS 2022: 28% married by 18 — subnational hotspots in northern regions Rating = Medium			
Child marriage prevalence			
	National prevalence (%) 10–14 / 15–17	<i>Use latest DHS/MICS or equivalent. Thresholds: High >30%; Medium 10–30%; Low <10%</i>	High / Med / Low
	Subnational hotspots and high-risk groups	<i>Identify regions or populations with elevated risk</i>	High / Med / Low
Drivers of child marriage			
	Poverty and economic pressure, including care: does financial hardship drive child marriage in this context?	<i>Assess intensity and evidence of impact</i>	High / Med / Low
	Girls' school attendance and dropout: are education costs, access, or safety a barrier?	<i>Identify gaps in affordability and access</i>	High / Med / Low
	Gender norms and social pressure: how strong are norms around early marriage, dowry, or girls' roles?	<i>Assess prevalence of discriminatory expectations</i>	High / Med / Low

Section	Checklist item	Notes	Rating
	Early pregnancy and SRHR gaps: adolescent fertility rate; access to SRHR services	<i>Note service gaps and barriers</i>	High / Med / Low
	Other vulnerabilities: disability, displacement, climate shocks, minority status	<i>Multi-dimensional vulnerability context</i>	High / Med / Low
	Structural drivers: are intergenerational inequalities (e.g. land/inheritance rights, women's labour exclusion, patrilineal structures) documented and reflected in programme design?	<i>Identify structural and root-cause factors</i>	High / Med / Low
Social protection landscape – see also Tool 2 under Core SP design			
	Existing SP programmes: list active cash, cash-plus, or public works programmes	<i>Note coverage and key modalities</i>	High / Med / Low
	Who is reached: are adolescent girls, married girls, adolescent mothers, or displaced girls included?	<i>Identify transfer type and target group</i>	High / Med / Low
	Transfer adequacy: do payments cover education costs (fees, materials, transport)?	<i>Benchmark against actual education costs</i>	High / Med / Low
	Coverage: estimated SP reach for adolescent girls (% of population)	<i>Use administrative data or surveys</i>	High / Med / Low
	Child marriage explicitly addressed: is CM a stated objective or indicator in any programme?	<i>'Yes' if CM is an objective; 'Partial' if addressed indirectly</i>	Yes / Partial / No
	Delivery mechanisms: are payment modalities accessible and safe for women and girls?	<i>Describe mode and accessibility</i>	Yes / Partial / No
Gender-responsiveness			
	Programme assessed against Gender Integration Continuum: do programmes actively address gender inequality or merely accommodate it?	<i>Assess across design, delivery, and M&E</i>	Transformative to Neutral
Participation & accountability			
	Girls and women meaningfully involved in design or monitoring, or tokenistically included?	<i>'Yes' if meaningfully consulted</i>	Yes / Partial / No
	Grievance and feedback mechanisms: can girls safely raise complaints or flag risks?	<i>Assess accessibility and adolescent-friendliness</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak
System feasibility (see also Tool 2)			
	Legal and policy alignment: do SP frameworks align with CM and gender equality laws and strategies?	<i>Consistency with CM and gender policies</i>	Favourable / Mixed / Weak
	Institutional capacity: are registries, MIS, and last-mile delivery systems functional?	<i>Functional systems and trained staff</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak
	Political economy: are there champions? Is there political will and coordination?	<i>Political feasibility of GRSP integration</i>	Enabling / Mixed / Constrained
Shock & fragility context (see also Tool 7)			
	Displaced populations in SP: are refugees or IDPs eligible for or included in SP?		Yes / Partial / No
	Exposure to climate, conflict, or economic shocks: how vulnerable is this context?	<i>Degree of vulnerability to crises</i>	High / Med / Low
	Shock-responsive mechanisms: are scalable triggers, contingency funds, or early-warning systems in place?	<i>Vertical and horizontal scalability</i>	Yes / Partial / No
Financing and fiscal space			
	Budget lines for gender-responsive SP: is funding explicitly earmarked for girls or CM prevention?	<i>'Yes' if explicitly earmarked</i>	Yes / Partial / No
	Financing predictability: is funding reliable across budget cycles, or heavily donor-dependent?	<i>Proportion of domestic vs donor funding</i>	Predictable / Mixed / Volatile
	Fiscal constraints: significant budget pressures or competing priorities?	<i>Degree of budget limitation</i>	High / Med / Low

Section	Checklist item	Notes	Rating
	PF4C and budgeting tools: mechanisms linking child and gender outcomes to budget decisions?		Yes / Partial / No
Safeguarding & do-no-harm			
	GBV risk mitigation protocols: are staff trained and codes of conduct in place?		Yes / Partial / No
	Case management and referral pathways: are girls referred to protection, health, GBV, and SRHR services?	<i>Availability and quality of case management</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak
	Data privacy: are girls' data protected, especially in digital systems?	<i>Data protection and confidentiality</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak
Priority gaps & entry points			
	Top entry points for GRSP integration: where are the most promising opportunities?	<i>Informed by findings above</i>	List 3-5
	Key operational risks: exclusion, misuse, GBV risks		List key risks
Summary recommendations			
	Key gaps: narrative synthesis of findings		Narrative text
	Priority interventions: top actionable priorities		List 3-5

This list is not comprehensive, additional resource: Understanding a country's risk profile: selected tools in United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2019 Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems.

Scoring/Rating key

Rating	Definition
Yes / Strong / High	Fully in place and functional; evidence available.
Partial / Medium	Partially in place or implemented inconsistently; can improve with targeted action.
No / Weak / Low	Absent, minimal, or significant gaps requiring priority attention.

What to do next

- ▶ **Tool 2: Assess** - Use your findings on SP landscape, gender-responsiveness, and institutional capacity to assess programme readiness. The diagnostic snapshot from Tool 1(Country Diagnostic Checklist) feeds directly into the assessment rows in Tool 2.
- ▶ **Tool 2.1: Assess (Gender-responsiveness)** - Run the gender-responsive and age-sensitivity checklist against any existing programmes identified, using the gender integration ratings from Tool 1 as a starting point.
- ▶ **Tool 2.2: Assess (Crises settings)** - If your country context is fragile, conflict-affected, or climate-vulnerable (as flagged in the Shock & Fragility section of Tool 1), proceed to Tool 2.2 to plan the necessary contextual adaptations.

Tool 2: Assess

Social Protection Programme Readiness Assessment

(Companion to Chapters 5 and 6: Design, Deliver and Strengthen Systems)

★ Purpose:

To assess whether a social protection programme – government or donor-led – is prepared to integrate child marriage prevention and response objectives and to deliver gender-responsive and age-sensitive interventions.

Output:

A concise readiness report identifying programme strengths, gaps, and required actions to achieve safe, child marriage integration in GRSP.

How to use:

Begin by completing the programme mapping rows at the top - these are a mapping exercise, not a rated assessment, and will inform all subsequent rows. Then rate each remaining item using available evidence and programme knowledge. Three scales are used:

- ▶ **Yes / Partial / No** — for presence/absence items
- ▶ **Strong / Partial / Weak** — for systems and capacity items
- ▶ **High / Medium / Low** — for severity and gap items

Note to readers: Add a brief note explaining each rating. Use findings to identify priority actions before integration or scale-up.

Domain	Indicator / Question	Evidence / Notes	Score	Recommended Action
Programme mapping (complete before scoring)				
	List existing government-led programmes with adolescent or girl-focused components (e.g. education stipends, adolescent cash transfers)		—	Map scale-up and sustainability potential; identify where CM prevention integration is feasible
	List donor- or partner-led SP or cash-plus initiatives for adolescent girls		—	Assess pathways for institutionalisation within national systems
Government commitment				
	CM prevention integrated into national SP or gender strategies	<i>Reference policy, strategy, or plan</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Strengthen policy coherence and advocacy
	Political and budgetary commitment to adolescent-focused programmes (domestic, not only donor)	<i>National budget line</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Advocate for predictable domestic finance
Core SP design – see also Tool 1 under Social Protection landscape				
	Transfer adequacy: do payment values cover key costs associated with girls' education (fees, materials, safe transport to school)?	<i>Review transfer value against education cost data</i>	High / Med / Low	Adjust transfer values or introduce education-linked top-ups

Domain	Indicator / Question	Evidence / Notes	Score	Recommended Action
	Safe and accessible delivery: are payment modalities accessible to women and girls, including in remote or insecure areas?	<i>Review payment modality and access barriers</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak	Redesign delivery to remove barriers; consider mobile or agent-based payment where safe
	Disaggregated data: does the SP registry or MIS capture gender, age, marital status, and pregnancy or motherhood status?	<i>Review data fields in registry or MIS</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Strengthen data systems to make adolescent girls, including married girls and adolescent mothers, visible
	Conditionality design: does the programme avoid punitive conditions that risk excluding the poorest or most vulnerable girls?	<i>Review compliance requirements and sanctions</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Replace punitive conditions with positive incentives, soft co-responsibilities, or milestone-based approaches
Cash-plus and service integration				
	Operational capacity to add 'plus' components at scale: does supply-side service coverage exist in programme catchment areas?	<i>Existing service coverage</i>	High / Med / Low	Strengthen service linkages before scale-up
	NGO/CSO partnerships for delivery of complementary services	<i>Partnerships with community-based or service providers</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak	Strengthen local delivery partnerships
	Service availability for referrals: adolescent-friendly SRHR, GBV, legal, and child protection services	<i>Service mapping</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Ensure functional referral networks before scale-up
Institutional capacity				
	Staff capacity and technical skills for GRSP and adolescent programming	<i>Assess training, experience, and retention</i>	High / Med / Low	Build capacity through training and mentorship
	Experience implementing cash transfers or cash-plus interventions	<i>Previous programme records or evaluations</i>	High / Med / Low	Document and scale good practices
	M&E systems with gender- and age-disaggregated data and relevant outcomes (schooling, delayed marriage, SRHR)	<i>Data systems and indicators in place</i>	High / Med / Low	Strengthen CM- and gender-sensitive indicators
Coordination				
	Inter-sectoral coordination: social protection, education, child protection, health	<i>Formal coordination structures or MoUs</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak	Activate or formalise coordination platforms
	Humanitarian-development coordination for continuity during shocks	<i>Links between SP and humanitarian cash or social registries</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak	Integrate shock-responsive coordination

Domain	Indicator / Question	Evidence / Notes	Score	Recommended Action
Financing feasibility & sustainability				
	Predictable financing for adolescent components (domestic, medium-term)	<i>Government or pooled fund commitments</i>	High / Med / Low	Strengthen domestic and multi-year financing
	Budget projections for scaling interventions: costed scale-up scenarios	<i>Financing strategy and risk assessment</i>	High / Med / Low	Include in medium- and long-term planning
	Operational cost planning: costing of case management and safeguarding systems	<i>Costed projections</i>	High / Med / Low	Budget for operational scale-up at design stage
Safeguarding and accountability				
	GBV/child protection risk mitigation embedded in operations	<i>SOPs, staff training, referral systems</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Integrate GBV risk protocols and case management
	Accessible, safe, and trusted grievance mechanisms for adolescents: available in multiple formats (SMS, hotline, in-person), linked to GBV referral pathways	<i>Adolescent-friendly feedback channels</i>	Strong / Partial / Weak	Strengthen adolescent-friendly GRM
	Community engagement and participatory monitoring including girls' voices	<i>Mechanisms for regular feedback and community dialogue</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Institutionalise community monitoring
Access and inclusion				
	ID and documentation barriers: do girls require national IDs or phone ownership to access benefits, and are alternative verification mechanisms in place?	<i>Policy review, programme records</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Design inclusion mechanisms or alternative verification
	Adaptive delivery for fragile, climate-affected, or displacement contexts	<i>Flexibility in design or delivery</i>	High / Med / Low	Embed adaptive mechanisms in design from the outset
	Do-no-harm assessment in displacement or conflict settings: review of how households with adolescent girls are reached, communication, and delivery	<i>Contextual analysis</i>	Yes / Partial / No	Adjust design and delivery for safety
Risk and context				
	Legal or policy barriers (e.g. SRHR restrictions) and political economy risks (backlash)	<i>Contextual analysis or stakeholder feedback</i>	High / Med / Low	Mitigate through advocacy and partnerships

Scoring key

Rating	Definition
Yes / Strong / High	Fully in place and functional; evidence available.
Partial / Medium	Partially in place or implemented inconsistently; can improve with targeted action.
No / Weak / Low	Absent, minimal, or significant gaps requiring priority attention.

What to do next

- ▶ **Use Tool 2.1 (Gender and Age Checklist)** immediately after Tool 2 to assess gender and age-responsiveness across all programme dimensions. The readiness aspects identified here, including on core SP design and safeguards, should be brought into Tool 2.1 for the assessment.
- ▶ Then, if your context is fragile, conflict-affected, or climate-vulnerable, continue to **Tool 2.2. (Crises Settings)** to identify the specific adaptations required. If your context is stable, proceed directly to **Tool 3: Align**.

Both sub-tools can also be used independently as a stand-alone periodic review instrument at any point in the programme cycle (quarterly, biannually, or ahead of scale-up) without needing to repeat the full Tool 2 readiness assessment.

Tool 2.1: Assess

Operational Checklist for Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity

This checklist is integrated within the Tool 2 assessment sequence. Use it directly after completing Tool 2 to apply a gender and age-responsiveness lens across all programme dimensions. It can also be used as a stand-alone periodic review tool at any point in the programme cycle (e.g., quarterly, biannually, or ahead of scale-up) without needing to repeat the full Tool 2 readiness assessment.

★ Purpose:

To ensure that social protection interventions systematically address gendered and age-specific barriers that influence child marriage risks, agency, and access to services.

Output:

A clear summary of programme readiness on gender- responsiveness and age-sensitivity, identifying gaps, risks, and immediate action points for course correction and scale-up.

- Important: Each checklist item is discrete and rated separately with its own Yes / Partial / No. Do not give a single rating to an entire dimension — work through each row individually.
- Adolescent mothers and married girls appear early in this checklist because they are frequently overlooked in SP design. These groups should never be treated as edge cases.

How to use

When	How	Purpose	Linked tools
During programme design	Apply checklist to planned or ongoing interventions. Identify 'Partial/No' items for improvement.	Ensures design meets gender- and age-responsive standards from the outset.	Tool 1, Tool 2, Tool 4
During implementation	Use for periodic review (quarterly or biannual) to ensure delivery remains gender- and age-responsive.	Enables course correction before problems escalate.	Tool 3, Tool 5
During evaluation or scale-up	Incorporate as part of M&E and programme audit processes.	Provides systematic audit trail for gender-responsiveness.	Tool 5

Scoring

- ▶ Yes / High readiness: Fully meets gender and age-responsive standards
- ▶ Partial: Meets some elements but requires adjustment or additional support.
- ▶ No / Low readiness: Significant gaps requiring priority action.

Dimension	Checklist item (each item rated separately)	Yes / Partial / No	Notes / Action required
	Ensuring scaled SP systems reach households with adolescent girls - Specify how criteria for ensuring households with adolescent girls are included and social registries capture adolescent-specific variables; consider intersectional vulnerabilities. (see Tool 1: Country Diagnostic Checklist).		
	Does the programme ensure coverage reaches households with adolescent girls?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are vulnerable sub-groups explicitly identified - displaced, minority, out-of-school girls, married adolescents, girls with disabilities?	Yes / Partial / No	

Dimension	Checklist item (each item rated separately)	Yes / Partial / No	Notes / Action required
	Are access barriers addressed - IDs, phone ownership, disability inclusion, transport costs, language barriers?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are intersectional factors (ethnicity, religion, caste) considered in criteria for how households with adolescent girls are reached?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Does the social registry capture adolescent-specific variables, including marital status and motherhood status?	Yes / Partial / No	
Adolescent mothers (assess early: do not skip) - Integrate childcare solutions, flexible scheduling, or conditionality waivers where relevant.			
	Can adolescent mothers register as individual transfer recipients rather than through a household head?	Yes / Partial / No	
	If there are conditions, are conditions flexible to account for caregiving responsibilities (e.g. waivers or alternative compliance pathways)?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are childcare or crèche options, flexible scheduling, or mobility support integrated?	Yes / Partial / No	
Married girls (assess early: do not skip) - Avoid assumptions of household support. Ensure privacy and tailored case management.			
	Are the specific needs and risks of married girls explicitly addressed in programme design?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are referral pathways discreet and safe, avoiding assumptions about household support?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are SRHR access and GBV risks for married girls included in case management protocols?	Yes / Partial / No	
Age-sensitivity - Tailor interventions by age cohort; younger adolescents may need stronger protection and caregiver engagement.			
	Are age-specific risks differentiated between younger (10–14) and older (15–19) adolescents?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are programme objectives, messaging, and conditions appropriate and tailored to each age cohort?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Do younger adolescents (10–14) receive stronger protection safeguards and caregiver engagement?	Yes / Partial / No	
Transfer design - Map barriers to safe access for adolescents (e.g., mobility, social norms). Adjust delivery modality or recipient as needed.			
	Is the transfer size meaningful and predictable enough for household planning?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are transfers directed to women/girls to enhance agency and decision-making?	Yes / No	
	Where transfers are directed to girls directly, are appropriate safeguards in place?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are intra-household dynamics considered, including risk of backlash or loss of control over transfer use?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are delivery mechanisms safe, accessible, and adapted for adolescents?	Yes / Partial / No	
Conditionality - Cross-reference with school attendance systems or SRHR access data. Ensure conditions don't penalise the most vulnerable; include alternative pathways for those unable to meet conditions.			
	Are cash transfers or conditional?	Yes / No	If No, state if unconditional
	If yes, are conditions realistic, equitable, and non-punitive?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Do conditions reinforce girls' education, health, SRHR, or well-being without penalising the most vulnerable?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are alternative compliance pathways available for girls unable to meet conditions due to structural barriers?	Yes / Partial / No	

Dimension	Checklist item (each item rated separately)	Yes / Partial / No	Notes / Action required
Safeguards - Apply do-no-harm principles (see Chapter 6.5). Conduct regular risk assessments; ensure clear referral protocols and staff training.			
	Are GBV and child protection risks assessed and mitigated at design stage?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are frontline workers trained in safe disclosure, GBV risk mitigation, and referral procedures?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are referral pathways to protection, psychosocial, and health services functional?	Yes / Partial / No	
Accountability and feedback - Use multiple channels (SMS, hotline, in-person). Proactively inform girls of their rights and options.			
	Are grievance redress mechanisms accessible, confidential, and adolescent-friendly?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are multiple channels available - SMS, hotline, in-person?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are girls proactively informed of their rights and how to report concerns?	Yes / Partial / No	
Disability inclusion - Partner with disability organisations to assess and address accessibility gaps.			
	Are payment points, registration processes, and service locations physically accessible?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are communication materials adapted - sign language, braille, easy-read, local languages?	Yes / Partial / No	
Community engagement - Reference Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping. Ensure continuous engagement and participatory co-design mechanisms for girls.			
	Are parents, caregivers, community leaders, and men and boys engaged in norm-change activities?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are adolescent girls meaningfully involved in programme feedback or co-design?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are social and behaviour change (SBC) strategies integrated to shift gender norms?	Yes / Partial / No	
Service linkages - Coordinate across sectors. Include shock-responsive measures for girls in humanitarian settings.			
	Are complementary services (education, SRHR, GBV response, livelihoods) accessible to adolescent girls?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are referral pathways operational, safe, and inclusive?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are shock-responsive measures in place for girls in humanitarian settings?	Yes / Partial / No	
Monitoring and learning - Ensure participatory monitoring and social accountability mechanisms. Feed learning into adaptive management cycles (see Tool 8: M&E). Include rapid feedback loops for crisis contexts.			
	Are indicators disaggregated by sex, age, marital status, and disability?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are adolescent recipients meaningfully consulted across the programme cycle for feedback?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Is learning systematically incorporated to adapt programme design and delivery?	Yes / Partial / No	
Sustainability & scale-up - Reference Chapter 7. Link with government, civil society, and humanitarian mechanisms. Document lessons learned and best practices.			
	Are interventions aligned with national SP systems and long-term financing?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Are multi-sectoral partnerships established for sustained impact?	Yes / Partial / No	
	Is programme design scalable and resilient to shocks or crises?	Yes / Partial / No	

Additional resources:

Perezniето, P., Holmes, R. (2023) ' Gender-transformative social protection in crisis contexts: guidance note', Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resource Facility (STAAR), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Gender-transformative-SP-guidance-note_03.10.23.pdf

STAAR. (2025). Gender Responsive Social Protection (GSP) Life Course Diagram. <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/gender-responsive-social-protection-gsp-life-course-diagram>

STAAR. (2024). Gender-responsive social protection: cheat sheet. <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/gender-responsive-social-protection-cheat-sheet>

These resources are also useful for Tool 7:

STAAR. (2024). Gender-responsive social protection and crisis: Thematic brief. <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/gender-responsive-social-protection-and-crisis-thematic-brief>

STAAR. (2024). Gender-responsive social protection and climate resilience: Thematic brief. <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/gender-responsive-social-protection-and-climate-resilience-thematic-brief>

What to do next

- ▶ If your programme operates in or plans for a fragile, conflict-affected, or climate-vulnerable context, complete **Tool 2.2: Assess (Crises Settings)** next to identify adaptation priorities. Bring the 'Partial' and 'No' ratings from this checklist (particularly on safeguards and service linkages) into Tool 2.2.
- ▶ If your context is stable, proceed directly to stakeholder mapping, **Tool 3: Link**. Use the gaps on community engagement, service linkages, and inter-sectoral coordination identified here to prioritise which actors to engage first.

Tool 2.2: Assess Adaptation in Crises Contexts

(Companion to Chapter 7: Scale-Up and Sustainability)

This tool is integrated within the Tool 2 assessment sequence. Use it after completing Tools 2 and 2.1 when operating in or planning for fragile, conflict-affected, or climate-vulnerable contexts. It can also be used independently at any point as a standalone adaptation review, without needing to repeat the full readiness assessment.

★ Purpose:

To guide programme teams in adapting gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) interventions in fragile, conflict, and climate-affected contexts, ensuring continuity, inclusion, and effectiveness during shocks or displacement. The tool assesses whether delivery systems and service linkages remain operational and inclusive under crisis conditions.

Output:

An Adaptation Action Plan identifying operational adjustments, partnerships, and monitoring arrangements in fragile, conflict, or climate-affected contexts.

Before completing this tool: identify the most likely shock type for your context (climate event, conflict, economic crisis, displacement) and note it here: _____

This will help you prioritise which rows are most immediately relevant.

Adaptation area	Key actions / Questions	Status (Yes/Partial/No)	Notes	Cross-references
Delivery mechanisms	Can payments reach recipients safely? Are alternative channels (mobile, digital) available? Are contingency payment plans pre-approved?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Note backup payment systems, agent networks, or partnerships with humanitarian cash actors.</i>	Ch. 5 - Payment & Delivery Tool 3.1 - Service Linkages
Anticipatory action and early warning	Are anticipatory cash or forecast-based triggers defined? Can the programme support vertical (top-ups to existing recipients) or horizontal (temporary new beneficiaries) expansion? Are trigger thresholds and early-warning system links established?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Define thresholds and protocols in advance. Link to contingency financing and crisis SOPs.</i>	Ch. 6 - Sustainability
Reaching households with adolescent girls in crisis	Are displaced, migrant, or crisis-affected adolescents identified and included? Are social registries updated to reflect new vulnerabilities? Are marginalised groups (disabled, minority, girls without documentation) reached?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Integrate displacement, gender, and equity data. Rapid re-registration protocols needed for informal settlements or camps.</i>	Tool 1 – Country Diagnostic Checklist Tool 2 - Readiness Assessment

Adaptation area	Key actions / Questions	Status (Yes/Partial/No)	Notes	Cross-references
Documentation and ID barriers	Is simplified enrolment available for refugees and IDPs without formal IDs or proof of residence?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Use alternative verification — community validation or humanitarian registries. Avoid documentation as a barrier to access.</i>	Tool 2 - Readiness Assessment
Conditionality flexibility	Are conditionalities realistic during crises (school closures, caregiver responsibilities)? Are temporary suspensions or flexible compliance mechanisms established?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Ensure conditions do not penalise families for circumstances beyond their control during emergencies.</i>	Ch. 4 - Design
Transfer value adequacy	Is the value adjusted for shocks, inflation, or seasonal needs? Are top-ups triggered by early warning data?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Review cost-of-living quarterly. Build scalable triggers for rapid adjustment.</i>	Ch. 6 - Sustainability
Climate-specific adaptations	Are index-based insurance or climate triggers integrated? Are cyclone, flood, or drought early-warning systems used? Are partnerships in place with meteorological agencies?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Align SP scale-up with climate forecasts and disaster risk management systems.</i>	Ch. 6 - Sustainability
Complementary services during disruption	Are education, SRHR, and GBV services accessible during disruptions? Are mobile or digital alternatives available?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Map service availability via humanitarian clusters. Deploy mobile outreach or integrated service hubs.</i>	Tool 3.1 - Service Linkages
Protection risks during crises	Are heightened risks of GBV, exploitation, trafficking, or child marriage identified? Are safe referral pathways maintained?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Crises increase risks for girls. Ensure survivor-centred referrals and trained frontline staff.</i>	Ch. 5 - Safeguarding Tool 2.2
Monitoring and accountability in crisis	Are safe feedback channels, complaint systems, and real-time monitoring in place? Do grievance mechanisms function when mobility or telecommunications are disrupted? Are offline or community-based options available?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Use SMS, WhatsApp, helpdesks; PSEA protocols; in-person GRMs via trusted intermediaries during outages.</i>	Ch. 5 - Accountability
Community engagement	Are families, local leaders, youth, and women's groups consulted? Are feedback mechanisms inclusive of marginalised voices?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Conduct dialogues with community networks and adolescent groups including girls with disabilities and displaced girls.</i>	Tool 3 - Stakeholder Mapping

In using this tool, some key considerations:

- ▶ **Identify potential risks:** Conduct scenario mapping for climate, conflict, and displacement risk
- ▶ **Establish contingency protocols:** Define triggers for transfer scale-up, delivery changes, or emergency top-ups
- ▶ **Coordinate with humanitarian partners:** Harmonise criteria for reaching households with adolescent girls, delivery, and transfer values with humanitarian assistance
- ▶ **Adjust delivery systems:** Integrate digital or decentralized systems (mobile payments, local vendors)
- ▶ **Maintain protection linkages:** Keep SRHR, GBV, and education referrals functional; ensure adolescent-safe channels
- ▶ **Monitor and learn:** Use real-time data to assess access, inclusion, and satisfaction. Update systems accordingly.

Additional resources:

Hagen-Zanker, J., Lowe, C. and Holmes, R. (2022) Linking social protection and humanitarian assistance: a toolkit to support basic needs. London: ODI. (www.odi.org/en/publications/linking-socialprotection-and-humanitarian-assistance-a-toolkit-to-support-basic-needs/).

Smith, G., (2025) 'Maintaining and strengthening social assistance systems in conflict settings: Synthesis note', Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice, and Resources Facility (STAAR), DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom. <https://socialprotection.org/discover/publications/executive-summary-maintaining-and-strengthening-social-assistance-conflict>

UNICEF (2019) Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems. See: Annex 2: Options for expanding coverage, financial protection and range of services, Annex 3: Assessing the appropriateness of potential response options against the outcome criteria and considerations to mitigate negative impacts (with example) and Annex 7 Minimum Preparedness Standard 5 for Humanitarian Cash Transfers in <https://www.unicef.org/media/68201/file/Practical-Guidance-to-Support-Work-on-Shock-Responsive-Social-Protection.pdf>

What to do next

- ▶ **Tool 3: Align** — Feed the adaptation priorities and operational gaps identified here, especially on delivery mechanisms, documentation barriers, and coordination, into the stakeholder mapping in **Tool 3**. to identify which actors are needed to make those adaptations work in practice.
- ▶ Where service disruption is a risk (as flagged in this tool), use **Tool 3.1** to build contingency service linkage arrangements and ensure referral pathways remain functional during shocks.

Tool 3: Link

Stakeholder Mapping Template

(Companion to Chapter 5 – Design Programmes that Work and Chapter 6 – Deliver and Strengthen Systems.)

★ Purpose:

To identify and analyse key actors, their mandates, and capacities for effective GRSP coordination addressing child marriage.

Output:

A stakeholder map identifying core actors, gaps, and partnership opportunities for integrating child marriage objectives within GRSP programmes.

How to Use This Tool:

- ▶ Map stakeholders across government, civil society, private sector, and community levels.
- ▶ Assess mandate, capacity, influence, and engagement potential to identify strategic partnerships.
- ▶ Ensure adolescent girl representatives are included — and that engagement is meaningful, not tokenistic.
- ▶ Highlight risks or overlaps that may hinder coordination.
- ▶ Adapt for subnational analysis, humanitarian settings, or specific vulnerable populations.

Relationship status key: Existing partner = active working relationship; To be engaged = identified but not yet approached; Requires brokering = relationship needs facilitation or third-party introduction.

Complete this tool collaboratively - not by a single team member. Update periodically to reflect changing actors, funding flows, or operating contexts.

Actor / Organisation	Type	Mandate and planned engagement	Relationship status	Resources / Capacity	Influence / Commitment	Notes / Risks
Ministry of Social Protection	Government	Policy, funding, and programme oversight. Lead or co-lead coordination.	Existing partner	Staff, budget, MIS	High / Med / Low	Risk of bureaucratic delays
Ministry of Education	Government	School-based interventions, conditionality management, data sharing; link to CCT.	Existing partner	Staff, school networks	High / Med / Low	Overlapping mandates
Women's rights NGO / CSO	NGO/CSO	Community mobilisation, mentorship, social accountability. Implement 'plus' components and advocacy.	To be engaged	Staff, community networks	High / Med / Low	Funding sustainability
Adolescent girl representatives or youth advisory group	Community	Feedback, co-design, advocacy, participatory monitoring. Note: engagement must be meaningful, not tokenistic.	Requires brokering	Networks via schools/ NGOs	High / Med / Low	Risk of tokenistic inclusion

Actor / Organisation	Type	Mandate and planned engagement	Relationship status	Resources / Capacity	Influence / Commitment	Notes / Risks
Youth / adolescent group (boys and young men)	Community	Peer outreach, participatory monitoring, norm-change activities.	Requires brokering	Volunteers, youth networks	High / Med / Low	Limited resources
GBV and SRHR service providers	NGO/CSO/Govt	Case management, referrals, counselling; referral pathway integration.	Existing partner	Trained staff, facilities	High / Med / Low	Capacity constraints
Humanitarian agency	INGO/NGO	Emergency cash assistance and protection; coordination in crises; system alignment.	Existing partner	Funding, field teams	High / Med / Low	Coordination challenges
Social service workforce	Govt / NGO	Frontline delivery of case management, referrals, and community-based support. Training and supervision of community workers on CM prevention, GBV risk, and safe disclosure.	To be engaged	Trained staff, supervision systems, community networks	High / Med / Low	Assess workforce density against catchment areas; risk of staff turnover and capacity gaps
[Add: faith/traditional leaders]	Community	Norm change, community mobilisation, marriage registration.	—	Community networks	—	Potential resistance; requires careful engagement
[Add: Ministry of Finance]	Government	Domestic financing, PF4C, budget integration.	—	Budget authority	—	Often hard to engage without cost-benefit evidence
[Add: disability organisations]	NGO/CSO	Accessibility, inclusion of girls with disabilities.	—	Specialist expertise	—	Often excluded from SP design

Add rows for context-specific actors. Suggested additions include: faith and traditional leaders; men and boys' groups; Ministry of Finance; donors; mobile network operators; disability organisations; legal aid providers; women's savings/self-help groups.

Scoring criteria for influence and commitment

Score	Influence	Commitment
High	Strong decision-making power or authority over key policies, funding, or SP/related sector implementation. Support or opposition can significantly affect success.	Demonstrated alignment with GRSP and CM prevention goals; actively participates, allocates resources, and advocates for integration.
Medium	Moderate influence — can affect implementation within their sphere (regional, sectoral, or community level) but lacks direct authority over major decisions.	Some interest or engagement but not yet fully committed; may require capacity-building, advocacy, or incentives.
Low	Limited or indirect influence — may affect outcomes through advocacy or local mobilisation but does not shape policy or major resource flows.	Limited engagement or alignment; low awareness or competing priorities. Potential to build commitment through evidence-sharing.

What to do next

- ▶ Use **Tool 3.1** to translate the partnerships identified and coordination structures here into service linkages for relevant sectors in your context. Tool 3.1 can also be used independently to review or strengthen existing service integration at any implementation stage.
- ▶ Use the completed stakeholder map as input for the Complementary Interventions and Delivery System Readiness rows in the **Tool 4** (Programme Design Tool). The actors mapped here become part of the delivery partners and referral networks.

Tool 3.1: Link

Linking Transfers to Complementary Services

(Companion to Chapters 5, 6, and 7)

This guidance is integrated within the Tool 3 stakeholder mapping sequence. Use it directly after Tool 3 to formalise service linkages across relevant sectors in your context, drawing on the partner relationships and coordination structures identified in the stakeholder map. It can also be used independently as a service integration review tool at any implementation stage, without completing the full Tool 3 mapping exercise.

★ Purpose:

To provide practical, step-by-step guidance for integrating social protection transfers with services, such as education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence, helping to reduce the risk factors and vulnerabilities that drive child marriage.

Output

A clear action plan detailing service linkages for education, SRHR, and GBV within GRSP programmes, with assigned roles, timelines, and indicators.

How to use this tool to identify existing linkages, gaps, and opportunities for multi-sectoral integration.

- ▶ **Define objectives:** specify how each service linkage supports child marriage prevention outcomes.
- ▶ **Map partners and establish agreements:** identify who delivers what and formalise coordination.
- ▶ **Build staff capacity:** train social workers and case managers on adolescent engagement, PSEA, and safeguarding.
- ▶ **Assess supply-side availability before committing to referral pathways:** a referral system without functioning services causes harm.
- ▶ **Monitor linkages:** track referral uptake, service quality, and adolescent satisfaction.

This tool has three parts: (A) a service linkage status assessment to complete for your programme; (B) a case management flow check; and (C) a cross-sector coordination sub-table. Complete all three.

Service type	Integration area / Key questions	Status (Yes/Partial/No)	Notes	Linked chapters / tools
Part A: Service linkage status assessment				
Education	School enrolment, attendance, and retention supported. Stipends, tuition support, or school meals in place. Re-entry policies for married or pregnant adolescents exist. Coordination with Ministry of Education established.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Specify conditionality or incentive mechanisms (e.g. attendance-based transfers). Include referral protocols for re-enrolment of married or pregnant adolescents.</i>	Chapter 5 (Design Programmes that Work); Tool 4: Programme Design Tool

Service type	Integration area / Key questions	Status (Yes/Partial/No)	Notes	Linked chapters / tools
SRHR	Access to adolescent-friendly SRHR services. SRH education and menstrual hygiene management integrated. Peer mentorship or life skills components in place. Outreach reaches married and hard-to-reach adolescents.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Identify health facilities or NGOs offering adolescent SRHR services. Establish referral mechanisms and ensure confidentiality safeguards. Note: social insurance schemes (e.g. health or maternity insurance) can also enhance SRHR access.</i>	Chapter 6.3 (Linking Social Protection to Services); Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping; Tool 3.1: Service Linkages
GBV prevention and response	GBV case management and referral pathways in place. Safe spaces and community-based protection networks operational. Disability-accessible GBV services available. Staff trained on GBV risk mitigation and response.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Ensure survivor-centred protocols and accessible grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs). Coordinate with case management systems.</i>	Chapter 6.5 (Safeguarding, Accountability and Do No Harm); Tool 2.1: Gender-Responsiveness and Age-Sensitivity Checklist
Care and support for adolescent mothers	Access to childcare and early childhood development (ECD) services available for adolescent mothers. Flexible scheduling and conditionality waivers in place to account for caregiving responsibilities. Psychosocial support and parenting programmes accessible. Time burden and mobility constraints of adolescent mothers explicitly addressed in delivery design.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Childcare and ECD access is a critical enabler for adolescent mothers in school or work. Link transfer recipients to ECD services where available, and do not assume family support — many adolescent mothers are isolated or in conflict-affected settings.</i>	Chapter 5 (Design); Chapter 6.3 (Service Linkages); Tool 3.1: Service Linkages
Adolescent girls as agents	Adolescent girls are meaningfully involved in designing and giving feedback on service referral pathways — not only as recipients.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Assess whether girls are consulted in service quality reviews. Avoid token participation.</i>	Chapter 6.6 (Participation, Transparency, and Continuous Learning); Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping
Adolescent mothers and married girls	Referral pathways explicitly include married girls and adolescent mothers. SRHR and family-planning services accessible. GBV prevention and response available. Parenting, childcare, and psychosocial support in place.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Ensure confidentiality and tailored support. Referral pathways must not assume household support.</i>	Chapter 5 (Targeting and Design); Chapter 6.3 (Service Linkages)
Social service workforce	Social workers, case managers, and community-based workforce trained on adolescent-responsive and gender-sensitive practice. Pre-service and in-service training curricula include child marriage prevention, GBV risk mitigation, and referral protocols. Sufficient workforce density in catchment areas. Staff retention and supervision systems in place.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Map workforce against programme areas; identify training gaps. Ensure PSEA and safe disclosure protocols are in place. Coordinate with Ministry of Social Welfare on workforce development.</i>	Chapter 6.2 (Coordination Across Systems and Actors); Tool 2: Readiness Assessment

Service type	Integration area / Key questions	Status (Yes/Partial/No)	Notes	Linked chapters / tools
Adolescent-friendly service standards	Services are confidential and non-judgmental. Staff are trained in adolescent-competent practice. Safe disclosure and referral procedures in place.	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Ensure all referral partners meet minimum adolescent-friendly service standards, particularly for SRHR and GBV.</i>	Chapter 6.5 (Safeguarding, Accountability and Do No Harm); Tool 2.1

Part B: Case management and referral pathway (apply a simple flow)

Case management flow	SP registration ▶ case assessment ▶ referral to services ▶ service uptake ▶ follow-up ▶ case closure. Is this flow operational and tracked through MIS or case management systems?	Yes / Partial / No	<i>Track cases through MIS or case management systems. Ensure warm referrals (not just information-giving).</i>	Chapter 6.3 (Service Linkages); Chapter 6.2 (Coordination); Tool 2: Readiness Assessment
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Part C: Cross-sector coordination

Complete the coordination sub-table below for each relevant sector:

Sector / Partner	Coordination mechanism in place?	Lead agency	Frequency of meetings	Data-sharing agreement?	Budget allocation
Education	Yes / Partial / No			Yes / No	
Health / SRHR	Yes / Partial / No			Yes / No	
Child protection / GBV	Yes / Partial / No			Yes / No	
Livelihoods / economic empowerment	Yes / Partial / No			Yes / No	
Humanitarian cash actors	Yes / Partial / No			Yes / No	

What to do next

- ▶ **Tool 4: Design** — Bring the service linkage action plan from this tool, including assigned roles, into the Complementary Interventions and Case Management rows of **Tool 4** (Programme Design).
- ▶ Use the service linkage status ratings from Part A of this tool to inform selection of relevant indicators in **Tool 5 (Monitor)**, particularly for SRHR access, GBV referral uptake, and education retention.

Tool 4: Design

Programme Design Tool - Linking GRSP Interventions with Child Marriage Outcomes

(Companion to Chapter 5: Design Programmes that Work)

★ Purpose:

To ensure programme design explicitly considers how gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) interventions reduce and respond to child marriage, identifies assumptions and risks, and plans complementary “plus” components for stronger and more sustainable outcomes.

Output:

A comprehensive design summary linking social protection measures to specific child marriage outcomes, with explicit assumptions, risks, and monitoring indicators.

How to use this tool

Step	Activity	Purpose	Linked component
1. Conceptualisation	Use during initial programme design workshops or when adapting existing SP programmes.	Establishes design logic and child marriage integration.	Chapter 4: Pathways and Framework
2. Diagnostic review	Cross-check with data from Tool 1 (Country Diagnostic Checklist).	Grounds design in evidence and context.	Chapter 3: What Works (Evidence and Insights)
3. Readiness check	Verify institutional and coordination capacity using Tool 2.	Identifies gaps before committing to design.	Chapter 6.1–6.2: Delivery Systems and Coordination
4. Stakeholder planning	Identify delivery partners and service providers with Tool 3.	Builds partnership strategy.	Chapter 6.3: Linking Social Protection to Services
5. M&E integration	Feed outputs into M&E system design using Tool 5.	Ensures measurement is built in from the start.	Chapter 6.6: Participation, Transparency, and Continuous Learning; Chapter 7: Scale and Sustainability

Design element	Guiding questions	Example response	Guidance / Key tips
Target population	Who are the recipients? (Age, gender, vulnerability criteria) What intersectional vulnerabilities exist (poverty, disability, displacement, minority status, child-headed households)? Any specific geographic or community traits?	<i>Girls aged 10–17 in low-income, rural households; out-of-school adolescents; displaced girls</i>	Identify overlapping vulnerabilities. Use Tool 1: Country Diagnostic Checklist for criteria for ensuring scaled SP systems reach households with adolescent girls and social registry design.
Intended outcomes	What child marriage outcomes are targeted: primary or secondary? What social or behavioural changes are expected at individual, household or community level?	<i>Primary: delayed age at marriage, increased school retention. Secondary: reduced early pregnancy, improved decision-making autonomy.</i>	Link outcomes to Chapter 4 Pathways and Framework .
Theory of change	What is the causal logic? What intermediate steps or behaviour changes lead from the intervention to child marriage outcomes?	<i>Cash improves economic security ► reduces pressure to marry ► girls stay in school ► marriage delayed.</i>	Use the frameworks in Chapter 4 . Validate through participatory workshops.

Design element	Guiding questions	Example response	Guidance / Key tips
Key assumptions	What must hold true for the theory of change to work? What external conditions are required?	<i>Key assumptions: families value girls' education; schools are safe and accessible; transfer is adequate; community norms do not actively undermine the programme.</i>	Make assumptions explicit and test them through formative research and community consultation.
Intervention type	Which GRSP instruments are planned: cash, social insurance, care intervention? Conditional or unconditional? What 'plus' components are added?	<i>Unconditional cash transfer + life skills + SRHR education sessions</i>	Use evidence from Chapter 3 (What Works: Evidence and Lessons) on cash-plus vs. cash alone. Document transfer amount, frequency, delivery, and who controls resources.
Transfer adequacy and predictability	Is the benefit size adequate to cover education-related costs at secondary level: fees, uniforms, materials, transport? Are transfers predictable and paid on time?	<i>Transfer covers fees, uniforms, transport; quarterly payments delivered on schedule.</i>	Benchmark against actual education costs. Use evidence from Chapter 3 (What Works: Evidence and Lessons) as Inadequate or irregular transfers significantly weaken child marriage outcomes.
Delivery modality	What payment modality is most appropriate: mobile money, in-person cash, bank transfer, hybrid? How do gendered access, safety, and confidentiality affect the choice?	<i>Mobile money for caregivers; in-person cash for adolescents without phones.</i>	Assess phone ownership, mobility restrictions, literacy, safety risks, and confidentiality for girls. See Chapter 6 (Deliver and Strengthen Systems),
Risks, mitigation, and safeguards	What unintended effects may occur? What gender- and age-specific risks exist (backlash, intra-household tension, exclusion of the poorest)? How will these be mitigated? Are safeguards and GBV protocols in place? Are transfers made directly to girls? If yes, what safeguards are in place? If no, what assurances and monitoring ensure that girls benefit from the transfer?	<i>Risk: intra-household tension over transfer control. Mitigation: community sensitisation, monitoring of transfer use, case worker follow-up.</i>	Integrate GBV safeguards (see Chapter 6.5 on Safeguarding, Accountability and Do No Harm. Indirect transfers to benefit girls should be monitored to ensure they reach the intended recipient) and real-time risk monitoring. Include referral mechanisms from the outset.
Case management	Is case management included as a core component? How are individual risks identified and followed up? Are referral pathways to protection, GBV, health, and livelihood services functional?	<i>Case workers screen for GBV risk, school dropout, household tension; warm referrals to protection and SRHR services.</i>	Case management strengthens protection, referral uptake, and safe cash use. Budget and staff accordingly. See Chapter 6.3 on Service Linkages.
Complementary interventions	When should SP link to education, health, nutrition, GBV, child protection, or livelihoods? Which services enhance impact? What partnerships are needed?	<i>Education: safe transport, mentorship. Health: SRHR services. Protection: GBV case management. Economic: savings groups, financial literacy.</i>	Use Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping to identify partners. Assess supply-side service availability before committing to linkages.
Delivery system readiness	Are ID, payment, MIS, and grievance systems available and inclusive? Are there documentation barriers for girls or displaced populations? Are adolescent-friendly communication channels in place?	<i>National ID not universal ▶ use humanitarian registry; SMS-based grievance channel for adolescents.</i>	Reference Chapter 5 (Design Programmes that Work). See also Tool 2: Readiness Assessment .
Cost and institutions	What are recurrent costs? What is the financing source and time span? Which institutions own or oppose this? Is there a mandate or reform window?	<i>GRSP sub-line in MoF budget + 3-year donor top-up + climate window for seasonal top-ups. Education and SP co-mandate; faith actors supportive; finance ministry neutral.</i>	Reference Chapter 7 on financing. Refer to stakeholder map from Tool 3 .

Design element	Guiding questions	Example response	Guidance / Key tips
Monitoring indicators	How will progress be measured? What intermediate and final indicators? What data sources? Are indicators sex- and age-disaggregated?	<i>Intermediate: school attendance, household income, girls' agency index. Final: mean age at marriage, early pregnancy rate, education completion rates.</i>	Ensure indicators are disaggregated. Align with Tool 5: M&E Indicators .
Adaptation considerations	How might fragility, climate, or conflict affect design? What adjustments ensure accessibility and safety across contexts?	<i>Fragile: mobile money + flexible conditions. Climate-affected: seasonal top-ups, savings groups. Remote: community-based delivery + radio information.</i>	Embed shock-responsive design features. Use Tool 2.2: Crisis Adaptation and see Chapter 6.4: Crisis Contexts .
Sustainability	What is the pathway from pilot to system? What is the institutional home at the end of the donor cycle? What milestones mark the transition to government ownership?	<i>Pilot in 2 districts (Year 1–2) ▶ integrate into national social registry (Year 2) ▶ Ministry of Social Welfare coordination (Year 3) ▶ domestic budget line secured (Year 4).</i>	Choose an institutionalisation pathway: embed / align / parallel-then-merge. Plan for contingency financing to prevent coverage gaps during handover. Plan institutionalisation. See Chapter 7: Scale and Sustain Impact .

What to do next

- ▶ **Tool 5: Monitor** — Feed the monitoring indicators identified in the Programme Design Tool directly into Tool 5 to build out your full MEL framework. The intermediate and final indicators in your theory of change should map to the outcome and impact indicator levels in Tool 5.
- ▶ **Tool 2: Assess / Tool 2.1** — If this is a design review of an existing programme rather than a new design, loop back to Tool 2 and Tool 2.1 to update your readiness and gender-responsiveness ratings in light of any design changes made here.

Tool 5: Monitor and learn

Suggested Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Indicators

★ Purpose:

To guide UNICEF Country Offices and partners in building a robust, gender-responsive, age-sensitive, and shock-responsive MEL frameworks from the programme design stage that track how GRSP interventions contribute to:

- ▶ preventing and responding to child marriage,
- ▶ strengthening adolescent agency and decision-making,
- ▶ shifting social and gender norms among girls, boys, caregivers, and communities, and
- ▶ sustaining impact over time, including in crisis contexts.

This tool should be opened alongside Tool 4 during design. The indicators selected here shape your theory of change, define what data you need to collect at baseline, and determine what learning questions the programme will answer. Used throughout the programme cycle, it tracks how GRSP interventions contribute to preventing and responding to child marriage and sustaining impact over time.

Output:

A gender-responsive and age-sensitive indicator set for monitoring how GRSP interventions contribute to reducing child marriage, improving adolescent well-being, and promoting gender equality.

This tool aligns with the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (Global Programme) indicators (UNFPA and UNICEF, 2025). It aims to strengthen measurement of norm change, agency, and long-term outcomes in the context of social protection programmes. Indicators cover outputs, outcomes, and impact, and integrate global programme standards, inclusion of boys/men, community engagement, and systemic change. Indicators marked ★ **Priority core** are recommended for all programmes regardless of scale or context. Examples drawn from Ghana's Adolescent Girls Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion Programme (LEPIP) results framework are noted where relevant as practical examples of how these indicators are applied in a West African cash-plus context.

Note on data source types: Indicators labelled 'Administrative' can typically be drawn from SP registries, MIS, or administrative records. 'Primary data' indicators require dedicated data collection (surveys, FGDs, participatory methods). 'Administrative / Survey' requires triangulation. Knowing this in advance significantly affects feasibility planning for smaller programmes.

Good practice for collecting and using disaggregated data

- ▶ Integrate age- and sex-specific fields directly into MIS, social registries, and case management systems.
- ▶ Use age categories (10–14, 15–19) consistently; avoid broad “youth” categories.
- ▶ Triangulate administrative data with qualitative tools (FGDs, participatory ranking, outcome harvesting) to understand *why* impacts differ across groups.
- ▶ Routinely analyse disaggregated data during quarterly reviews, not only at evaluation stage, to adapt design, delivery, and safeguards.

Long-term tracking

To address sustainability gaps, programmes should:

- ▶ Plan follow-up data collection 2-4 years after programme completion, where feasible.
- ▶ Use panel or tracer samples of adolescent girls to assess sustained school completion, age at marriage, continued access to services, and persistence of agency and norm change.
- ▶ Leverage national surveys (DHS, MICS) and administrative systems to complement programme data.
- ▶ Budget for long-term tracking at design stage and explore joint evaluations across programmes.

How to use this tool

- ▶ Open this tool at programme design stage, alongside Tool 4. The indicators selected define what your programme is accountable for measuring from day one.
- ▶ **Select indicators:** relevant to your programme's theory of change, context, and data feasibility. Priority core indicators (marked ★) should be tracked by all programmes regardless of scale or context. Select additional indicators per level based on objectives.
- ▶ **Define baselines:** gather pre-intervention data before implementation begins (see also Tool 1 – Country Diagnostic Checklist and use findings as the starting point).
- ▶ **Integrate in logframe:** embed selected indicators into programme design and M&E plans.
- ▶ **Budget for data collection from the start:** plan and cost these at design stage, prior to commissioning evaluations.
- ▶ **Use mixed methods:** combine quantitative and qualitative methods to capture agency, norms, and empowerment.
- ▶ **Review regularly:** update indicators annually or post-shock and at scale-up decision points (see also Chapter 6 on scale-up and sustainability).

Indicator	Global Programme Reference	Disaggregation	Notes / Guidance	Ghana LEPiP indicator examples	Data source
OUTPUT INDICATORS - what is delivered?					
★ Number of adolescent girls enrolled in GRSP programmes	1121	<i>Sex, age (10–14, 15–19), disability, marital status, displacement</i>	<i>Verify through social registries or MIS.</i>	# (and proportion) of poorest adolescent girls (16-21) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes.	Administrative
Number of households receiving cash transfers, disaggregated by sex of recipient	2211	<i>Sex of recipient, household vulnerability</i>	<i>Track targeting and inclusion of female-headed households.</i>		Administrative
★ Number of married adolescent girls and adolescent mothers reached with tailored support	1111	<i>Age, marital status, disability</i>	<i>Ensure inclusion beyond 'unmarried' girls.</i>	# (and proportion) of boys and girls in programme areas who accessed prevention and protection services from child protection, health, education and social protection service delivery points (cumulative)	Administrative
Number of girls supported to obtain national IDs or financial accounts	—	<i>Age, disability, location</i>	<i>Financial inclusion enabler; track as part of access reduction.</i>	# of adolescent girls with active the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) registration	Administrative
★ Number and type of 'plus' interventions delivered (life skills, health, SRHR, mentorship, business training)	1111	<i>Age, gender</i>	<i>Reflects complementary empowerment components.</i>	# of adolescent girls provided with life skills, business management, micro-enterprise skills training, and start-up capital # girls successfully completing training with minimum certification # of adolescent girls who have started and remained in business a year after exiting the programme # of adolescent girls benefitting from nutrition services	Administrative

Indicator	Global Programme Reference	Disaggregation	Notes / Guidance	Ghana LEPIP indicator examples	Data source
Number of boys and men participating in norm-change group education or dialogues	1211	Age, school/work status	Tracks male engagement in norms change.	# (and proportion) of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	Administrative
★ Number of community actors (leaders, teachers, CSOs) engaged in GRSP and CM prevention dialogues	1223	Role, sex	Community-level social norm change indicator.	# individuals reached through community sensitisation campaigns conducted on the value of the girl child and on ending marriage	Administrative
★ Number of girls referred through case management systems	—	Age, marital status, service type	Case management output; track referral completion, not just initiation.	# adolescent girls and boys benefitting from individualized case management services (disaggregated by sex, type of protection concern including child marriage and sexual gender-based violence)	Administrative
Number of service providers trained on adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive service delivery	2131	Sex, role, service type	Track pre- and in-service training. Include GRSP-specific modules.	# DSWCD and GHS personnel trained on data sharing protocols to facilitate referrals of at-risk adolescent girls and young mothers to critical services # service providers trained on gender-responsive SP programming	Administrative
Number (and proportion) of civil society organizations and decentralized stakeholders trained with enhanced capacity to promote gender equality and social accountability mechanisms for improved programme delivery	—	Organisation type, location	System-strengthening output; track changes in CSO capacity at follow-up.	# CSOs trained to promote girls' leadership and champion change # of resources developed to enable government to engage local actors like women and girl-led groups # of service providers trained on gender responsive social protection programming	Administrative
Number of girls meaningfully consulted (e.g. FGDs, U-Reporter channels, advisory groups)	—	Age, location, programme phase	Avoid tokenistic inclusion. Assess quality of participation, not just number.	# girls consulted as part of initiative (e.g., We Deserved Better) # of girls trained (U-Reporters) and equipped with advocacy and communication tools to advocate for their rights and influence decision-making in their communities	Administrative

Indicator	Global Programme Reference	Disaggregation	Notes / Guidance	Ghana LEPIP indicator examples	Data source
OUTCOME INDICATORS — what changes for participants?					
★ School attendance and retention among adolescent girls receiving GRSP support	1121	Age, marital status, socio-economic status	Link to attendance monitoring and education databases.		Administrative
Retention of girls in school after shocks	—	Age, displacement, shock type	Crisis-specific indicator; compare with non-recipients.		Administrative
Knowledge of SRHR among adolescent girls and boys	1111,1211	Age, schooling status	Pre/post surveys, participatory methods		Administrative
★ Girls' ability to make decisions about SRHR (e.g. healthcare, contraception)	—	Age, marital status	Core agency indicator; use validated tools.	# of pregnant adolescent girls enrolled into parenting programme and utilising SRH services	Primary
★ Girls' participation in household decision-making and control over resources	1111	Age, household type	Proxy for agency; use perception surveys.		Primary
Girls' confidence, aspirations, and goal-setting	—	Age	Empowerment indicator; use structured tools or participatory ranking.		Primary
Girls' mobility and ability to move safely outside the home	—	Age, marital status	Use perception-based tools; assess change over time.		Primary
★ Use of GBV referral pathways and protection services	2131	Age, gender, disability	Track uptake; ensure safety and confidentiality in data collection.	# at-risk adolescent girls referred between social welfare, health and justice systems	Administrative
Reduction in unpaid domestic and care work provided by girls	1111	Age, gender, type of care work	Use time-use surveys or diaries; consider seasonal variations.		Primary
★ Community attitudes toward acceptability of child marriage	1221-1223	Age, gender, role	Social norms indicator; use community surveys and FGDs.		Primary
Participation of men and boys in norm-change activities and shifts in attitudes)	1211	Age, schooling/work status	Tracks male engagement		Administrative
Time from referral to service uptake (SRHR/GBV/education)	—	Service type, location	Case management performance indicator.		Administrative
IMPACT INDICATORS — what difference does it make long-term?					
★ Mean age at first marriage among GRSP recipients	—	Age cohort, region, socio-economic status	Core long-term indicator; align with DHS/MICS data.		Administrative /Survey
★ Incidence of child marriage among GRSP recipients vs. comparison group	—	Age, marital status	Longitudinal tracking recommended.		Administrative /Survey

Indicator	Global Programme Reference	Disaggregation	Notes / Guidance	Ghana LEPIP indicator examples	Data source
Incidence of early pregnancy among adolescent girls in SP programmes	—	Age, marital status	Tracks delayed marriage and SRHR outcomes.		Administrative /Survey
Reduction in gender gaps in education completion among GRSP recipients	2121, 2211	Age, gender, socio-economic status	Measures systemic gender equity impacts.		Administrative
Shifts in social norms regarding child marriage	1221-1223	Age, gender, role (parent, leader)	Measure community-level norms change		Administrative
Evidence and knowledge generated on effective interventions	3211-3212	Type, gender analysis included	Supports learning, scale-up, and replication.		Administrative
Partnerships established to deliver adolescent-responsive SP South-to-South cooperation (peer learning, conferences, study tours) supported	3221	Type, participants	Facilitates regional knowledge sharing and scaling of effective models		Administrative
Policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted or adopted	3111	National/ subnational level	System-level advocacy and policy change.		Administrative
Programme cost per delayed marriage	—	National/ subnational	Cost-effectiveness; calculated using PF4C tools.		Administrative
SHOCK-RESPONSIVE INDICATORS					
★ Speed of payment delivery during shocks (days from trigger to payment)	—	Location, shock type	Core shock-responsiveness metric; set target threshold at design.		Administrative
Coverage expansion during crises - new beneficiaries reached	—	Sex, age, displacement	Tracks horizontal scale-up performance.		Administrative
Functionality of grievance mechanisms during disruptions	—	Age, channel used	Include offline options in assessment.		Primary

What to do next

- ▶ Although this tool appears last in the guide, it belongs at the start of your programme cycle. **If you are using it at the end of a design process, revisit:** are the indicators embedded in the programme logframe? Are baselines planned? Are data collection costs budgeted? Schedule periodic reviews, at minimum annually and post-shock. Return to Tool 2.1 for gender and age assessments during implementation, and Tool 2.2 if context fragility increases.
- ▶ If entering a new phase or scaling up, open Tool 5 alongside Tool 1 (Country Diagnostic Checklist) from the start, as the monitoring data collected (coverage, service uptake, norm change trends) can inform the next diagnostic and design cycle.

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Annex

1. Glossary of terms

Category	Term	Definition	Source
Social protection interventions	Social assistance	Non-contributory transfers such as cash transfers (conditional or unconditional), vouchers, or in-kind transfers such as school feeding subsidies or fee waivers.	UNICEF, 2019
	Social insurance	Contributory schemes, including health insurance, unemployment insurance, maternity benefits, and pensions, which can prevent children and families from falling into poverty when shocks or unexpected life events occur.	UNICEF, 2019
	Labour market & jobs programmes	Programmes and services that promote decent work and sustainable livelihoods help families secure stable income while ensuring time and support for quality childcare. These include broad labour market initiatives as well as targeted measures for families, such as childcare services and family-friendly workplace policies that enable women's participation in the workforce.	ILO, 2024; UNICEF, 2019
	Social care services	Services, such as childcare, GBV response and prevention, sexual and reproductive health, and psychosocial support that address social and normative barriers to gender equality. The social service workforce plays a central role through outreach, case management, and referrals, ensuring children and families access the support they need.	ILO, 2024; UNICEF, 2019
Gender-responsive approaches	Gender-responsive social protection (GRSP)	Interventions addressing specific risks, needs, and constraints of women and girls, promoting equitable access, empowerment, and protection from harmful practices like child marriage.	Kuss et al., 2024
	Gender-integration continuum	Spectrum of approaches from gender-blind to gender-transformative, reflecting levels of gender integration in programmes.	UNICEF, 2020
Crises approaches	Shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) or Adaptive Social Protection (ASP)	'Shock-responsive' and 'adaptive' social protection are used by different stakeholders to refer to broadly similar concepts. They focus on increasing attention on the role that social protection can play in advance of, and in response to, covariate shocks (i.e. shocks that affect a large proportion of the population simultaneously) for immediate, medium- and longer- term support – alongside other sectors.	UNICEF, 2019
	'Scaling up' cash transfers	Cash transfers that temporarily expand in coverage, value, or duration during shocks, supported by pre-arranged financing, contingency plans, and coordination with humanitarian actors.	World Bank, n.d.
Risk financing mechanisms/instruments	Disaster risk financing	Covers the system of budgetary and financial mechanisms to credibly pay for a specific risk, arranged before a potential shock. This can include paying to prevent and reduce disaster risk, as well as preparing for and responding to disasters	Centre for Disaster Protection, n.d
	Pre-arranged financing	Financing that has been approved in advance of a crisis, and that is guaranteed to be released to a specific implementer when a specific, pre-identified trigger condition is met.	Centre for Disaster Protection, n.d

Category	Term	Definition	Source
	Trigger	A predefined threshold of an index underlying a risk finance mechanism which, if exceeded, prompts a payout. A trigger may also leave an element of discretion to a designated party about whether or not to launch a response activity	Centre for Disaster Protection, n.d.
	Basis risk	The difference between an index and the shock that the index is supposed to be a proxy for. For example, disagreement may arise over whether an agricultural insurance product that uses a rainfall-based index covers drought-induced crop disease and pest damage.	Centre for Disaster Protection, n.d.
	Index	An indicator or measure that is chosen to be a good proxy for a type of shock, and used to determine payouts. For example, tropical cyclone categories used as an index for property damage or area average yield as a measure of lost agricultural production. Modelled estimates of damage costs are also used as indices.	Centre for Disaster Protection, n.d.
	Parametric insurance	A type of insurance that does not indemnify the pure loss but agrees before the event to make a payment dependent on an index. Also known as index insurance.	Clarke and Dercon, 2016
	Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF)	A regional insurance pool for Caribbean and Central American countries covering earthquakes, hurricanes, and excess rainfall.	CCRIF, n.d.
Anticipatory Approaches	Forecast-based Financing (FbF)	A system that releases money to at-risk households based on predictions of disasters (like floods or droughts) before they happen. Cash is distributed when forecasts show a high probability of disaster, giving families time to prepare and protect their assets.	IFRC, 2022
	Anticipatory Action	Anticipatory action refers to actions taken to reduce the humanitarian impacts of a forecast hazard before it occurs, or before its most acute impacts are felt. The decision to act is based on a forecast, or collective risk analysis, of when, where and how the event will unfold.	Anticipation hub, n.d.
	Anticipatory cash transfers (Experimental)	One-off cash transfers, triggered by forecast thresholds, given before a predicted disaster, like floods, to households.	Centre for Disaster Protection, 2021
	Early Warning System	An integrated system of hazard monitoring, forecasting and prediction, disaster risk assessment, communication and preparedness activities systems and processes that enables individuals, communities, governments, businesses and others to take timely action to reduce disaster risks in advance of hazardous events.	UNDRR, n.d.

2. Summary of evidence review

Recent literature on social protection and child marriage has grown rapidly. The following summarises the studies that informed the evidence review, along with a selection of reports, toolkits, and case studies published in recent years.

What we know about the links between GRSP and child marriage

A scoping review of 86 studies across low- and middle-income countries demonstrates that well-designed gender-responsive social protection (GRSP) can meaningfully reduce key drivers of child marriage—poverty, school drop-out, and economic insecurity—and, in some contexts, delay marriage directly. Interventions that combine cash support with education, life skills, norms-focused programming, or livelihoods components are most effective. Impacts are context-dependent, shaped by programme design and implementation quality. Evidence from humanitarian and crisis settings is promising but remains limited, highlighting the need for context-sensitive approaches.

EVIDENCE LANDSCAPE

Scope and composition

- 86 studies reviewed: 64 systematic/narrative/scoping reviews and syntheses, and 22 individual studies (qualitative, RCTs, quasi-experimental, mixed-methods, policy analyses).
- Studies are diverse in methods, interventions, contexts, and outcomes.

Focus of evidence:

- Majority examine non-contributory social assistance, especially cash transfers (conditional and unconditional).
- Growing body of work on cash-plus models combining transfers with education, life skills, or social norm interventions.
- Fewer studies assess vouchers, scholarships, public works, or social insurance.
- Instruments reviewed:
 - Cash transfers (conditional and unconditional): 56 studies
 - Cash-plus or multi-component interventions or scholarships/stipends: 13 studies
 - Social insurance/pensions: 1 study
 - Other / unspecified / mixed / multiple instruments): 16 studies

Geographical Coverage

- Predominantly LMICs, concentrated in South Asia and Africa, with limited evidence from Latin America.
- 21 studies examine humanitarian, crisis, or displacement settings.

Outcomes:

- Child marriage and age at first marriage were explicit outcomes in fewer studies.
- Most studies assess intermediate outcomes, such as school enrolment and retention, adolescent pregnancy, birth spacing, sexual risk behaviours (transactional sex), time use, and in some studies, intimate partner violence (IPV).

3. Existing guidance on GRSP and child marriage

Title	Type	Date	Institutions involved	Regional focus (if any)	Synthesis / Toolkit / Case Study	Citation / Link
Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems	Programme Guidance	2019	UNICEF	Global	Framework for designing and implementing shock-responsive systems.	UNICEF (2019). <i>Programme Guidance: Strengthening Shock Responsive Social Protection Systems</i> .
Gender-transformative Social Protection in Crisis Contexts: Guidance Note	Guidance Note	2023	STAAR, DAI Global UK Ltd	Global / Crisis contexts	Practical guidance on embedding gender-transformative principles in SP responses during crises.	Perezniето, P., & Holmes, R. (2023). <i>Gender-transformative social protection in crisis contexts: guidance note</i> . STAAR, DAI Global UK Ltd.
Gender-responsive Social Protection: Cheat Sheet	Technical Brief / Summary Tool	2024	STAAR	Global	Quick reference sheet summarizing key principles and design features of GRSP.	STAAR (2024). <i>Gender-responsive social protection: cheat sheet</i> .
Building and Maintaining Social Protection Systems through a Twin-Track Approach	Technical Note / Joint Guidance	2025	UNICEF & WFP	Fragility, Shock, and Conflict Contexts	Provides operational guidance for delivering SP in fragile and conflict-affected settings.	UNICEF & WFP (2025). <i>Building and maintaining social protection systems through a twin-track approach</i> .
Conflict Sensitive Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Conflict Sensitivity Toolbox 1	Operational Toolkit / Case Example	2023	UNDP	Lebanon / MENA Region	Toolkit for integrating conflict sensitivity into cash assistance programmes.	UNDP (2023). <i>Conflict Sensitive Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Conflict Sensitivity Toolbox 1</i> .
Linking Social Protection and Humanitarian Assistance: A Toolkit to Support Basic Needs	Toolkit	2022	ODI	Global	Provides operational tools for linking humanitarian and social protection responses.	Hagen-Zanker, J., Lowe, C., & Holmes, R. (2022). <i>Linking social protection and humanitarian assistance: a toolkit to support basic needs</i> . ODI. Link
Tips for Linking Social Protection and GBV Prevention and Response during COVID-19	Brief / Guidance Note	2020	SPACE	Global	Practical tips for integrating GBV prevention in SP during crises.	SPACE (2020). <i>Gender and Inclusion in Social Protection Responses during COVID-19</i> .
Resources for Mainstreaming GBV in Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)	Resource Compilation	2020	GBV AoR / Global Protection Cluster	Global	Resource library for integrating GBV considerations into CVA programming.	GBV AoR (2020). <i>Resources for Mainstreaming GBV in Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)</i> .
Toolkit: Context Analysis on Child Marriage in Crises and Forced Displacement Settings	Analytical Toolkit	2023	UNHCR & Plan International	Humanitarian / Displacement Contexts	Provides step-by-step guidance for analyzing child marriage risks in crises.	UNHCR & Plan International (2023). <i>Toolkit: Context analysis on child marriage in crises and forced displacement settings</i> .

Title	Type	Date	Institutions involved	Regional focus (if any)	Synthesis / Toolkit / Case Study	Citation / Link
Toolkit on FGM and Child Marriage	Multi-Issue Toolkit	2022	GAGE (Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence)	Ethiopia / East Africa	Offers field-tested tools for addressing harmful practices, including child marriage.	Presler-Marshall, E., Yadete, W., Jones, N., Gebeyehu, Y., & Abdisalam, A. (2022). <i>Toolkit on FGM and child marriage</i> . GAGE.
Leveraging Large Scale Sectoral Programmes to Prevent Child Marriage	Guidance Note	2022	UNICEF	Global	Guidance on integrating child marriage prevention into large-scale sectoral programmes.	UNICEF (2022). <i>Leveraging large scale sectoral programmes to prevent child marriage</i> .
CALP Network Resource Library	Knowledge Hub	Ongoing	The CALP Network	Global	Repository of resources on cash and voucher assistance (CVA), including gender-sensitive practices.	CALP Network Resource Library
CALP Network Programme Quality Toolbox	Quality Toolkit	Ongoing	The CALP Network	Global	Practical tools and standards for improving CVA quality, gender, and inclusion.	CALP Programme Quality Toolbox
Girls Not Brides Resource Hub	Repository / Toolkit Compilation	Ongoing	Girls Not Brides	Global	Compilation of practical tools and evidence on ending child marriage, including SP linkages.	Girls Not Brides Practical Tools

4. Existing Case Studies on GRSP and Child Marriage

Study	Summary	Link
CRANK Research Spotlight: Cash and asset incentive schemes to address child marriage and support married girls	Research Spotlight looking at the evidence behind the WHO recommendation to offer cash and/or incentives conditional on schooling, and the implications for policy and programmatic work and research. Includes additional evidence, insights and practical tools to support implementation of such incentives.	Supporting married girls case study
Elnakib, S., Sieverding, M., Kammouni, Z., Dabliz, H., & Taha, K. (2025). Effectiveness of a cash for school programme on education and marriage among adolescent girls: A longitudinal intervention study in Lebanon.	One of the first studies to evaluate the impacts of a conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme on child marriage in a humanitarian setting. Using longitudinal data, a three-year CCT programme in Lebanon improved educational outcomes and attitudes among adolescent girls from Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian communities. While one year of cash did not reduce early marriage, two or more years significantly lowered the risk. Each additional year of cash also reduced school dropout. The study highlights that sustained cash-for-education programmes can support school retention and delay child marriage in humanitarian settings.	Child marriage in humanitarian settings case study
Hamad, B. A., Jones, N., Abuhamad, S., Baird, S., & Oakley, E. (2025). Can social protection contribute to social connectedness in contexts of forced displacement and crisis? Lessons from Jordan's labelled cash transfer for education.	Social protection programming can help address gender- and lifecycle-specific vulnerabilities, particularly in humanitarian contexts. Although adolescents are disproportionately affected by crises, there remains limited evidence about how such programming can mitigate risks they face, including social isolation. This article explores how a cash-plus social protection response enhances refugee adolescents' social connectedness and contributes to broader social cohesion and sustainable peace.	Jordan case study
Maluccio, J.A., Soler-Hampejsek E, Kangwana B, Muluve E, Mbushi F, Austrian K. (2023). Effects of a single cash transfer on school re-enrollment during COVID-19 among vulnerable adolescent girls in Kenya: Randomized controlled trial.	COVID-19 school closures in Kenya, among the longest in Africa, threatened older adolescent girls with permanent dropout. A randomized-controlled trial tested an unconditional, labelled cash transfer in urban areas to encourage re-enrollment. Few were married, pregnant, or with children, but this study still demonstrates the role of cash, as the intervention significantly increased school return, especially for older girls and some previously unenrolled.	School re-enrolment and vulnerable adolescent girls case study
Samuels, F., & Ghimire, A. (2021). Preventing school dropout and early marriage in Nepal	Reviews two girl-focused programmes (BPBB and BKCSJV) in Nepal preventing school dropout and child marriage; finds successes in birth registration, awareness, and access to school (e.g., bicycles); highlights resource gaps and recommends programme improvements.	Nepal case study
Simon, C.A. (2019). The effect of cash-based interventions on gender outcomes in development and humanitarian settings	Cash transfers reach women and girls but do not automatically improve outcomes. Evidence shows some benefits for women and girls in development settings, but impacts in humanitarian contexts are limited and mixed. Discussion paper provides evidence from development and humanitarian contexts on various outcomes, including child marriage.	Child marriage in development and humanitarian settings case study
STAAR (2024) Roadmap for the Use of Social Protection to Tackle Child Marriage, Nepal	Analyses barriers to using social protection to reduce child marriage in Nepal; proposes a multi-pronged roadmap including cash transfers, education support, skills training, and awareness campaigns; MOWCSC to lead implementation.	Nepal case study

Study	Summary	Link
STAAR (2024) Roadmap for the Use of Social Protection to Tackle Child Marriage, Zambia	Reviews child marriage drivers (poverty, gender norms, poor education) in Zambia; recommends social protection programmes, awareness campaigns, law enforcement, and policy reforms; creates a stakeholder roadmap with actions and timelines.	Zambia case study
Thakar, K., Graham, H., Souris., B., and Gitonga., P. (2021) The Role of Cash and Voucher Assistance in Increasing Equity and Inclusion for Girls and Children with Disabilities in Education in Emergencies	Explore barriers to safe, quality Education in Emergencies (EiE) for girls, children with disabilities (CWDs), and marginalized children, and identifies effective integrated interventions, including cash-plus approaches.	Children with disabilities in emergency settings case study

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Wherever he lives.

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Published by UNICEF
Prevention of Harmful Practices Unit, Child Protection Programme Group
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
www.unicef.org

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