

## Making change happen: a SADC Model Law on Child Marriage

The Southern African Development Community Model (SADC) Model Law on Child Marriage sets a pathway for governments to end child marriage. It shows leaders how to develop legislation, policies and programmes that will help them address the problem of child marriage in their country, and in doing so, free girls and women from harm.

Although it has been developed specifically for the SADC region, the model law has many lessons that will be useful for other countries and regions as they commit to developing robust legal and policy responses to end child marriage.

The SADC Model Law on Child Marriage is designed to:

- ✓ Encourage the **adoption of progressive marriage laws** and the **reform of outdated laws**.
- ✓ Provide **specific guidance to national legislators** in Southern Africa on the **content and provisions of effective child marriage laws** that would be binding at the national level.
- ✓ **Promote regional and country level harmonisation of child marriage-related laws** across and within Member States: laws on sexual offences; laws relating to gender equity and equality; penal laws; marriage laws; and divorce laws.
- ✓ Provide **clear definitions of terms** — such as ‘child’ and ‘child marriage’ — to avoid ambiguity and enhance consistency. For example, it sets the **legal minimum age of marriage at 18 for both sexes**, without the exceptions commonly seen in existing national laws.
- ✓ **Reaffirm a human rights approach** — focused on the rights of women and children — to tackling the issue of child marriage in Southern Africa.
- ✓ Serve as a quality **standard for national legislators** and policy makers and promote accountability.
- ✓ **Put the issue of child marriage on the political agenda** and serve as a **stimulus for debate**, as well as an entry point for advocacy.
- ✓ **Encourage data collection and in-depth research** to guide design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure that they address the needs of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups of girls.

### The SADC Model Law Guide:

The SADC Model Law Guide aims to support the domestication and implementation of the SADC Model law by providing an easy-to-use overview of the content of the Model Law with practical and concrete examples and recommendations on how interested parliamentarians, civil society organizations and young advocates can take action to promote the Model Law in their countries. In addition, it:

- Provides a framework that **cuts across all sectors**, and looks at prevention, protection and mitigation of the effects of child marriage
- Focuses on **programming** and can be used to guide the development of national action plans to end child marriage. Ministries, NGOs and other partners can **start applying the recommendations**, even before legislative reform has taken place.

Read the full guide [here](#).

See the SADC Model Law here:

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/sadc-model-law-child-marriage/>