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# The empowerment of adolescent girls is key to the development of Zimbabwe

*Ahead of the International Day of the Girl Child the European Union Delegation in Zimbabwe and UNICEF Zimbabwe renew their engagement towards the empowerment of adolescent girls*

**Harare, 10 October 2022** – *As the world is celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Day of the Girl Child (11 October), the European Union Delegation to Zimbabwe and UNICEF Zimbabwe are highlighting the crucial role adolescent girls and young women play in the development of the country and call for continued investment in their education, and economic and social empowerment.*

In the last 10 years, there has been increased attention worldwide amongst governments, policymakers and the public on issues that matter to girls, and more opportunities were created for girls to have their voices heard. Yet, investments in the rights of adolescent girls remain limited at the global level. Girls continue to confront a myriad of challenges to fulfil their full potential. This is further exacerbated by concurrent crises of climate change, COVID-19, and humanitarian conflict. Girls around the world continue to face unprecedented challenges to their education, their physical and mental wellness, their participation in decision-making processes and the protection needed for a life without violence.

In line with the Zimbabwe Constitution and under the theme of “leaving no-one and no place behind”, the National Development Strategy (NDS-1) prioritizes gender equality and women empowerment. In this context, Zimbabwe has seen the attention for girls growing, including for gender-based violence. The country recently adopted the Marriages Act which forbids the marriage of children under the age of 18, and the Government has rolled-out the successful Spotlight Initiative programme to protect girls and young women against sexual abuse and exploitation, with the support of the European Union and the UN system. The growing attention for adolescent girls and their empowerment goes beyond their rights to protection against violence, and also includes access to education and skills development and to adequate health care services, including for HIV/Aids.

The challenges girls in Zimbabwe face remain important, including the risk of becoming pregnant or married at an early age. Adolescent pregnancies and child marriage are widespread in Zimbabwe. One woman out of three is married before the age of 18. Child marriage has a devastating impact on the lives of adolescent girls. It disrupts childhood and often leads to early pregnancies with health complications, and school drop-out, preventing girls from developing their full potential.



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This year's commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child in Zimbabwe is marked by the adoption of the Marriages Act and the expected positive impact that its full implementation will have on adolescent girls and on the country.

To end child marriage the perception of the role of women in society needs to change. Adolescent girls need to be given the opportunity to develop their full potential as equal members in society. Luckily, that message is gathering growing support and momentum, also in Zimbabwe. The awareness campaign launched a few months ago by UNICEF Zimbabwe and its partners to collect pledges to empower women and adolescent girls and to end child marriage has already been signed by more than 1000 people throughout the country.

Adolescent girls are worth the investment. When girls thrive, we all thrive. Adolescent girls have shown time and time again that given the skills and the opportunities, they can be the change-makers driving progress in their communities, building back stronger for all, including women, boys and men.

The European Union Delegation to Zimbabwe and UNICEF Zimbabwe want to renew their engagement to join forces with the Government and its partners to continue to invest towards the development and empowerment of adolescent girls. Equipped with the right resources, opportunities and an enabling environment, these girls will become a powerful generation of female leaders, entrepreneurs and change-makers building Zimbabwe into a prosperous country for all.

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**Note for the editors:**

UNICEF pledge campaign to empower women and end child marriage, is accessible [here](#).

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