

Bolivia takes important step towards ending child marriage

In a move to end child marriage, Bolivia's National Senate has approved a bill to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18, without exceptions.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, April 25, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On April 23, 2025, Bolivia's National Senate approved Bill No. 092-24, which proposes eliminating legal exceptions that currently allow marriage from the age of 16. If passed into law, the bill would set the minimum age of marriage at 18, without any exceptions. This approval marks an important step in the fight for the rights of girls and adolescents in Bolivia. However, the process is not yet complete, as the bill must still be debated and passed by the Chamber of Deputies.



Bolivia National Senate

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We will continue to support this process and advocate for final approval of the law. Bolivia has the opportunity to close a long-standing legal gap. The decision now lies in the hands of the deputies.”

Equality Now and Comunidad de Derechos Humanos

BOLIVIA'S CURRENT LAWS ON CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage and early unions before the age of 18 remain a reality in Bolivia, with devastating consequences for the lives, health, and rights of girls and adolescents. These human rights violations perpetuate cycles of poverty and expose girls to serious risks, such as sexual and domestic violence, early pregnancies, and school dropout, especially in rural and Indigenous communities. The practice is deeply rooted in cultural and gender norms that assign roles to girls from a young age and limit their autonomy.

Although Bolivian law sets 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage, the Family Code allows exceptions from the age of 16 with the authorization of parents, guardians, or child protection authorities. These legal loopholes have enabled thousands of girls and adolescents to be married or in informal unions with adult men, many of them significantly older, in contexts marked by inequality and deeply imbalanced power dynamics.

In many cases, these unions are presented as voluntary decisions, but in reality, they occur in situations of economic dependence or family pressure. Girls are not in a position to freely consent, as their choices are shaped by the limitations of their environment.

HOW WIDESPREAD IS CHILD MARRIAGE IN BOLIVIA?

Between 2014 and 2024, more than 6,000 girls aged 16 and 17 were married or in informal unions in Bolivia, according to official data from the [Ombudsperson's Office and the Civil Registry \(Sereci\)](#). The actual figures are likely even higher due to significant underreporting.

A [2021 study](#) conducted by Coordinadora de la Mujer and Save the Children revealed that more than 32,000 girls had been married or in unions before the age of 15. Many of these unions involve adult men and take place in environments marked by inequality, lack of access to rights, and the absence of protective systems. In such situations, girls are exposed to multiple forms of violence, including sexual violence, domestic violence, and even femicide.

In 2024 alone, the Public Prosecutor's Office reported 84 cases of femicide in Bolivia, along with 37,601 complaints of domestic or family violence, 3,737 cases of sexual abuse, 3,140 of rape, 2,696 of statutory rape, and 1,864 of sexual assault against adolescents. Among the femicide victims was a 14-year-old girl who was living with a 28-year-old man, the main suspect in her murder, who later attempted to take his own life in Cochabamba. These figures underscore how child marriages and unions not only expose girls to harm—it intensifies the structural violence they already face.

SENATE APPROVES BILL TO PROHIBIT CHILD MARRIAGE

On April 23, 2025, the National Senate approved Bill No. 092-24, which aims to close legal loopholes that currently permit marriage from age 16. This legislative advancement is a significant step forward in the effort to protect girls and adolescents in Bolivia.

This progress was made possible thanks to the leadership of Senator Virginia Velasco and the advocacy efforts of Bolivian civil society organizations.

Still, the road ahead is critical. The bill must now be debated and approved by the Chamber of Deputies.

BOLIVIA'S INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is a serious violation of human rights, recognized by instruments such as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women ([Convention of Belém do Pará](#)), which requires State Parties—including Bolivia—to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Other key international frameworks, including recommendations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), clearly establish that marriage under the age of 18—even with parental consent—violates fundamental rights such as education, health, and development.

Eliminating legal exceptions would allow Bolivia to fulfil these commitments and bring its legislation in line with the highest international human rights standards.

IT'S UP TO CONGRESS TO PROTECT GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Senate's approval is an important milestone, but the work is far from over. The Chamber of Deputies will be the space where it is decided whether Bolivia takes real action to end child marriage, or continues to tolerate a practice that leaves girls and adolescents exposed and unprotected.

At Equality Now, together with our allies at Comunidad de Derechos Humanos in Bolivia, we will continue to support this process and advocate for the final approval of the law. Bolivia has the opportunity to close a long-standing legal gap. The decision now lies in the hands of the deputies.

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