

# TOO YOUNG TO WED

The growing problem of child marriage among Syrian girls in Jordan



**Maha\* is just 13 years old but she's already married. Her husband is ten years older than her.**

*"I didn't want to get married. I wanted to finish my studies and become a doctor. But my parents forced me to marry. My father was worried about sexual harassment here."*

*"I'm pregnant now. [The foetus] is very weak because I'm so young and my body isn't ready."*

\* name changed to protect identity



**Save the Children**

Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.  
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.  
We help them fulfil their potential.

**Names of children and adults quoted in this briefing  
have been changed to protect identities.**

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# A GROWING PROBLEM

War in Syria has killed more than 10,000 children.<sup>1</sup> More than 1 million more have fled the country in fear,<sup>2</sup> while millions more remain displaced inside the country.<sup>3</sup> This briefing looks at another disturbing but less publicised impact of the crisis: the increase in the numbers of girls who have been forced to marry.<sup>4</sup>

Child marriage existed in Syria before the crisis – 13% of girls under 18 in Syria were married in 2011.<sup>5</sup> But now, three years into the conflict, official statistics show that among Syrian refugee communities in Jordan – who we focus on in this briefing given the lack of statistics inside Syria itself – child marriage has increased alarmingly, and in some cases has doubled.\*

In Jordan, the proportion of registered marriages among the Syrian refugee community where the bride was under 18 rose from 12% in 2011 (roughly

the same as the figure in pre-war Syria) to 18% in 2012, and as high as 25% by 2013.<sup>6</sup> The number of Syrian boys registered as married in 2011 and 2012 in Jordan is far lower,<sup>7</sup> suggesting that girls are, as a matter of course, being married off to older males.

Child marriage has also reportedly increased in camps of Syrian refugees in Erbil, Iraq<sup>8</sup> and among Syrian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> Incidences of child marriages and forced marriages among Syrian girls have also been reported in Egypt<sup>10</sup> and in Turkey.<sup>11</sup>

There are a number of reasons why families are opting for child marriage for their daughters. As refugees, Syrian families are reliant on dwindling resources and are lacking economic opportunities. At the same time, they are all too aware of the need to protect their daughters from the threat of sexual violence. Given these pressures, some families consider child marriage to be the best way to protect their female children and ease pressures on the family resources.

The girl is saying, “Daddy, where is this man taking me? Is it to the park?” The scroll that the man on the left is holding says ‘Marriage Certificate’.

The illustrations in this briefing are from a series of caricatures drawn by girls who attended sessions at a youth centre in Za’atari refugee camp. The sessions were held to raise awareness of the dangers of child marriage.



\* Syrian refugees in Jordan are not necessarily representative of the situation of the broader Syrian population.

Research studies from around the world suggest that child marriage, rather than protecting girls, often has far-reaching negative consequences. It often denies a girl her right to an education and leaves her far less able to take advantage of economic opportunities. As a result, child brides – who are more likely to come from poor families in the first place – are likely to remain poor.

Globally, we know that child marriage also removes girls from family and friends, often leading to social and psychological isolation. This isolation in turn limits girls' access to sexual and reproductive health. The consequences can be highly damaging, even fatal. A girl under 15 is five times more likely to die in childbirth than a grown woman.<sup>12</sup>

Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence than their peers who marry later.<sup>13</sup> The isolation of girls forced to marry makes it harder to access help, including child protection services. Sexual violence is inherent within child marriage: sex with a child under the minimum age for consent and unwanted sexual

relationships are gross violations of a child's rights, regardless of whether they take place within the context of a marriage.

While child marriage has been increasing among Syrian refugees in Jordan, there is also determined resistance within families. A recent report by UNHCR,<sup>14</sup> which looks at the situation of Syrian refugee women who are running households on their own in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, revealed mothers' resolute rejection of child marriage. Thirteen women reported receiving marriage proposals for their underage daughters (out of 135 women interviewed), but all refused. Among the reasons mothers gave were that their daughters were too young and that they wanted their daughters to complete their education. The report adds that women "resented the image being perpetuated of Syrian girls as 'easy and cheap'."

This briefing, based on desk research and interviews, does not purport to be a comprehensive analysis of the complex situation of Syrian refugee girls and child marriage in Jordan. Rather, it provides a snapshot of the threats many of these girls face.

## CHILD MARRIAGE IS A BREACH OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Child marriage is a human rights issue, due to the nature of child's consent – or lack of consent – to enter into such a relationship. The right to 'free and full' consent to a marriage is recognised in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Child marriage is further prohibited by the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the major international agreement defining the rights of girls and women, which requires governments to condemn all forms of discrimination against girls and women and pursue all appropriate means to eliminate it. Child marriage has a range of further implications that significantly infringe on the rights and protections guaranteed for children (defined as those under age 18) under Article 18 in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Jordanian legal system sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. Shari'a judges may authorise

marriage for children aged 15–17 years under certain conditions.<sup>15</sup> However, while the conditions outlined in Jordanian law for allowing marriage of children under 18 are relatively restrictive, the fact that a significant proportion of all marriages in Jordan involve children (13.6% in 2013<sup>16</sup>) and the increasing number of early marriages for Syrian girls indicate that child marriages are commonly approved. Strengthening the procedural safeguards to ensure that the law is systematically applied is an essential step to reduce the number of child marriages and the risks associated with them.

In addition, many Syrian marriages, including those involving children, are not registered. They lack the minimal protection afforded by a review by a Jordanian judge of whether a child marriage is in the interest of the child. Wives and their children also miss out on the protection afforded by a marriage that is formally registered.

# WHY ARE MORE GIRLS BEING FORCED TO MARRY?

The incidence of child marriage is increasing both within Syria<sup>17</sup> and among Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. Now, among Syrian refugees in Jordan – who are the main focus of this report – official statistics show that one in every four registered marriages is of a girl under the age of 18.<sup>18</sup>

This section looks specifically at the reasons child marriage is increasing amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan. The reasons families seek to arrange child marriages for their daughters – for girls' protection and to alleviate poverty – remain broadly the same as before the conflict. However, as this section shows, as a result of the conflict some drivers of child marriage have become more intense, while at the same time new ones have emerged.

*“In the beginning, in Syria, they would make girls get married early, one way or another. But when events started to happen in Syria, parents were marrying their girls as soon as they turned 12 or 14. Families started doing it so quickly, especially when things happened and they started to worry about their daughters.*

*“And we heard lots of stories that happened and are still happening about girls who are too young to know what marriage is, or even what responsibility for a house and a husband really means, and therefore she gets sucked into the marriage.*

*“There are lots of people who make their daughters drop out of school, too. So if someone comes and asks for her hand, the girl would drop out of school in order to get married. This is very widespread in Syria. I mean, not all families give importance to studying, for example.*

*“Especially after the war, this phenomenon has grown bigger in our society.”*

**Sama, 18.** Sama got married when she was 17 (see page 4).



## GENDER INEQUALITY AND PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE

One of the main reported reasons for child marriage among Syrians in Jordan is to protect their girls.<sup>19</sup> Where there is only one man in the household, many Syrian refugees report feeling that this is not sufficient protection for women and girls – especially if that man has to leave the home regularly (for example, to collect food or to work). Particularly among those living in the camps, general insecurity and sexual harassment are commonly reported as reasons for arranging for girls to be married at a young age.<sup>20</sup> Parents see child marriage as a way to protect their daughters – and their family’s honour

*“If we were in Syria and she was around this age, her father wouldn’t marry her off. She’s too young. Only in these circumstances, where there are fears of sexual harassment, are they marrying their daughters off”*

**Abdullah, 23**, husband of Maha, 13 (see Maha’s quote on the front page)

– from possible sexual assault and other kinds of hardship.<sup>21</sup> This has been exacerbated by the conflict.

However, while child marriage is often arranged in order to ‘protect’ girls, this motivation is often intimately linked to traditional gender roles and



PHOTO: ROSIE THOMPSON/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**A 14-year-old girl at a shop selling wedding dresses in Za’atari refugee camp.**

*“I got married when I was 17 years old. When I was in Syria, I wasn’t thinking about marriage at all. I’d finished my high school education and registered for university. But because of the conditions in Syria, I wasn’t able to continue. We were forced to move from place to place within the country. At one point, we were in my grandfather’s house, and we had to remain there for five months. That’s where I got engaged.*

*“We had to move again within Syria, and then to Jordan. We stayed in Za’atari for a while and then*

*moved into a two-room house, which was very small. Ten people were living there. It was my family’s house and also my maternal aunt’s house – so my husband is actually my maternal-aunt’s son. We were engaged and people started talking and gossiping that it was not proper for us to be living in the same house if we weren’t married. And because of that, we were compelled to get married.”*

**Sama, 18**

*“I took the decision to get my daughter married at a young age because we didn’t feel that we had any stability living in a place like this, with an enormous number of refugees. The instability left me with no choice but to make a decision. In terms of her education, it was difficult for her to continue here. There are a large number of men in the streets and near the schools, so as a father I had to take the decision to either keep her at home with me until our future becomes clearer or take the decision for her to get married early.*

*“Of course, I didn’t make that decision on my own; it was a family decision and I consulted with my daughter and gave her the freedom to choose. She took the decision on her own and we didn’t put any pressure on her. Circumstances made us take the decision quickly and get her married off. We have no regrets.”*

**Father of Reem** (see page 7)



inequalities, where a girl’s value is largely determined by her upholding family honour, producing children and remaining within the home. Girls’ and women’s roles may be restricted in many ways, such as decision-making on family issues, including household income, and their educational opportunities may be limited. Syrian married girls are more likely to drop out of school and not engage in work outside the home.<sup>22</sup> Child marriage thus serves to perpetuate and reinforce gender inequality across a broad spectrum of a girl’s rights.

Focus group discussions<sup>23</sup> indicate that women and girls are more likely to have concerns about girls getting married at a young age, but these concerns are often overruled by fathers who are much more likely to be in favour of child marriage. It is important to acknowledge the variation in these attitudes though, with some fathers rejecting child marriage for their daughters.

## POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Lack of employment and livelihood opportunities for Syrians within Jordan is consistently reported as one of the main factors in early marriage. They place a huge strain on the ability of parents to provide for their families. Reducing the economic burden on families – by reducing the number of ‘mouths to feed’ in a household – has been identified as a motivating factor for families to seek marriages for daughters.<sup>24</sup>

## THE STATUS OF MARRIAGE

In Jordan, we found that some Syrian girls were married before they left Syria because a man is more likely to be able to enter some neighbouring countries if he is married or part of a family.

It was also reported that marriage of Syrian refugee women in Za’atari refugee camp to Jordanian husbands was viewed as a way of securing sponsorship that would allow her and her family to move out of the camp. Syrian girls and women living in camps in Jordan who marry men residing outside the camp are able to leave their camp and to live in a host community.

## FORCED MARRIAGE AFTER RAPE

There are also reported cases of forced marriage in refugee settlements. Forced marriages are reportedly sometimes arranged for Syrian women and girls who have been victims of rape,<sup>25</sup> enabling their families to restore their ‘honour’.

# THE IMPACT ON GIRLS

The Syrian crisis has exacerbated pressures on children and their parents to arrange for their daughters to marry under the age of 18. It has also increased the danger that girls married early may end up in abusive or exploitative situations.<sup>26</sup> This section explores the increased risks girls face.

## GIRLS AT RISK

### A NEW SENSE OF URGENCY AND DESPERATION

The deepening conflict has given a new sense of urgency and desperation to child marriage negotiations, which has weakened the thoroughness of the investigations Syrian families usually make into the character and background of potential husbands for their daughters.<sup>27</sup> A focus on short-term financial security, instead of on character and suitability, increases the risk of matches that put girls at risk and lead to sexual or other exploitation. Girls, boys, women and men in Za'atari<sup>28</sup> all expressed concern about the risks of 'temporary' or 'dishonourable' marriage proposals while seeking refuge in Jordan, and about the perceived increased risk of exploitation and divorce.

Marriages in Syria are usually officiated by sheikhs known to both families. However, Syrian refugees

in Jordan are reportedly allowing this role to be performed by a stranger who is not authorised to conduct these marriages.<sup>29</sup>

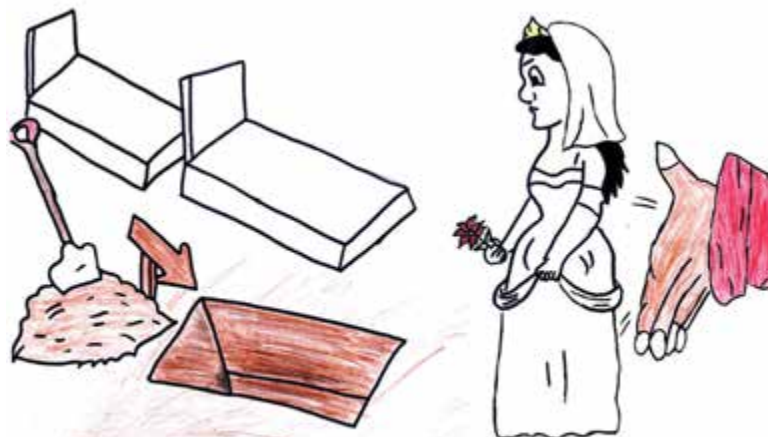
*"I got married at the age of 13. I never really had the chance to get to know my husband until his family wanted him to marry me. The first time they proposed for my hand in marriage I refused because I wanted to complete my education. But then my mother forced me to marry him. She kept on trying to convince me until eventually I accepted. We were only engaged for 10 days.*

*"My husband soon went back to Syria and stayed on his own. I felt like I wasn't even his wife. When I asked him why he treated me that way he said it was none of my business. He told me I didn't mean anything to him and I am nothing but a 'wall' to him. He said I'm not allowed to know where he was, what he was doing or where he is going."*

**Hania, 15**

### GIRLS FORCED TO MARRY OLDER MEN

Trends show that refugee Syrian girls in Jordan are marrying older men,<sup>30</sup> with 48% of Syrian child brides in 2012 marrying men ten or more years older than them.<sup>31</sup> The greater the age difference, the more likely girls are to be disempowered and at risk of violence, abuse or exploitation.<sup>32</sup>







Sisters Nadia and Sama, with Sama's newborn baby. Nadia was married when she was 15, Sama when she was 17.

## REFUGEE CHILD-MARRIAGES ARE OFTEN UNREGISTERED

Child marriages often remain unregistered in Syrian refugee communities. This can be because of confusion over marriage practices in host countries; fees may be involved; and families may have an abiding hope that a marriage will be registered upon returning to Syria.

In Jordan, all marriages of children should be reviewed by a shari'a court judge, but many Syrian refugees do not undertake this step. The reasons given for this include not seeing the benefits, not being aware of the procedures, difficulties accessing necessary documentation and misunderstandings about the costs involved. This means that child marriages are not coming under the scrutiny of shari'a court judges, thus denying girls the benefit of a measure designed to safeguard their interests.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, not registering a marriage with authorities in Jordan can cause complications when registering the marriage on return to Syria, or when registering children from the marriages. In addition, it leads to a lack of legal protection for the spouse and any future children.<sup>34</sup>

## GIRLS PREVENTED FROM RETURNING TO SCHOOL

*“Since I got married I don't feel anything. Well, I do feel sad when I see other girls from my neighbourhood going to school. Whenever I see a woman who has become a doctor or a lawyer or has finished her education I get upset.”*

**Reem, 15<sup>35</sup>**

Children who drop out of school are more likely to marry. In addition, child marriage is also a barrier to education and play, with girls expected to leave school in order to care for their husband and home, or to begin childbearing and childcare.<sup>36</sup> Another reason why child wives are prevented from re-enrolment in school is the unwillingness of some school administrations and parents to mix married girls with unmarried ones.<sup>37</sup> This also inhibits the ability of child wives to have friends after marriage, leading to increasing levels of social isolation.

## THE DEADLY RISKS OF CHILD PREGNANCY

Child marriage has devastating consequences for girls' health, resulting in sexual activity at a young age, while their bodies are still developing and when they may have limited understanding of reproduction and sexual health. Child brides often find it difficult to openly discuss family planning methods or sexual practices with their husbands, and often face pressure from family members to become pregnant quickly.

For girls, becoming pregnant and giving birth increase the health risks for both the mother and the child – rates of stillbirths and newborn deaths are substantially higher for girls than for adult women, and girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than a grown woman is.<sup>38</sup> In Za'atari camp in Jordan, one clinic, run by the Jordan Health Aid Society, registered 58 pregnancies involving mothers below the age of 18 during the last week of February 2013.<sup>39</sup>

## TOO MUCH TOO YOUNG

Child marriage often adversely affects mental health, due to the impact of early and forced sexual activity, premature pregnancy and childbirth, and the responsibilities of caring for children at an early age. Married adolescent girls in Jordan talk of not feeling ready to be mothers.

*"I got married when I was 15 years old. I was forced to marry because my family and I – ten people – were sharing a very small house with only two rooms. We had to get married, and it was a day full of tears and sadness more than of joy. I was aspiring to get into medicine at university and become a doctor. I left school and didn't finish my 11th year and we came to Jordan. Everything got destroyed.*

*"There was no joy on my wedding day. I was hoping to live in a very beautiful house, I had dreams about it – to have my wedding in a nice hall and invite my loved ones."*

**Nadia, 16**, living in a host community in Amman, Jordan

In Za'atari refugee camp, Jordan, one young woman told us: *"I was married when I was 15 years and had two abortions... I was not able to think clear and did not know if it was my fault. I am 19 now with a nine-month-old baby, (I) had a very hard delivery... I still feel I am too young to be a mother."*<sup>40</sup>

Mothers in Za'atari also expressed concerns that adolescent girls are not ready to raise a family, with some of the mothers who married at a young age stating that they had not been ready to be good mothers and wives when they were young.<sup>41</sup>



# A DIFFERENT FUTURE IS POSSIBLE FOR SYRIA'S CHILDREN

Zada changed her mind about marrying her daughter off at a young age after participating in awareness-raising sessions at an activity centre run by Save the Children and UNICEF in Za'atari refugee camp:

*"I worry so much about my daughter and I thought maybe if she got married she would be well looked after. My husband is physically disabled and I am so scared that he won't be able to protect or look after her. I wanted to make her get married just because I'm worried about her, not because I believe in early marriage at all.*

*"Here at the activity centre they carried out awareness-raising sessions on the dangers of early marriage. I have seen the impact of early marriage on girls from the camp or at the centre. I will not let my daughter get married to the wrong person, even if we end up staying in this camp for 20 years. She won't get married unless a gentleman proposes to her, and when she's at least 22 years old.*

*"I suffered from obsessive fear and anxiety even before the crisis in Syria started, because of my husband being disabled. I always worry about my children and I'm so overprotective. This made things so complicated for my daughter. She was never allowed to go anywhere unless I was with her. After we joined the activity centre and we met new girls and the staff here, I started to allow her to walk on her own in the camp. The centre and the people here made me feel secure and safe to be able to do that."<sup>42</sup>*

## KEY STRATEGIES

From our own programmes with Syrian refugees and around the world, together with a large body of international evidence, we know there are solutions to prevent child marriage. Experience in Jordan suggests that with a concerted effort it is possible to prevent some early marriages, and to reduce the risks of those marriages that do take place. But changing this practice requires sustained, integrated, coordinated efforts by all partners.

The International Centre for Research on Women, the leading research institute on child marriage, recommends five strategies to prevent child marriage. These are drawn from a systematic review of programmes, including those of Save the Children, that measured changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage.<sup>43</sup> These strategies are applicable in the Syrian refugee context:

### **1. Empower girls with information, skills and support networks**

By bringing girls together to learn basic skills like numeracy and literacy, how to communicate and negotiate with others, how to stay healthy during their reproductive years, how to work together to solve problems, and how to earn and manage money, girls can become more knowledgeable and self-confident in refusing unwanted marriage.

### **2. Provide economic support and incentives to girls and their families**

Approaches that enhance the economic security of poor households can aid in curbing child marriage. Providing a girl or her family with an incentive, such as a loan or an opportunity to learn an income-generating skill, can yield immediate economic relief for struggling families. Daughters who learn skills that enable them to earn an income in the future may be seen as adding more value to the family.

### **3. Educate and rally parents and community members**

Families and community elders are traditionally responsible for deciding when and who a girl marries. Educating them on how child marriage impacts a girl's health and future often sparks powerful change. With new knowledge, adults' attitudes and behaviours about child marriage can shift; they become more likely to challenge, rather than embrace, traditional expectations of girls.

#### 4. Enhance girls' access to a high quality education

Girls with no education are three times more likely to marry before 18 than those with secondary and higher education. When girls are in school they are less likely to be seen as ready for marriage by their families and community members.

#### 5. Encourage supportive laws and policies

Many countries with high rates of child marriage have passed legislation to prohibit the practice, or have established a legal age for marriage.

Advocating for the implementation of these laws and raising awareness among community leaders helps strengthen and better enforce existing initiatives around girls' rights.

The international community must place greater emphasis on tackling child marriage among Syrian refugees in the region and within Syria. It's vital that donors fund the \$5.3 billion gap that remains in the United Nations appeal for the Syrian refugee response,<sup>44</sup> and that they ensure this includes significant investment in approaches, like the No Lost Generation initiative, which provide concrete measures to reduce girls' vulnerability to child marriage.

No Lost Generation was launched as an initiative between UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, World Vision, Mercy Corps and other partners in October 2013.

It calls for \$1 billion to give Syria's children safety, stability, and a chance to resume their education and rebuild their lives. The initiative aims to help Syria's children, both within Syria and in neighbouring countries, to gain access to good-quality education, find protection from exploitation, abuse and violence and access psychological care.

The immediate child protection funding requirements set out in the No Lost Generation strategy must be met. This strategy must be extended to ensure support from the international community to address children's protection needs is sustained over the long term. We must promote strategies that address poverty and unequal gender roles; that provide educational, reproductive health, case management, legal and psychosocial services for adolescent girls (including married girls); and that support community dialogue on early marriage as outlined in our recommendations below. We also know that education plays a key role in reducing child marriage. Girls who are in school are more likely to marry later, have fewer children, be healthier and have greater future prospects than girls who drop out to marry.<sup>45</sup> A key part of responding to child marriage among Syrians will be funding the education component of the No Lost Generation initiative, including a response that addresses the specific barriers in the Syria regional context that are causing girls to drop out of school or never enrol in the first place.

As part of Save the Children Regional Response to the Syria crisis, Save the Children is helping children in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt to cope with the worst effects of the war. In Jordan, we run community awareness sessions on child marriage with children, adolescents and parents with a focus on prevention of child marriage.

Across the region our child protection teams respond to issues related to child marriage and forced marriage, referring cases of gender-based violence to specialised agencies so that victims get specialist support. In Jordan, we have joined forces with other agencies to launch *Amani*, a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of marriage and to spread the message 'Our sense of safety is everyone's responsibility'. A 'forced and early marriage' taskforce was established in Jordan in 2014, co-chaired by UNHCR and UNFPA, to develop a joint action plan to reduce the risk and mitigate the consequence of child marriage and forced marriage in Jordan, and to build the capacity of local organisations to tackle this issue. A joined-up approach is critical to address the issue of child marriage.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on donors to:

- Fund and support in-depth assessments across the region to improve the evidence base and enable a greater understanding of the extent and causes of marriage among Syrian children, so that we can collectively improve our prevention and response.
- Fund programmes to identify children at risk, receive reports of child marriage and other child protection incidents, and take action to protect children, including advocacy with parents, especially fathers, to stop child marriages taking place.
- Fund programmes to support survivors of child marriage, such as access to age-appropriate education, case management, psychosocial support, economic and reproductive health services.
- Fund and support community-based initiatives to change social norms and attitudes towards early marriage. These programmes should focus on the positive effects of marrying after 18, support refugee advocates of change, especially women and girls, and find creative ways to engage men in this dialogue.
- Invest in programmes that work with religious and community leaders across the region officiating and authorising child marriages, in order to raise awareness of the harmful nature of child marriage and prevent this practice from occurring.
- Invest in long-term programmes that address the underlying causes of child marriage – programmes such as economic and social empowerment of women and girls, livelihood opportunities and incentives to at-risk families – as this will be critical to reducing the financial pressures that contribute to increased incidence of child marriage among vulnerable households.
- Invest in girl-sensitive education programmes to ensure more refugee girls go to school and stay in school, and to improve refugee girls' access to education by removing economic barriers (through initiatives such as scholarships, free access and transport) and other key push factors, thus reducing the likelihood of early marriage. Programmes and activities developed and implemented for Syrian refugees and host communities should also take into account the needs of both boys and girls.
- Increase support to host governments – including funding, technical support and capacity building – to better enable them to address the issue of child marriage in host communities and refugee camps. This includes strengthening the implementation of legal frameworks and procedures related to early marriage, and involving government actors in prevention campaigns on early marriage.



# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, January 2014
- <sup>2</sup> UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, November 2013
- <sup>3</sup> OCHA, 2013 Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Action Plan, December 2013 (OCHA states that 6.5 million people are displaced within Syria, and UNICEF estimates that 46% of these are children)
- <sup>4</sup> Child marriage is defined as a formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18, as defined by UNICEF ([http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58008.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html))
- <sup>5</sup> UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2013*, Table 11, p 142. It is also worth noting that child marriage also existed across the region, such as in Lebanon and Jordan, before the Syrian refugees arrived.
- <sup>6</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014. The legal age of marriage in Jordan is 18 years old. In Syria, it is 17 years old for girls and 18 years old for boys.
- <sup>7</sup> 0.9% of Syrian grooms were under 18 in 2011 and 0.7% were under 18 in 2012 (UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014). However, absolute numbers of early marriage of Syrian boys are undoubtedly higher due to fact that many Syrian marriages are not registered.
- <sup>8</sup> UNFPA, Regional Situation Report for Syria Crisis #16, 1–31 December 2013. Also, UN Women, *We Just Keep Silent: Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 2014
- <sup>9</sup> UNHCR, CPIE rapid needs assessment, July 2013. Also, Lebanon Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group Assessment, January – February 2013
- <sup>10</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF & WFP, Joint Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Egypt, November 2012. Also see Save the Children, Preliminary Findings on Protection Challenges and SGBV Trends among Refugee Communities in Egypt
- <sup>11</sup> UNHCR, Regional Response Plan 2014
- <sup>12</sup> World Health Organization, Adolescent Pregnancy, Fact Sheet 364, 2012
- <sup>13</sup> International Center for Research on Women, Child marriage facts and figures, webpage, <http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>
- <sup>14</sup> UNHCR, *Woman Alone: The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women*, 2014
- <sup>15</sup> These conditions include that the groom is “appropriate in terms of religion and wealth”, including that they can pay the alimony and dowry; that all involved consent to the marriage, including the child and their guardian; that the marriage is in the child’s interest and provides economic, safety or social benefits; that the age difference is “appropriate” and that the marriage will not be a reason for discontinuing the child’s education (Inter-Agency Standard Operating Procedures for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection, Jordan 2014). Jordanian Personal Status Law #36, 2010, Article 35/c does outline exceptional cases in which marriage under 15 is allowed, but in general shari’a judges do not authorise marriage of children under 15.
- <sup>16</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014
- <sup>17</sup> War Child Holland, Syria Child Rights Situation Analysis, p42 <http://watchlist.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/War-Child-Holland-Syria-Child-Rights-Situation-Analysis.pdf>
- <sup>18</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014
- <sup>19</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, in section on focus group discussions for AMANI campaign
- <sup>20</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, in section on focus group discussions for AMANI campaign
- <sup>21</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014
- <sup>22</sup> Only 1% of Syrian married girls were working in 2012, while only 3% of Syrian girls married unemployed men (UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 19).
- <sup>23</sup> Conducted as part of developing AMANI campaign and during implementation of sessions on AMANI campaign on early marriage
- <sup>24</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 8
- <sup>25</sup> UNHCR, Regional Response Plan 2014
- <sup>26</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 9
- <sup>27</sup> Respondents in focus group discussions in the UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 34
- <sup>28</sup> Focus group discussions during preparation of Amani campaign, Za’atari camp 2014
- <sup>29</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 9
- <sup>30</sup> In 2012, of all Syrian girls who married between the ages of 15 and 17, 16.2% married men who were 15 or more years older than them, compared with 6.3% for Palestinian girls and 7.0% for Jordanian girls.
- <sup>31</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 27
- <sup>32</sup> International Center for Research on Women, *New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage: A global analysis of factors and programs*, 2007, p 10; Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group Jordan, *Findings from the Inter-Agency Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in the Za’atari Refugee Camp*, July 2013, p 29
- <sup>33</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014, p 10
- <sup>34</sup> Amani Campaign, Interagency child protection and gender based violence campaign, Jordan 2014 p 12, [data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=5569](http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=5569)
- <sup>35</sup> Interview conducted by Rosie Thompson, Save the Children, May 2014
- <sup>36</sup> UNICEF, Child marriage in Jordan, 2014
- <sup>37</sup> Focus group discussions conducted by Save the Children in Amman, Jordan, 2013
- <sup>38</sup> The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage
- <sup>39</sup> <http://www.irinnews.org/report/98118/born-into-crisis-unwanted-pregnancies-in-syria>
- <sup>40</sup> Observations from Save the Children’s work in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, 10 April 2013
- <sup>41</sup> Focus group discussion in Za’atari refugee camp during preparation of Amani campaign, January 2014
- <sup>42</sup> Interview conducted by Rosie Thompson, Save the Children, May 2014
- <sup>43</sup> Save the Children is a member of the Girls not Brides network
- <sup>44</sup> As of June 2014
- <sup>45</sup> Save the Children, *State of the World’s Mothers 2014*, p 9



# TOO YOUNG TO WED

## The growing problem of child marriage among Syrian girls in Jordan

War in Syria has killed more than 10,000 children. More than 1 million more have fled the country in fear, while millions more have been displaced inside Syria.

This briefing looks at a disturbing but less publicised impact of the crisis: the increase in the numbers of girls who have been forced to marry.

[savethechildren.org.uk](http://savethechildren.org.uk)



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