

## **Child marriage in the wake of conflict and emergencies**

### Facts

- An estimated 47 000 girls under 18 are at risk of child marriage everyday
- 1 in 3 girls drop out of secondary school due to child marriage globally.
- Humanitarian crisis increase the practice of child marriage. In wake of the Syrian conflict the number of child marriages doubled.
- The power of community mobilization: A body of evidence shows that understanding the complex drivers of child marriage and engaging the community, including faith based actors, are likely to contribute to lasting change.

Every two seconds a child gets married in the world. When a society affected by a humanitarian crisis - conflicts, epidemics or natural disasters – there is a significant increase in child marriages. In Bangladesh, flooding and other natural disasters have been key drivers of the harmful practice. According to Human rights watch one in three girls is married before the age of 15. The conflict in Syria is another example. In the wake of the crisis, the number of child marriages has doubled Syrian population in the , both in the country and in countries where they flee too. Recent statistics show that one in four Syrian refugee girl stands bride in Lebanon.

### **Girls more vulnerable than boys**

The reasons why a child is married off are several and complex. For a family that loses its security, income, or are forced to flee, it can be a way to survive economically to marry their daughters. As sexual violence increases in a humanitarian crisis, a family might make the judgment that the girl is safer if married. Despite parents' motives to wish to ensure the safety of their daughter, she is exposed to the risk of violence and abuse within the marriage. Regardless of the rationale for child marriage it is not a protective factor and all causes of child marriage are rooted in inequality. Although boys are married off in early age too it is a significantly larger proportion of girls that are affected.

### **A vicious circle of poverty**

Once girls are married, it infringes upon a range of their rights. Most child brides are burdened with responsibilities as wives and mothers with little support, resources, or life experience to meet these challenges. 1 in 3 girls drop out of secondary school due to child marriage globally. It also risks their health and lives. A child that is married has almost no ability to decide over their own body and their sexuality. 9 out of 10 teenage pregnancies occur within marriage. Maternal mortality is one of the leading causes of death for girls aged 15-19 years in low- and middle-income countries. It also has implications for their mental health. Suicide is now the leading cause of death for adolescent girls between 15-19 in the

world. Other harmful consequences may include exposure to HIV infection, violence in the home, and limited freedom to interact with their peers or to participate in civic and cultural activities in their communities. Child marriage occurs in all walks of life, but is most common among those who live in poverty. Poverty increases and equality decreases when girls do not get to decide over their lives, their bodies and their sexuality. It is a vicious circle. Poverty and humanitarian crises thus leads not only to more child marriages, they in turn lead to deeper poverty and vulnerability.

### **Reducing harmful practices**

Child marriage violate the inalienable dignity and integrity of a person and cannot be accepted. Religious actors are in a position of power when it comes to such practices and is also therefore instrumental in ending the practice of child marriage. Stopping child marriage requires work in the short term: in emergency and humanitarian response women and girls needs have to be acknowledged and addressed. It also requires work in the long term for young people's rights and gender equality through working directly with girl's education and health, through legislation, as well as work on norms and attitudes in societies and communities. Programmes that help girls stay in school help reduce child marriage and men and boys are important allies thus engaging them in programmes that promote gender equality is crucial. Evidence highlights the fact that working with religious actors and faith based organisations offers multiple entry points to address prevention but also mitigate the impact on young married girls. Those that emphasize local solutions to local causes, including understanding the complex drivers of child marriage and engaging the community, including faith based actors, are most likely to contribute to lasting change.

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