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LEBANON
Country Brief

UNICEF Regional Study on Child Marriage
In the Middle East and North Africa

LEBANON
Regional Study
on Child Marriage
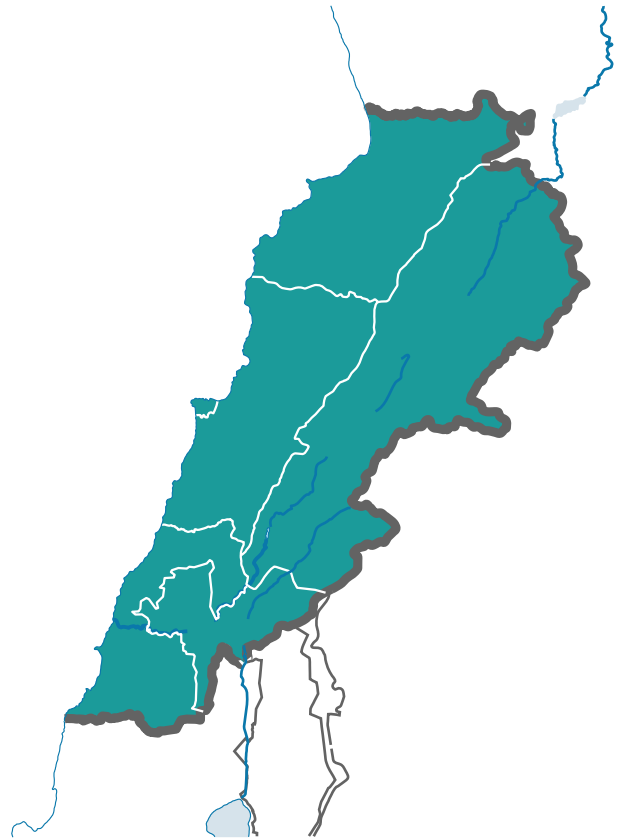
Key Recommendations

Girls' Voice and Agency

Maintain and strengthen safe spaces for women and girls.

Increase financial incentives for sending girls to school.

Empower girls through life skills, psychosocial support, economic strengthening, and access to education and health.

Build on social, health and economic assets of girls to help them reach their full potential.

Engage girls as advocates for girls' rights and in communication of risks associated with child marriage. amongst their peers and in their communities.

Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours

Implement holistic community programming using UNICEF Communication for Development approaches.

Scale-up the engagement of receptive religious leaders through dialogue and awareness workshops.

Service Delivery

Increase funding to NGOs and Government of Lebanon for holistic community programming.

Employ people from the targeted community to increase the cultural and contextual sensitivity of interventions.

Legal Context

Coordinate advocacy efforts to end child marriage.

Develop a national strategy to end child marriage in Lebanon.

Evidence Generation

Increase research cooperation and collaboration.

Support evaluation of current prevention programming.

Establish strong M&E systems using UNICEF's global monitoring framework, Monitoring Results for Equity Systems (MoRES), to monitor child marriage programme activities.

POLITICAL & ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Due to ongoing political instability in the MENA region, Lebanon has become a central hub for Syrian and Palestinian refugees fleeing violence. As of December 2016, over 1 million Syrian refugees were registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon, 52.5 per cent of whom are women and girls, over half of those displaced under the age of 18.[1] Lebanon also plays host to several other refugee communities, including Palestinian refugees from Syria, and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon. The influx of refugees has strained the country's infrastructure and public finances, which at the same time, has generated a number of restrictions for those in the refugee community. Obtaining civil documentation is difficult due to bureaucratic requirements that refugees report being unable to fulfil,[2] leaving many refugees in a precarious legal position, with the majority of them (60 per cent) without legal status as of August 2016.[3]

December 2016:

over 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon

52.5 % are women and girls, over half of those displaced are under the age of 18.

52.5%   <18
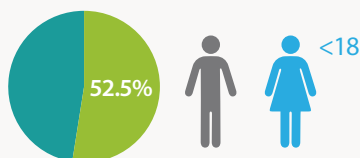
Source: UNHCR in Lebanon

In the absence of legal status, refugees have become vulnerable civilians with restricted freedom of movement and limited access to safety and critical services such as healthcare, education and employment opportunities.[4] This refugee influx has widened income inequality in the country.[5]

Whilst GDP grew from 1.3 per cent in 2015 to 1.8 per cent in 2016 due to improving real estate and tourism sectors, Lebanese citizens still struggle with unemployment – approximately 300,000 citizens are unemployed, most of whom are unskilled youth.

Syrian refugee influx in Lebanon

Political challenges   Economic challenges   Security challenges   Decreasing job opportunities

300,000 Lebanese citizens are unemployed

Although Lebanon is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), much remains to be done in the country to fulfil the Conventions' responsibilities.

Whilst the adoption of Law 293 in 2014 legislated new mechanisms to address family violence, the law contains several shortcomings, including neglecting to specifically protect women, failing to criminalize marital rape, and offering only limited child custody protections.[6] Additionally, whilst there is not a comprehensive child protection code in Lebanon, Law No. 422 of 2002, the 'Protection of at-Risk Children or Children Violating the Law', extends some protection to children victims of violence. A law which, despite its efforts, still has many loopholes. Despite the provisions of Law No. 422 and 293, many children seeking asylum are still at risk of violence and exploitation.

The Lebanon Crises Response Plan 2017-2020 (LCRP) is intended to directly address some of these issues for both refugees and Lebanese citizens.

In coordination with the Government of Lebanon, the LCRP aims to strengthen "existing national systems to address the immediate needs of all those affected by the Syrian crisis and its protracted nature, both those displaced from Syria, and Lebanese communities."[7] In order to ensure sustainability of these planned interventions, all activities will be aligned with national plans, such as the National Social Development Strategy, National Ten Year Strategy for Women in Lebanon, and the MoSA National Plan to Safeguard Children and Women in Lebanon.[8] The LCRP activities aim to strengthen national protection, child protection and GBV systems and the overall protection environment. This will include institutional support to relevant ministries, capacity building to service providers, and psychological, medical, legal, shelter, life skills and social empowerment interventions to GBV survivors and persons at risk, including for girls at risk of and affected by child marriage.[9]

> **Box 1: Quote from the LCRP 2017-2020**
>
> *"Protection activities will aim at strengthening existing national systems to address the immediate needs of all those affected by the Syrian crisis and its protracted nature, both those displaced from Syria and Lebanese communities"*

PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The prevalence of child marriage in Lebanon varies by nationality. According to a baseline survey conducted by UNICEF in 2015-2016, 6.0 per cent of Lebanese girls and women

aged 20 to 24 years were married before the age of 18, compared to 12.0 per cent of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL), 25.0 per cent of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), and 40.5 per cent of Syrian refugees.[10] Using the prevalence of child marriage amongst all women ages 20 to 49 years to estimate trends in child marriage over time, it is apparent that the prevalence of child marriage is decreasing amongst Lebanese women and Palestinian women from Lebanon, whilst it is increasing for Syrian women and Palestinian women from Syria. [11]

There is evidence to show that level of education and prevalence of child marriage are related in Lebanon. As shown in Figure 1, across all ethnic groups, women who have completed secondary or higher education are less likely to be married than those with intermediate, primary, or no education. [12]

Figure 1: Percentages of women age 20-49 years married before 18, by education, Lebanon, 2016

	Lebanese	Syrian	PRL	PRS
None	19%	30%	23%	25%
Primary	25%	34%	27%	31%
Intermediate	19%	37%	23%	27%
Secondary	11%	20%	10%	1%
Higher	3%	5%	2%	2%
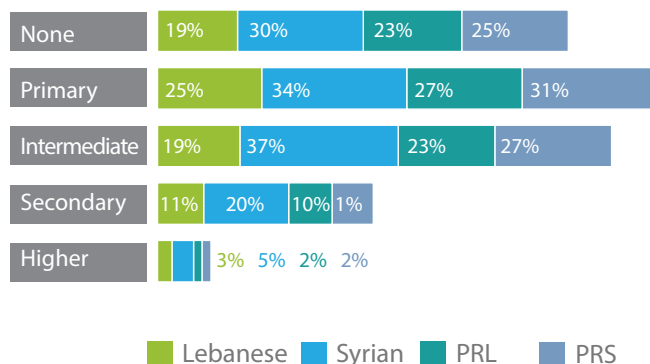
Table source: UNICEF Lebanon. (2016) Child Protection Baseline Survey 2016 - draft results paper. Shared by Nina Kokol, GBV/HPM Specialist/Emergencies via personal communication, August 17, 2016.
Note: (25%) for PRS with no education is based on 25-49 unweighted sample size

The relationship between child marriage and education in Lebanon is likely bidirectional. Previous studies have shown that higher levels of education negatively affect attitudes towards child marriage. For example, a study by Saint Joseph's University in Lebanon (USJ) found that 37.2 per cent of girls surveyed who had no education were totally against child marriage, compared to 45.0 per cent of those who had dropped out and 62.3 per cent of girls who were going to school.[13]

An additional study by USJ on early marriage rates in Lebanon found that education level also affected attitudes towards child marriage amongst adults. Amongst all surveyed residents of Lebanon, 18.9 per cent of those with no education were either in favour or moderately in favour of child marriage, compared to only 8.4 per cent of those with university-level education.[14] Thus, increased education may delay marriage by changing both girls' and adults' attitudes towards child marriage.

Girls who reported they were against child marriage by level of education

37.2% Who had **no education**

45.0% Who had dropped **out of school**

62.3% Who were **going to school**
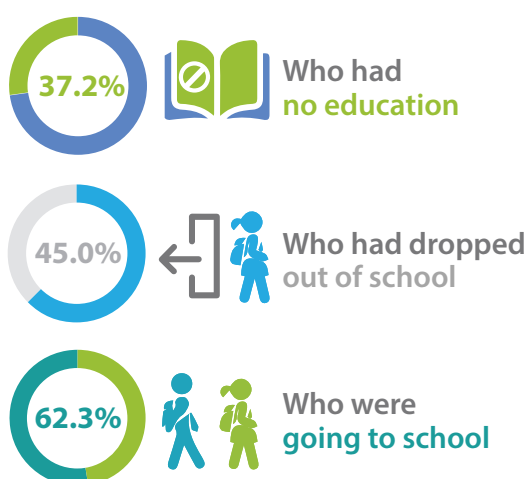
At the same time, child marriage may also prevent women from completing their education. For example, a study on child marriage amongst the Syrian refugee population in Bekaa found that, of girls not enrolled in school for the 2015-2016 school year, marriage or engagement was the cause in 20 per cent of cases.[15]

METHODOLOGY[16]

The data presented here was collected via key informant interviews with staff in in two governmental institutions, three UN organizations, and 17 non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Interviews were conducted in person from November 23 – December 6, 2016. All interviews were coded independently by two researchers, using NVivo 11 to distill key themes which were then organized through thematic content analysis. The findings were then aligned with the Global Programme's five outcomes (described below) and cross-checked with the local researchers to ensure that the data were consistent with their overall impressions during the field missions.

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews[17]

Government

| Ministry of Social Affairs |
| High Council on Childhood |

UN

| UNHCR | UNFPA | UNICEF |

NGOs

| Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World |
| l'Université Saint-Joseph |
| Danish Refugee Council |
| Himaya |
| Organisations of ABAAD |
| Arab Institute for Human Rights |
| International Rescue Committee |
| Lebanese Women's Democratic Gathering |
| Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) |
| Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation |
| Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Woman |
| Terre des hommes Lausanne. |

LIMITATIONS

This report presents the main findings strictly based on the interviews and one focus group conducted in Beirut, North Lebanon, and Mount Lebanon, and are therefore, limited to those categories of respondents. Considering the study's goals and focus on

scaling up promising programmatic approaches, the study focused on service providers, government officials, multilateral agencies, and donors – all of whom would be able to identify 'best practices' to end child marriage. As a result, the findings are only representative of these respondent's views of promising approaches to end child marriage in Lebanon.

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings are outlined in light of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme's five outcomes:[18]

- Adolescent girls atrisk of and affected by child marriage are better able to express and exercise their choices.

- Households demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours regarding gender equality and equity.

- Relevant sectoral systems deliver quality and cost-effective services to meet the needs of adolescent girls.

- National laws, policy framework and mechanisms to protect and promote adolescent girls' rights are in line with international standards and properly resourced.

- Governments support and promote the generation and use of robust data and evidence to inform programme design, track progress and document lessons.

1 Girls' Voice and Agency

Gendered barriers to mobility restrict girls' movement

As one NGO aptly put it, in order to access services, a girl's first obstacle is leaving her house. Once a girl reaches puberty, her mobility becomes increasingly restricted in many poor refugee and Lebanese communities. Once a young girl is married, the obstacles to leaving the house become even higher – as one NGO key informant said:

> 66
>
> *"They're seen differently, they're seen as having these responsibilities now that they're married even though they're young, they have different restrictions placed on them in terms of their movement because of the perception of honour and protection and community gossip."*
>
> 99

This restricted mobility is symptomatic of girls' lack of agency and voice within the home – one key informant noted that as young brides, "there are so many people deciding for them, where they can go, what they can do and what they can access."

Family and spousal control make accessing girls challenging

A girl's agency can be limited in these scenarios by both her family, her spouse, and her spouse's family. Several NGO key informants cited the difficulty in accessing at-risk and already married girls:

> 66
>
> *"It's very rare for them to go to community centres for service provision, most of the times they can't go alone, they need to be accompanied by their mother, they don't have the freedom of mobility (they don't have the financial means) and the freedom of decision making."*
>
> 99

Even NGOs who reach out to girls in their own homes face similar issues – "if we go to them and the girl is at risk of child marriage, she won't speak up in the presence of her parents." Some NGOs noted that the most effective way to provide services to the girl was to engage the whole family:

> "The whole family comes, and we divide them into groups to attend the needed sessions. This way the girl feels more comfortable coming with her family, and they don't have to pay to come."

Opportunity costs limit access to education for Syrian refugees

For families with limited resources, opportunity costs can often justify not sending their children to school. One key informant reported that even when families can access and afford education for multiple children,

> "…families will still feel that this is not their best option, they don't see the validity of education; they don't think the education in Lebanon will give them an added value."

When school is not seen as an avenue to future social and economic stability, refugee families may instead turn to child labour and child marriage. A recent study from the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) found a strong association between work and going to school amongst Syrian refugee children: 69.5 per cent who do not work go to school, whilst only 12.6 per cent who work also go to school.[19] Additionally, the report found that the school dropout rate is much higher for working students at 22.8 per cent, reflecting the temptation to drop out of school in order to increase time available for work.[20]

69.5%
Go to school

12.6%
Work and go to school

22.8%
School dropout rate for working students

Whilst the USJ study did not break child labour down by gender, several key informants indicated that for Syrian refugee families, child labour is the preferred alternative to school for boys, whilst child marriage is the preferred alternative for girls. As one NGO informant noted:

> "When teenage boys are exposed to school dropout, they will become workers, but for girls in the same age, school dropout will lead them to early marriage."

Girls' school dropout can lead to a perpetuating cycle – several key informants cited that the mother's education level has a huge impact on the decision to marry off a child. In fact, two reports recently found that amongst Syrian refugees in Lebanon, a mother's education was significantly associated with her children attending school,[21] corroborating a previous USJ study, which found that a mother's level of education was associated with child marriage decisions.[22] This suggests that limited education opportunities for at-risk girls not only increases their own risk of child marriage, but also that of their children to being married early.

Box 2: Quote from Université Saint-Joseph

> "It turns out education was the only variable that we can control when it comes to child marriage, especially the mother's education; the more educated the mother is, the less her children are at-risk of early marriage."

2 Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours

A key obstacle to ending child marriage is the culture, social norms, and traditions which perpetuate community support for the practice. The majority of institutions interviewed for this study identified the importance and difficulty of changing social norms at the household and community levels. In the Lebanese context, one key informant said that it is important to recognize that:

> *"[Child marriage] has multiple faces; it's probably not the same situation when we talk about Lebanese and Syrians, when we talk about one community compared to another, in terms of sexual and religious background."*

While this report frequently discusses child marriage as a sweeping issue across both the Lebanese and Syrian refugee populations, it is important to note that the exact norms and traditions can vary greatly both between and amongst those communities.

■ **Girls may lack awareness of the negative consequences of child marriage**

Several key informants discussed the effect that a community's social norms and traditions have on girls' own perceptions of child marriage. Their biggest concern seemed to be that at-risk girls lack awareness of the potential negative health, safety and socioeconomic impacts that child marriage can have on their lives. One government official noted that:

> *"marriage itself is related in the girl's mind to her honour; it will be her destiny no matter what and where."*

Relatedly, an NGO expert stated that the:

> *"symbolic violence that's been fed into the mind of girls, making it a given that she should find the right man who will make her life better."*

Marriage is thus viewed by many young girls as being both inescapable and beneficial, which, especially for Syrian girls who are refugees, can lead to the hope and expectation of early marriage.

■ **Conflict and instability exacerbate child marriage**

Lebanese government officials, UN officials, and NGO experts all noted that the trend of early marriage has grown exponentially as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees.

Many NGO key informants hypothesised that the financial instability experienced by Syrian refugees is a key driver behind the increasing rates of child marriage. When refugee families are uncertain of their financial and physical security, child marriage can increasingly be perceived as a way to secure a daughter's safety and financial future. Indeed, one NGO key informant noted that child marriage "is not seen as a negative thing by the [refugee] community – they see it as a way of securing the future of their daughter." Another key informant suggested that:

> *"The only way to make effective and sustainable change is to provide these families with what they need in order for them to stop using marriages of young girls as a way to secure their economical positions in the informal settlements."*

Key informants also explained that child marriage amongst Syrian refugees is extremely difficult to address because child marriage is a symptom of much more pervasive underlying issues unique to the refugee situation.

One UN official noted that:

> *"[Child marriage] is not an isolated issue, it's a mechanism to cope with a larger issue; without robust programming to address the underlining causes, it becomes very difficult to address early marriage directly."*

3   Service Delivery

■ **Restricted mobility limits access to at-risk and already married girls**

Accessing at-risk and already married girls is a frequently cited challenge by service providers. Most commonly, this difficulty centres around two factors:

■ Girls' restricted mobility.

■ Familial scepticism of the organization and its services.

For example, service providers noted that:

> *"it is very rare for girls to go to community centres for service provision, most of the times they can't go alone," and "when women approach us to get psycho or legal support, men do not like it, and they start questioning us, and our work," and "we can face challenges from religious parties that do not understand why do we intervene and why do we think we have a say in what's happening."*

Thus, in order to provide services to at-risk girls, several NGOs cited that they devised programming that engages the whole family or whole community:

> *"The challenge is having the time to reach these girls; it's not about identifying them, we know what is required to identify and find these girls, but if you have to engage the parents on several occasions, once a week for 3 weeks, before you can even get the girl to attend the sessions, the cost per beneficiary increases, and that's what we don't have."*

As noted in this quote, despite their apparent effectiveness in allowing service providers to access at-risk girls, these 'whole family' approaches are very expensive, which limits the number of families an organization can work with – an obstacle that respondents commonly noted with regard to these programmes' successes.

■ **Trust must be built in refugee communities**

In addition to devising 'whole family' approaches to programming, service providers also frequently evoked the importance of building a relationship and trust with the community as a whole and the specific families they serve. A key informant at an international NGO summarised this best:

> *"I think some of the challenges are getting the trust of the girls and their families so that they'll be able to participate, which takes time, and it helps if the organization is known and respected in the community... It's also about not thinking that you're going to meet with these families once and assume that they will feel comfortable when you drive by your bus up and pick up their daughters, they'll just let their daughters get on your bus, it just wouldn't happen like that, maybe you will have to take the girls and their parent to the centre where you'll provide the activities, help them understand, invite them in the first few activities."*

Another way to build trust within the community is to have community members involved in the implementation of activities – several key informants noted how their organizations are working with local community members: one NGO hired women from around the region to implement activities; another NGO conducting a study hired a woman field researcher from the community; another simply focused on delivering services with cultural and contextual sensitivity. Several NGO key informants commented that once trust is built within a part of the community, they rely on their good reputation to access at-risk girls. For example, one NGO remarked that:

> *"we have good credibility within the community, which helps us a lot not to face resistance, people have heard about us by "word of mouth," whilst another said that "we have a protection shield in the community; even if someone wants to attack our work, we have enough testimonials on our work in other areas, so they accept us."*

■ **Respondents are confident in their organizational capacity to address child marriage**

The majority of key informants from NGOs were satisfied with the work their organization was doing, and believed they were effectively addressing child marriage. Despite the many challenges, they noted in providing services to girls at-risk of child marriage, or who are already married, many organizations said that they were pleased with the effects of their outreach and participation levels. A quote from an international NGO sums up the general sentiment well:

> *"I think what we're doing is really solid work and I think what we provide right now is a good step forward in terms of what we're able to provide for married adolescents, to make sure they're having these information, life-skills… but then I'm not sure if we should be 100 per cent satisfied with what we're doing, because there is always more to do and things that can be improved."*

Only 2 of the 12 interviewed NGOs did not consider the services they offered to be effective at addressing some aspect of child marriage. However, the majority of organizations did identify the lack of financial resources as a key challenge to offering more comprehensive and expansive services to their communities.

4 Legal Context

■ **There is consensus that a national strategy is needed to address child marriage, but currently none has been approved**

There is currently no minimum age of marriage in Lebanon and no approved national plan to prevent child marriage.[23] However, since May 2015, there has been a consensus that a national strategy to address child marriage needs to be developed under the leadership of the High Council for Childhood. [24]

■ **Currently, religious law determines the minimum age of marriage**

Marriages are typically governed by individual religious groups who have personal status laws over marriage decisions. Thus, religious law determines the age of marriage and varies depending on religion and denomination. According to the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), both boys and girls can marry under the age of 18 across all religious groups.[25] Amongst Sunni and Shiite communities, marriage is permissible for girls as young as 9 years old, although it is no longer customary to marry this young. [26] Amongst other religious

communities, a marriage can be licensed as young as 15 amongst Greek Orthodox and the Assyrian Church of the East, and as young as 14 amongst Druze, Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and Evangelical communities in Lebanon. [27]

Legality perpetuates child marriage

When child marriage is legal in a country, it is difficult to end the practice. As one UN official noted, "the law translates what the community thinks is acceptable." This raises the question: is it best to change the law and hope that social norms will follow, or should the law follow the social norms? The majority of key informants asserted that in order to end child marriage in Lebanon, the legal age of marriage first had to be established at 18. However, international experience shows that introducing marriage laws before communities are ready may lead to limited enforcement of the law through illegal marriages and increased vulnerability of at-risk and already-married girls. [28]

Thus, advocacy efforts and community norm change programmes should work in tandem to end child marriage both de jure and de facto. However, there was a strong consensus across key informants that until Lebanese leaders made child marriage illegal, efforts to end the practice would only make limited progress.

> **Box 3: Quote from UN Official**
>
> *"The law translates what the community thinks is acceptable."*

National efforts to end child marriage are ongoing

In order to increase the pressure on the government, several organizations have submitted draft laws to raise the minimum age of marriage in Lebanon over the years. For instance, the draft law submitted by MP Mokhaiber and the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) in 2014 required the approval of a juvenile court judge to marry minors under age 18, to ensure that minors were not being coerced into marriages. The proposed law required that the judge hear the minor before a marriage is allowed. It is also proposed that the clergy who contracted marriages and parents who facilitated them are penalized. However, other organizations did not agree with certain aspects of the proposal, and submitted counter proposals – both Kafa and the Lebanese Women's Democratic Gathering submitted their own draft laws.

Several key informants noted that this process would have been more effective if all the concerned organizations had worked together on creating a unified draft law. In addition to presenting one unified front, a national advocacy group could have been formed between different backgrounds and institutions to lobby for the ratification of that unified draft law by the parliament.

Coordination amongst women's organizations does appear to be increasing - in May of 2016, the Higher Council for Children, the NCLW, the Organizations of ABAAD, the Arab Institute for Human Rights—Lebanon Office and UNICEF hosted the first consultative meeting on child marriage in Lebanon. Experts and practitioners reviewed existing legislation and regulations pertaining to child marriage, and provided recommendations for legal revisions, health care service delivery, capacity building amongst communities, advocacy, and lobbying.[29] Additionally, the National Commission for Lebanese Women, a state body on women's rights, and the Lebanese Women's Democratic Gathering recently drafted legislation that would increase the age of marriage amongst all religious groups. [30] This bill was introduced to the Lebanese Parliament in March 2017.[31]

5 Evidence Generation

Exploratory studies on child marriage are underway

Government officials, NGO experts, and UN officials have become increasingly concerned with rising rates of child marriage in Lebanon in recent years. To better understand the increasing prevalence, several organizations have conducted exploratory studies to:

- Understand the reality behind the incidence of early marriage in the Lebanese community.

- Estimate the volume of the targeted population.

- Recognize the economic and cultural traits of the communities in which child marriage is highly prevalent.

For example, the Organisation of ABAAD and Queens University are collaborating on a study using a new interactive methodology that has not been used before, called 'Sense Maker', which tries to show the inter-linkage between socio-economic factors and other factors. As ABAAD noted:

> *"It's easy for us to just blame it on poverty or just blame it on culture but it would be more interesting to see how these are inter-linked."*

The first phase of data collection is complete, with over 1,300 survey responses collected from women, girls, men and boys. ABAAD reported that they are now in the data analysis phase.

Lack of coordination perpetuates evidence gaps

Despite many studies that focus on the issues of child marriage in Lebanon, many key informants noted that large gaps exist in the evidence on child marriage in Lebanon.

Key informants pointed to of the need for efficient coordination and collaboration between operating organizations in Lebanon as obstacles to generating and sharing evidence. Greater collaboration amongst institutions will be needed to close evidence gaps and avoid duplication of research efforts in Lebanon.

PROMISING APPROACHES IDENTIFIED BY KEY INFORMANTS

The key informants identified several promising approaches to help reduce child marriage in Lebanon. These include:

Incentivizing participation in education and social programming

Due to economic hardship, social norms, and girl's limited agency, it can often be difficult for organizations to engage at-risk and already married girls. As an NGO key informant noted:

> *"You need to acknowledge the primary decision makers in their life, which are normally the caregivers, and that can be difficult...so what we are doing is to incentivize their participation, whether though a hot meal or insuring all expenses throughout their participation are covered."*

Incentives can range from covering transportation costs, to compensating for a lost day of work, to cash for participation, to hot meals, etc. It can also be through creating a 'one stop shop', where multiple health and education needs of the family can be addressed.

In addition to NGOs using this method, UNICEF is currently running an unconditional cash transfer pilot programme to help children attend public primary school in Mount Lebanon and in Akkar, areas with large amounts of Syrian refugees. Their plan is to incentivise families to keep the girls at school instead of marrying them by providing cash assistance for school attendance. As part of the LCRP 2017-2020 similar programmes are planned, although not specifically targeted to at-risk or already married girls. For

example, UNICEF is implementing a Back-to-School initiative, which, amongst other things, will help to subsidise enrolment fees, books and stationary, and transportation to school.[32] It will also pilot a cash transfer programme to provide additional support to poor families, and will be scaled up if proven effective.

Incentivising participation has proven effective in other contexts, and has been identified as a promising approach to addressing child marriage in the Lebanese context. UNICEF's unconditional cash transfer pilot and Back-to-School initiatives will provide information on effectiveness in the near future.

Holistic community engagement

NGO, government, and UN officials commonly noted that child marriage has to be addressed at the community level. As one UN official put it, "child marriage is a community issue, so we try to work on the community level to try to prevent it." The majority of key informants identified community engagement as a best practice in addressing child marriage.

Community engagement was typically envisaged in two different ways:

- As a way to gain the trust and buy-in of the community and families.

- As a way to change community and household norms.

Gaining community trust to better provide services to at-risk and already married girls

As part of holistic community engagement, many key informants noted that in order to assist at-risk and already married girls who have low agency and voice, it is necessary to build a relationship and trust with family and community members. If community leaders and families do not trust an organization, addressing child marriage in the community can be very difficult. NGOs noted many different ways to gain the trust of the communities. One reported that they conduct activities within small communities rather than at centres outside the community:

> "The fact that we're going and doing them in small communities, is somehow perceived as being safer for the girls, its more acceptable and more flexible to them because it's less time it doesn't involve going to the centre and coming back, there is really a value in having them community based."

Another NGO key informant said their organization was trusted within the community because:

> "We are not only a women's protection organization, we're an organization that also does development work. That puts us in a privileged position whereby the community is not perceiving us only as a women's organization – they need to see that we're doing benefits the whole community, not just the women."

Another NGO took a longer-term, concerted effort to build trust:

> "Gaining the trust and confidence of these populations is something that we are slowly doing, because of our presence and because of the fact that we are there, they're seeing the activities and understanding them."

The UN also relies on community based protection programming to build trust and legitimacy within the community:

> "It's a lot more effective to engage a wide variety of community members, for example young women, youth, adolescents, men, boys…to go and inform other community members about the risk of early marriage; it's more effective when it comes from refugees themselves than from external humanitarian activists who are often seen as not understanding the cultural context."

These three approaches to building trust and legitimacy in the community underline the variety of ways organizations can engage in this best practice. As evidenced by these quotes, many key informants considered trust-building an essential first step in providing services to at-risk and already-married girls.

■ Changing community norms around child marriage

Building trust and relationships with family and community members is a predecessor to changing community norms. The majority of key informants identified social norms and culture as a key driver of child marriage. Respondents also stressed how difficult it is to change those social norms, both at the household and community levels. Despite this inherent difficulty, engaging with community leaders and members through awareness campaigns and dialogue was identified as a promising approach to changing these norms by NGO, UN, and government officials. One international NGO takes a very deliberate approach by:

> "Particularly looking at the different community structures that are in place…thinking who are the people who have power within that community who could potentially have a role in protecting and changing, supporting prevention in regards to early marriage."

Some organizations have focused their efforts on engaging with local religious leaders due to their wide influence within poorer communities. Key informants cited the "significant impact" that religious leaders can have on the social norms within communities. Through dialogue and awareness workshops, organizations are encouraging religious leaders to challenge and address social norms surrounding child marriage. Whilst several organizations highlighted their successful experiences engaging religious leaders to change community norms around child marriage, others reported experiencing some resistance from religious leaders. Thus, whilst this is an innovative method that shows promise, careful evaluation of these programmes is needed, as there can be no certainty of what messages the community is receiving from religious leaders about child marriage. Many religious leaders in Lebanon believe that child marriage can be a good option for girls in difficult situations, and careful selection and training of religious leaders will be needed to ensure that they are implementing a child protection approach.

Other organizations have gone beyond engaging communities for awareness raising and social norms change, to directly recruiting the community into child marriage prevention efforts. For example, Kafa runs community committees devoted to detecting and intervening in cases of child marriage. They reported great success with these committees, especially in informal settlements refugee camps, citing them as being "efficient and able to make an impact." Kafa is planning to increase the number of community committees this year because of their apparent success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations emerging from this study are grouped under the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme's five outcomes:

Girls' Voice & Agency

■ Maintain and strengthen safe spaces for women and girls

Four NGO key informants identified the need for more safe spaces for women and girls in Lebanon. The UNFPA defines safe spaces as "a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe."[33] Safe spaces can be instrumental in building a girl's agency and voice, giving them the opportunity to meet other girls in similar situations, and creating a peer support network.[34]

Safe spaces also offer services for mothers, an important provision as there is evidence that empowered mothers can help delay the age of marriage of their daughters. For example, one safe spaces model in Lebanon works through national Listening and Counselling Centres, and offers activities for children whilst mothers participate in their own activities.[35]

While there is already a large network of both mobile and static safe spaces in Lebanon for women and girls, implementers should focus on assessing the adequacy and relevance of offered activities for all the cohorts and ensure linkages with other key sectors for women's and girls' empowerment. Specific attention should be on paid to ensuring effective spaces and services for girls at immediate risk of child marriage, and for girls recently married.

▪ Increase financial incentives for sending girls to school

A 2016 systematic review of interventions to prevent child marriage in low and middle income countries found that cash-transfer programmes and programmes to decrease school-associated costs "had a significant impact on decreasing the rate of child marriage or increasing age at marriage in the intervention group."[36] Whilst this systematic review did not include any studies from the MENA region, comparable programmes are currently being piloted under the LCRP 2017-2020 strategy and by UNICEF – the results should be shared widely, and programmes should be scaled up if proven to be effective in the Lebanese and Syrian refugee context.

It should be noted that although cash incentives are a promising stop-gap measure to keeping girls in school and delaying age of marriage, these programmes may be unsustainable in terms of cost, and should be coupled with community norm-changing interventions.[37] Girls' continued school attendance and education is a key factor in preventing child marriage, and should be incentivized appropriately.

In addition to these recommendations, the UNICEF Lebanon Country Office staff identified the following key recommendations:

▪ Empower girls through life skills, psychosocial support, economic strengthening, and access to education and health.

▪ Build on social, health and economic assets of girls to help them reach their full potential.

▪ Engage girls as advocates for girls' rights and in communication of risks associated with child marriage amongst their peers and in their communities.

Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours

▪ Implement holistic community programming

Whether it takes the form of an awareness campaign, health services, or dialogue workshops, child marriage programming is more likely to be successful when it is engaging a variety of community actors. Because girls have limited voice and agency, only engaging with girls on child marriage issues will have limited efficacy – it is imperative to engage their families and community leaders if norms around child marriage are to change. Any behaviour change strategy intended to address the norms around child marriage needs to mobilize the entire community. Programmes should use UNICEF's Communication for Development (C4D) strategies to work with both adults and children in the community to identify problems, propose solutions and act upon them.

As discussed earlier, key informants reported that child marriage practice amongst Syrian refugees is

perpetuated by the perception of child marriage as protecting girls from financial and physical instability. To address this, C4D strategies should be used to support public education programmes that raise awareness of the negative consequences of child marriage on a girl's health and that of her children, in order to reinforce the perceived duties of parents and communities to protect at-risk girls.

Scale-up the engagement of receptive religious leaders

Like targeting programming to the entire community, it can be beneficial to specifically connect with local religious leaders. Making religious leaders aware of the consequences of child marriage, and supporting them to become vocal advocates can have a powerful impact on the way community members view child marriage. As a recent report by PLAN noted:

> *"By speaking out against child marriage and identifying and championing community led strategies for ending the practice, [religious leaders] can create environments where parents who decide not to marry their daughters early are supported."* [38]

This is already being done in Lebanon, and where interventions have shown to be successful, they should be scaled-up appropriately. However, caution must be exercised to ensure that religious leaders are promoting evidence-based messages and not reinforcing harmful ideas. Therefore, this type of intervention requires careful selection of receptive religious leaders and large amounts of training and oversight.

Service Delivery

Ensure sustainable services through

long-term funding and capacity building of local organizations

The majority of service providers identified lack of continuous and reliable financial resources as a key challenge to offering more comprehensive and sustainable services to their communities. Specifically, organizations that attempt a holistic community and family approach to their programming face serious financial limitations due to the expansive and costly nature of implementing programming for the whole community. Several NGOs noted that they must limit the number of cases they can take on because providing holistic family programming to both at-risk and already married girls quickly becomes very expensive. To address this, funding and organizational support should be increased, with the goal of building the capacity of NGOs and government to deliver sustainable programming.

Employ people from the targeted community to increase the cultural and contextual sensitivity of interventions

Employing people from the community can increase the cultural and contextual sensitivity of an organization's work. Many NGOs noted their success, and the increased access they had to young girls when they hired from within the communities in which they were working. Indeed, one UN key informant remarked that programmes are "a lot more effective when it comes from refugees themselves rather than from external humanitarian activists who are often seen as not understanding the cultural context."

Legal Context

Coordinate advocacy efforts to end child marriage

Lack of coordination and collaboration amongst organizations advocating to end child marriage in Lebanon was a serious concern cited by many key informants. Although it does seem to be improving, further strategising and coordination of resources is needed in order to create a unified draft law setting the legal age for marriage at 18. A national advocacy group should be formed to lobby for the adoption of the unified draft law introduced to the Parliament in March 2017.

■ **Develop a national strategy to end child marriage in Lebanon**

As mentioned previously, since May 2015 there has been a consensus that a national strategy to address child marriage needs to be developed under the leadership of the High Council for Childhood in Lebanon. As of June 2017, efforts are currently underway to begin developing the national strategy and action plan. Domestic and international stakeholders need to be engaged at an early stage to provide input on the strategy to ensure their buy-in and support of the plan. The national strategy should be holistic and address the five focus areas of the UNICEF/UNFPA Global Programme on child marriage. Additionally, whilst changing laws is important, the plan should also look at potential policies that can effectively address child marriage in Lebanon.

Evidence Generation

■ **Increase research cooperation and collaboration**

The Lebanese government and international donors need to support and promote the generation and use of robust data and evidence. Although there is some recent statistical data gathered by different organizations, such as UNICEF/MoSA's 2016 Baseline Survey, there remains a large gap in the evidence. Greater collaboration amongst institutions will be needed to close this evidence gap in Lebanon.

■ **Support evaluation of current prevention programming**

Despite the many programmes that address child marriage under the auspices of gender equality, child protection and/or gender-based violence, very few have conducted studies to evaluate the efficacy of their interventions. This has severely limited knowledge of the effectiveness and sustainability of various programmatic approaches to ending child marriage in Lebanon. Ensuring that pilot programmes like UNICEF's unconditional cash transfers to help children attend public primary schools, and Back-to-School initiatives have sufficient funding and resources to adequately evaluate their programmes should be a priority. This will build the evidence base for child marriage prevention in Lebanon, and will allow practitioners to make appropriate adjustments before scaling up these interventions.

■ **Develop an M&E framework and tools**

Future monitoring and evaluation efforts should refer to the lessons learned and best practices emerging from the level 3 monitoring approach (L3M) pilot for child marriage activities in Bangladesh. This pilot was the first attempt to use UNICEF's global monitoring framework, Monitoring Results for Equity Systems (MoRES), to monitor child marriage programme activities. The L3M monitored two of UNICEF's child marriage activities in Bangladesh – adolescent stipends and conditional cash transfers – to assess their effectiveness in addressing social norms, financial access, and legislation/policy. The results from this pilot document the successes and challenges in changing social norms through multifaceted community based programming, and could form the basis for an improved monitoring framework of child marriage activities in Lebanon.

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16.   ICRW would like to thank the valuable contribution of Ranim Rachid Osman who conducted all the interviews and translated them from Arabic into English. Ranim Rachid Osman is an Attorney-at-law in Beirut, Lebanon.

17.   The work of very few organizations is highlighted in this brief as it was not possible for ICRW to meet with all of the organizations working on child marriage in Lebanon. ICRW and UNICEF are conscious that this brief does not reflect all the good practices in child marriage programming taking place in Lebanon.

18.   As part of their mandate to combat child marriage and in line with the Gender Action Pan 2017, UNICEF has joined efforts with UNFPA through the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, a new multi-country initiative that will help protect the rights of millions of the world's most vulnerable girls. This Global Programme focuses on proven strategies, including increasing girls' access to education and health care services, educating parents and communities on the dangers of child marriage, increasing economic support to families, and strengthening and enforcing laws that establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage. The programme also emphasizes the importance of using robust data to inform policies related to adolescent girls.

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