PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS: THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME APPROACH

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)–United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the Global Programme) works with diverse partners to advocate for and support practical actions to end child marriage and promote gender equality and the rights of adolescent girls. This factsheet presents the Global Programme's experiences in and plans for addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings in collaboration with development and humanitarian partners.

This factsheet is based largely on the discussions and presentations from a consultation on child marriage in humanitarian settings organized by the Global Programme in Jordan in February 2020. In the month after the consultation, the world was confronted with a massive challenge in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has strained individual and institutional capacities and resilience everywhere. The ruptures in basic services and entitlements – health, education, safety, livelihoods, food and nutrition – as a result of the pandemic have brought elevated risks of child marriage and unions in their wake. The pandemic underscores the importance of the work of the Global Programme, its partners and various other actors in building the resilience of girls, families and communities by promoting the understanding of adolescents' rights and investing in systems and services.

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THE PROBLEM

Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality, discriminatory institutions and gender and social norms, and a lack of opportunities for adolescent girls and their families. During humanitarian crises, these drivers are often exacerbated, usually increasing the prevalence of child marriage.[1]

Rises in child marriage in humanitarian settings are generally attributable to increased levels of insecurity and violence (including gender-based violence [GBV]), school closures and lack of education opportunities, breakdowns in social and health services (including contraceptive services), increased poverty and a decline in livelihood opportunities, and disruptions of social support networks. Families may force their daughters into child marriage as a negative coping strategy, to reduce the economic burden on the household and/or to gain bride wealth, to avoid the stigma of pregnancy outside marriage, and to protect girls because of concerns about their safety and about family honour.

KEY POINTS ON CHILD MARRIAGE PROGRAMMING IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS:

- Women and adolescent girls' issues are more visible on the agenda of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus than ever before.
- Child marriage programming in humanitarian settings requires a multi-sectoral response, just as it does in development settings.
- Strategic approaches to address child marriage holistically are emerging – particularly in the protection and GBV clusters.
- Programmes have to be adapted to context. Even though drivers are similar, their relative importance and the pathways through which they drive child marriage differ by context.
- Programmes must work through and strengthen existing structures (government, development programmes, humanitarian systems) rather than creating parallel systems.
- Partnerships have to be strengthened between GBV and child protection,[9] between protection and other clusters like health, education and social protection, across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, and between policy, practice and research.

KEY CONCEPTS

Humanitarian settings include natural disasters, conflict, and complex political emergencies, whether slow or rapid onset. Humanitarian settings include countries in any phase of the emergency or recovery process.[2]

The **humanitarian–development–peace nexus** refers to the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actors. The nexus approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantages of each sector to reduce need, risk and vulnerability.[3]

Resilience is the ability of an individual, a community or a country to cope with, adapt to and recover quickly from the impact of a disaster, violence or conflict. Resilience is relevant at all stages of a disaster, and includes positive transformation that strengthens the ability of current and future generations to meet their needs and withstand crises.[4]

Preparedness includes measures taken in advance of a crisis to ensure an effective response to the impact of hazards, including issuing timely and effective early warnings and the temporarily evacuating people and property from threatened locations.[5]

Primary prevention addresses the root causes of child protection risks among the population (or a subset of it) to reduce the likelihood of abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence against children. **Secondary prevention** addresses a specific source of threat and/or the vulnerabilities of a child who is identified as being at particularly high risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence because of characteristics of the child, family and/or environment. **Tertiary prevention** reduces the longer-term impact of harm and reduces the chance of recurring harm to a child who has already suffered abuse, neglect, exploitation or violence.[6]

Humanitarian response is one dimension of humanitarian action. It focuses on the provision of services and public assistance during or immediately after a specific emergency in order to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety, maintain human dignity and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected. It should be governed by the key humanitarian principles.[7]

The **Cluster Approach** is used for coordinating in non-refugee humanitarian emergencies. Humanitarian organizations have agreed to lead certain clusters at global level, and have defined a cluster structure for non-refugee humanitarian responses at country level. At country level, cluster leadership should ideally mirror global arrangements, and clusters are often co-led with government and/or co-chaired with non-governmental organization partners. The cluster system spreads accountability for the delivery of services across different cluster lead agencies, and as a result no single agency is accountable for the entire response. In each country situation, overall accountability for coordination and delivery rests with the humanitarian coordinator.[8]

PROGRAMMING APPROACHES AND EXPERIENCES

The following sections present the key areas of interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings.

1 Evidence and data generation

There is a **growing body of evidence** and research on the prevalence, drivers and consequences of child marriage in humanitarian settings. In addition, humanitarian agencies have produced case studies of promising practices. Research in the Global Programme includes:

- Multi-country studies in the Arab states and South Asia regions
- A regional compilation of data and evidence and piloting of guidance on child marriage programming in humanitarian contexts in the East and Southern Africa region
- A secondary analysis of administrative and survey data to generate more evidence on trends and prevalence of child marriage in both development and humanitarian settings in Mozambique
- Documentation of lessons learned from Yemen

> **Evidence on child marriage in humanitarian settings has the potential to drive effective programming and policy to prevent child marriage and mitigate its impacts.**

The need to advance research to the next level: Evidence on child marriage in humanitarian settings has the potential to drive effective programming and policy to prevent child marriage and mitigate its impacts. Building on the evidence on prevalence, drivers and consequences, there is an opportunity to improve the evidence base on promising practices in prevention and mitigation, including on how to deliver interventions in adverse circumstances. Areas for research that require funding and attention include:

- Understanding the differences between child marriage in climate-related emergencies versus conflict settings, among internally displaced people versus others, and among long-term refugees versus refugees, and more work on married, divorced and widowed girls, and on child grooms
- Evaluating programmatic approaches to addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings
- Mapping programmatic gaps
- Integrating child marriage measures into rapid assessments

2 Preparedness, prevention and resilience building

Preparedness is essential to ending child marriage in humanitarian settings, using the following strategies:

- Ensure that child marriage as well as adolescent girls' risks and entitlements are included in humanitarian response plans.
- Build the capacity of humanitarian–development–peace-building staff on evidence-informed interventions to end child marriage.
- Advocate with donors and national governments to finance and implement programmes that uphold girls' basic entitlements and prevent child marriage.

Prevention and resilience building: Adolescent girls are usually more vulnerable during and after conflict, displacement or natural disasters. Resilience building is critical to reduce the likelihood that girls and their families resort to child marriage. At the individual level, this includes education and health services, life skills and comprehensive sexuality education, and psychosocial support. At the community level, resilience building requires social protection for families.

Resilience building promotes the ownership of communities and national and local authorities from crisis-affected areas and affected communities to contribute with solutions and overcome the challenges, in partnership with humanitarian–development–peace actors.[10]

MOZAMBIQUE:

Cyclone Idai (March 2019) caused catastrophic damage and a humanitarian crisis in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. In response to the crisis, UNFPA in Mozambique implemented Women-Friendly Spaces, offered as women-only spaces, where all women and girls living in accommodation centres could feel physically and emotionally secure to talk about sexual and reproductive health and rights and GBV. Also provided were life-saving sexual and reproductive health interventions such as temporary clinics offering maternity and dignity kits, and maternal health nurses and community health youth volunteers deployed to raise awareness about the prevention of GBV, pregnancy and harmful practices. The response also included training religious leaders and activists to sensitize their communities on the importance of preventing GBV and harmful practices.

BANGLADESH:

UNFPA and UNICEF work to address child marriage in two different types of emergency situation in Bangladesh: during the floods and in Rohingya refugee camps. Programmatic responses supporting the cluster response include:

- Girl Shine: life skills training is provided for adolescent girls in refugee camps and host communities.
- Disaster risk reduction skills: the initiative assesses and explores adolescent girls' vulnerabilities associated with disaster, and supports them to understand their rights and the role they could play in their communities in a disaster.
- Champions of Change: adolescent boys, 10–19 years of age, living in refugee and host communities, receive 20 life skills sessions as part of the Champions of Change curriculum.
- Multi-purpose child and adolescent centres: social hubs and clubs are established in refugee camps and affected host communities, where boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 18 are enrolled in life skills activities and vocational training for resilience and empowerment.
- Engagement of religious and community leaders: stakeholders are engaged on gender issues, GBV prevention, and risk mitigation to end child marriage and other harmful practices.
- Women Friendly Spaces and Women Led Community Centres: in refugee camps and host communities, separate group sessions are held with women and girls on gender, GBV and the consequences of child marriage, and there are adolescent sexual and reproductive health activities. Participants also receive details of GBV response services, awareness raising messages on ending child marriage, and empowerment through the skills development programme.

Lessons learned from programming in the floods:

- Even though adolescent girls themselves may have awareness, they lack agency and voice within their communities. It must be ensured that adolescent volunteers are not exposed to greater risks.
- The security of women and girls in flood shelters is a concern and needs to be prioritized.
- The needs of adolescents are not prioritized by disaster risk reduction committees before and during the disaster response. Capacity development is needed by sub-national-level disaster risk reduction committee members to address the needs of adolescents during disasters.

Lessons learned in Rohingya camps and host communities:

- Engaging community stakeholders (especially religious leaders) from the beginning of programme design and implementation is critical.
- Finding suitable spaces for adolescent sessions within Rohingya camps is a challenge due to space constraints.
- Sessions on child marriage at the Women Friendly Spaces should be organized not only separately for women and girls, but also together. Also engage more adolescent girls in skills-building sessions at the Women Led Community Centres.
- The drop-out rate of adolescent girls from programmes is high due to child marriage, difficulties obtaining permission from parents and caregivers, and the large distance between homes and the location of group sessions.

3 Programming responses during emergencies and protracted crises

Child marriage is a cross-cutting issue that requires a multi-sectoral approach and coordinated responses in humanitarian and development settings. This requires linkages with child protection, GBV, health, education and social protection.

In humanitarian settings, UNFPA supports lifesaving interventions for adolescent girls and young women, primarily the prevention and management of the consequences of sexual violence, reduction of HIV transmission, and the prevention of maternal and newborn death and illness. These interventions are sustained and expanded in protracted crises and during recovery from crises with comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, empowerment of girls through safe spaces, and the involvement of young people in humanitarian action. UNFPA leads the GBV Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster.

UNICEF's *Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action*[11] commit UNICEF to working across all sectors – health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, child protection, and education – as part of any humanitarian response. UNICEF prevents and responds to violence towards and exploitation and abuse of children and women, including GBV; provides psychosocial support to children and their caregivers; addresses the separation of children from families, and promotes family-based care; prevents recruitment of children to armed forces and armed groups; monitors and reports grave violations regarding children and women; and provides access to education. UNICEF leads the child protection Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster.

KEY PROGRAMMING ISSUES:[12]

- Empowering adolescent girls and young women to know and exercise their rights, to continue education and to access vocational programmes, and to delay pregnancy are pivotal in ending child marriage.
- There is a critical need for family and community engagement, recognizing what they see as the positives of marriage, but providing alternatives to child marriage. Family and community engagement is an example of nexus programming, common in development contexts, with the potential to improve community resilience when crisis hits and in the recovery phase.
- Women – both mothers seeking young daughters-in-law for their sons, and mothers marrying off their daughters in a bid to protect and secure a better life for their daughters – need to be engaged by programmes.
- Engaging men and boys in listening to the voices of girls and women, and as change agents in gender transformation is crucial, as is engaging community and religious leaders.
- When boys are married early, programmes need to recognize that they, like girls in this situation, are deprived of agency and choice as well.
- Working with women-led organizations is key.
- Continued systems-strengthening is needed to ensure robust systems in crisis, including of health, civil registration and vital statistics, and law enforcement systems, and social services.
- Livelihood and cash-based initiatives to address economic stressors can contribute to ending child marriage.
- Measuring the impact and effectiveness of programmes remains a challenge.
- The Global Programme and its partners need to understand how scale is defined in humanitarian contexts, and their ability to reach numbers at scale.
- The Global Programme and its partners need to identify what gender-responsive programming to address child marriage looks like in humanitarian contexts.
- Humanitarian funding is an opportunity for child marriage programming; the humanitarian response tends to be large but often gender-blind.
- More United Nations programming is needed on ending child marriage in the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

BURKINA FASO:[13]

The country is currently witnessing an increase in armed hostilities, with both local and international non-state armed groups allying with criminal networks and exploiting underlying social tensions. The current emergency affects 4.9 million people, out of whom 57 per cent are children. Over 288,000 people are displaced, most of whom have sought refuge in other communities or in displacement sites. In order to address child marriage, the child protection humanitarian sector is supporting the Government and contributing towards systems strengthening to address the structural causes of humanitarian needs and build resilience of the most vulnerable populations. The country adopted a new strategy in integrating humanitarian and development planning as an essential step towards longer-term response, the Operation Strategy for Child Protection Humanitarian Action 2019–2021.

The strategy supports three mutually reinforcing change strategies and aims to protect girls and boys, particularly the most vulnerable, affected by a humanitarian crisis from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and harmful practices, and ensure that they benefit from equitable child protection services. These change strategies are to:

- **Assist vulnerable families** affected by armed conflict, including host communities, to improve the well-being of girls and boys, by household economic strengthening, supporting positive parenting and psychosocial support, and strengthening family- and community-based alternative care
- **Strengthen community-based child protection support mechanisms** by reviewing and establishing community-based structures and enhancing their technical capacities, and through service provision
- **Scale up and accelerate girls' and boys' access to child protection systems and services** by accelerating and strengthening the continuum of services spanning prevention and response at all levels; building and supporting child protection systems at all levels, and ensuring minimum child protection service standards for girls and boys; expanding and supporting the social services workforce for child protection at provincial, district and community level; and improving and strengthening existing child protection coordination mechanisms

4 Coordination and partnerships

Effective coordination and collaboration to end child marriage takes many different forms:

- Strengthening linkages between GBV and child protection, and with other clusters and areas of responsibility, such as sexual and reproductive health and education, to provide better services for adolescent girls.

- Integrating child marriage into all stages of the humanitarian programming cycle.

- Strengthening links between humanitarian and development programming.

- Reinforcing coordination in adolescent programming across agencies.

- Broadening the sharing of experiences across countries and regions.

Programming under the **No Lost Generation Initiative** is embedded within humanitarian plans for the Syria and Iraq crises, as well as refugee-hosting countries in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. The initiative focuses on children and young people, providing programmes across education, child protection, and adolescents and youth. The initiative provides an overarching regional framework for key areas of the response, gives a platform for joint advocacy on the priorities for children and youth, amplifies the voices and perspectives of adolescents and youth, links efforts in different sectors to achieve results on issues that cannot be addressed by one sector alone, such as child marriage, and mobilizes resources for sectors at risk of underfunding.

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YEMEN:

Child marriage in Yemen is entrenched in the culture, and there is no minimum age of marriage in legislation. Child marriage has increased in response to the conflict in the country, and the Global Programme has been modified to take account of the humanitarian crisis. Utilizing a whole-community approach to empowering girls and engaging community stakeholders, the programme has four components:

Empowerment

- Using life skills as an entry point for empowerment in schools, women's safe spaces and youth clubs
- Empowerment through peer-to-peer education, targeting girls and boys

Community engagement

- Working on social norms and behaviour change through influential community and religious leaders
- Involving empowered adolescent boys and girls in sharing information and facilitating discussions in the community
- Engaging community stakeholders through, for example, Men2Men networks and father-to-mother councils

Systems

- Providing a range of multi-sectoral services to survivors through a programme embedded in the UNFPA GBV programme
- Focusing on cross-sectoral interventions with the education and health sectors, through a programme embedded in UNICEF's adolescent interventions
- Providing a programme linked with UNFPA's and UNICEF's case management systems, with standard operating procedures on referral pathways
- Building capacity for case workers in schools and health workers on referral pathways

Evidence generation

- Conducting studies on the drivers and patterns of child marriage in sites for internally displaced people and in host communities to inform programming
- Documenting programme implementation, lessons learned and good practices to inform programme scale-up or shifts in operational approach

Regional and global action

In a prominent example of regional action on child marriage, the Joint Regional Accountability Framework of Action on Ending Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa/Arab States Region was created through a consultative process with United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, advocacy organizations and civil society.[14] In the context of the Global Programme and based on a regional study done by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in six countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)[15], UNICEF MENA Regional Office and UNFPA Arab States Regional Office embarked upon the joint and participatory process in 2017 to map ongoing work on child marriage, recommend key areas of action and develop the framework for 2018–2021, with particular attention to humanitarian contexts. The framework also established a research coordination group to minimize duplication of research efforts on child marriage in the MENA/Arab states region.

At the global level, UNFPA and UNICEF are mobilizing technical, financial and political support for addressing the issue of child marriage in humanitarian settings. The Global Programme supports several countries that are experiencing or have experienced emergencies and crises. The Global Programme is doing the following:

- Facilitating the sharing of knowledge on child marriage in humanitarian settings between governments, organizations and individuals in countries in the Global South

- Shaping the research agenda on child marriage to ensure relevance for programmes

- Making other contributions in a normative role, such as providing evidence and technical expertise in support of intergovernmental processes touching on child marriage in humanitarian settings (e.g. in United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Human Rights Council resolutions, and outcomes of the Commissions on the Status of Women, and on Population Development).

5 Opportunities

Humanitarian programming to end child marriage benefits from a number of opportunities within the Global Programme and beyond through partnerships with other agencies. The Global Programme has added value especially in the development field, including through linkages, with efforts to strengthen education, reproductive health and child protection systems.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES:[12]

- **Leveraging global interest and political momentum on adolescents:** This can be leveraged to draw attention to child marriage, which predominantly affects adolescent girls.

- **Engaging donors:** Engagement, including sharing evidence and models, can influence broader development and humanitarian funding, including funding for nexus programming.

- **Harnessing the humanitarian reform agenda:** Child marriage programming aligns well with the push for localization in humanitarian action, for working with community-based organizations and civil society organizations, and for ensuring meaningful engagement of and accountability to affected populations throughout the humanitarian programme cycle.

- **Using existing entry points:** Women and girl safe spaces, heath facilities, and education in emergencies programming all offer platforms for child marriage programming; existing programme curricula and tools can also be adapted for use in humanitarian settings.

- **Sharpening focus on sub-populations:** In addition to prevention of child marriage among unmarried girls, focus on supporting married, divorced, and widowed girls; distinguish younger versus older girls; and engage men and boys at community level, in services, and as leaders., because child marriage in humanitarian situations is a gender relational issue as well.

- **Building resilience and nexus programming:** Support nexus programming and build disaster preparedness/crisis response into programme design (e.g. incorporate disaster risk management into life skills programmes).

- **Developing guidance and standards:** Minimum principles/a 'standardized' model for humanitarian architecture is needed, to address child marriage as well as for nexus programming. Use existing resources/guidance/packages like Girl Shine.

- **Taking research to the next level:** Evaluate programmes/ interventions, conduct operational research on programme delivery, and solidify a community of practice.

6 Resources

Selected studies supported by the Global Programme:

- UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (IRCW), Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa: A multi-country study, 2017, <www.unicef.org/mena/reports/child-marriage-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

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