



# Action by Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies **to prevent and respond to child marriage**

## Case Study Report

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Cover photo: Lesotho, Kenya and Nepal



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Case Study Report: Action by Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies to Prevent and respond to Child Marriage

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**Child marriage** is a human rights violation. It is defined as any formal or informal union where one or both parties are under 18 years.<sup>1</sup>

## Purpose of this case study report

This case study report provides examples of concrete activities and related lessons that may benefit future Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society projects to address child marriage in development and emergency situations.

Rather than being an exhaustive list of the work of National Societies, the case studies provide details of work from a sampling of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies. Specifically, eleven projects are highlighted and represent action from the Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe and Middle East and North Africa Regions.

## Global agenda on ending child marriage

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 calls for the elimination of all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriages<sup>2</sup> and female genital mutilation. Globally there has been a decline in child marriages by 15% from 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. But the current trend will not be enough to meet SDG 5.3 on ending child marriage by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OHCHR. (2019). *Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Including in Humanitarian Settings*. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Forced marriages are marriages in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. A child marriage is considered to be a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent. Early marriages, like child marriage, are marriages before the age of 18 years. Source: OHCHR. (2019). *Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Including in Humanitarian Settings*. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF. (2018). 25 Million Child Marriages Prevented in Last Decade Due to Accelerated Progress, According to New UNICEF Estimates. <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented>.



## Global background on child marriage and the high risk to girls

Child marriage is a human rights violation, a form of gender-based discrimination, a harmful practice and a form of sexual and gender-based violence, which requires States to take steps to prevent and eliminate it.<sup>4</sup>

Both boys and girls are impacted by child marriage. 765 million people alive today were married as children.<sup>5</sup> Of those, an estimated 115 million are boys and men.<sup>6</sup>

The prevalence of child marriage worldwide is significantly higher among girls; the total number of girls and women alive today that were married as children is 650 million.<sup>7</sup> This is equivalent to 1 in 5 girls being married as children compared to 1 in 30 boys.<sup>8</sup> There are an estimated 12 million girls who are married in childhood every year, that is equal to 23 girls being married every minute and nearly one every two seconds.

The dramatic differences of girls and boys being married reflects social values and norms that hold girls in low esteem denying them the agency to chart their own course in life.<sup>9</sup> This exemplifies how gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage.

There are many negative consequences when girls are married. This is because they are not physically or emotionally ready to become wives or mothers. The consequences include:<sup>10</sup>

- Becoming isolated, having limited freedom, and feeling disempowered;
- Being deprived of their fundamental rights to health, education and safety;
- Increased risks of experiencing dangerous complications in pregnancy and childbirth;
- Contracting HIV/AIDS;
- Suffering domestic violence; and
- Living in poverty due to their limited access to education and economic opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations. (2014). *Joint General Recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women / General Comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Harmful Practices*.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF. (2019). *115 Million Boys and Men Married as Children*.  
<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/115-million-boys-and-men-around-world-married-children-unicef>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA and UNICEF. (2017). *Annual Report Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage*.  
[https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Global\\_Programme\\_Child\\_Marriage\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Global_Programme_Child_Marriage_Annual_Report_2017.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. (2019). *115 Million Boys and Men Married as Children*.  
<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/115-million-boys-and-men-around-world-married-children-unicef>.

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA and UNICEF. (2017). *Annual Report Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage*.  
[https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Global\\_Programme\\_Child\\_Marriage\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Global_Programme_Child_Marriage_Annual_Report_2017.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Girls Not Brides. (2018). <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/what-is-the-impact/>.

Countries with the highest maternal and child mortality rates are the same countries where child marriage is prevalent. In fact, a ten per cent reduction in child marriage could be associated with a 70% reduction in a country's maternal mortality rate.<sup>11</sup>

I don't want to marry.

I just want to be home with my family.

Participant of Australia Red Cross community project

## Humanitarian crises and child marriage

Humanitarian crises can involve a variety of situations, such as conflict and post-conflict, displacement, epidemics, famine, environmental emergencies and the aftermath of natural disasters.<sup>12</sup> Reports and data on the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian settings remain limited. However, the breakdown of family, social and legal networks linked to real or perceived risks of sexual violence and the consequent "damage to family honour" and economic strains underpin families' decisions to marry girls at an early age. Fear of sexual violence against women and girls has been found to be a major concern and a reason for families to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere, and an incentive to marry off their daughters at a young age in the belief that marriage will protect them.<sup>13</sup>

Research shows that nine out of the ten countries with the highest child marriage rates are considered either fragile or extremely fragile states and seven out of twenty-one countries with the highest child marriage rates face some of the biggest humanitarian crisis.<sup>14</sup> In such situations, child marriage increases with a disproportionate impact on girls.

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<sup>11</sup> University of California, San Diego. (May 2013). *Higher Child Marriage Rates Associated with Higher Maternal and Infant Mortality*. [http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/higher\\_child\\_marriage\\_rates\\_associated\\_with\\_higher\\_maternal\\_and\\_infant\\_mort](http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/pressrelease/higher_child_marriage_rates_associated_with_higher_maternal_and_infant_mort).

<sup>12</sup> United Nations General Assembly. (2019). *Child, Early, and Forced Marriage in Humanitarian Settings: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1911783.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Girls Not Brides. (2018). *Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings*. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings.pdf>.

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### AN IFRC STUDY ON SGBV AND DISASTERS

A 2018 IFRC study on SGBV and disasters in Indonesia, Laos PDR, and the Philippines<sup>15</sup> found:

- In Lao PDR, 47 per cent of respondents reported that women and girls felt distressed by the rise in child marriage after the disaster.
  - In the Philippines, 30 per cent of respondents reported women and girls felt distressed by the rise in child marriage after the [local] disaster.
  - In Indonesia, 18 per cent of respondents reported that women and girls felt distressed by the rise in child marriage after the disaster.
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For more data and background on child marriage in humanitarian crises, see an overview by Girls Not Brides: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings.pdf>.

For us to protect our heritage, we must ensure that girls are accorded all rights that propel them to develop their full potential and skills. The right to education; work and not to be subjected to harmful cultural practices such as child and forced marriage should be given to all and by all.

Stella Munyi  
Netherlands Red Cross

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<sup>15</sup> IFRC. (2018). *The Responsibility to Prevent and Respond to Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Disasters and Crises*. <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/responsibility-prevent-respond-sexual-gender-based-violence-disasters-crises/>.

## Key themes

Several key themes can be identified from the case studies highlighting National Society action to address child marriage. In particular, National Societies are:

- 1) working in disaster, migration and conflict-affected areas.
- 2) helping girls access basic essential services as a key priority. This often includes psychosocial support and other health care services.
- 3) providing multiple interventions and they recognize that single activities are not effective.
- 4) involving parents and community leaders so that the responsibility of addressing child marriage is clearly and fully on adults and not on children.
- 5) working to support participation and leadership of adolescents and young adults.
- 6) collaborating with a host of local, international NGOs, UN agencies, and local government.
- 7) trying to monitor their reach and results.
- 8) facing common challenges including access to adolescents in fragile, hard-to-reach or conflict-affected areas.
- 9) bringing several added values to addressing the problem of child marriage:
  - Our Fundamental Principles such as impartiality, neutrality, and independence support a trusting relationship with authorities and often allow us access to affected people including in emergencies.
  - Our 190 National Societies, 14 million local volunteers, and 160,000 local branches are all rooted to solve local problems; we are there before, during and after an emergency.
  - Volunteers from local communities lead our work with communities. These volunteers understand the nuances and customs of the places where we work.
  - National Societies often have long-standing technical and operational experience in working on complex humanitarian issues such as healthcare, psychosocial support, and disaster risk reduction, or also SGBV prevention and response and child protection, which can be used as entry-points for addressing problems like child marriage.



Red Cross' experience is that people are not helpless when facing complex social problems such as forced marriage. Across most communities there are members who are applying culturally appropriate and effective strategies to find solutions in this space. These culturally determined approaches can also support and strengthen the broader government and sector initiatives and contextualise and localise the broader response.

Australia Red Cross, report on Forced Marriage:  
Community Voices, Stories and Strategies







# NATIONAL SOCIETY CASE STUDIES



# Australia



## BACKGROUND

Forcing anybody to get married is a serious crime in Australia as people are free to choose if, when, and who they want to marry. A person must be over 18 years of age to be legally married. However, in some circumstances, a person over the age of 16 years can marry a person over 18 years, but this requires a court order. No person under 16 years of age can be legally married. In Australia, it is against the law to organise or officiate a forced marriage or be party to a forced marriage if you are not the victim. This applies to all legal, cultural, and religious marriages.

## AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS APPROACH

Australian Red Cross has expertise in responding to survivors of child marriage and in engaging with communities to identify ways in which to prevent it. Between 2013, when forced marriage was first criminalised in Australia, and 1 May 2019, Australian Red Cross has directly assisted 88 people in or at risk of forced marriage through the Support for Trafficked People Program (Support Program), funded through the Australian Government Department of Social Services. More than half of these individuals have been under the age of 18. Responding to the day-to-day challenges of survivors has provided insight into the impact of forced marriage against children, resulting in the provision of holistic, dignified and effective support.

While legislation and a strong support program for those affected by child and forced marriage are elements of an effective response to the issue, Australian Red Cross has also developed expertise in prevention work, engaging and collaborating with communities to begin shifting social norms. The Australian Red Cross Free to Choose, Empowered to Respond project seeks to prevent child and forced marriage

though empowering individuals, families and communities in understanding that they can be the catalyst toward positive behaviour change. The project aims to unify and strengthen families and communities and facilitates this by opening safe spaces for dialogue, learning, and mutual understanding. Together, families and communities identify social expectations that hold social norms in place and uncover local prevention strategies by focusing on ‘what is already going right?’ rather than exploring what is going wrong. In this way, the prevention strategies seek to shift the harmful norm in positive empowering ways.

Australian Red Cross has also undertaken a series of community consultations as a crucial step in understanding community approaches to negotiating and preventing child and forced marriage and enhancing support and service responses. Australian Red Cross recognises that expanding community empowerment and utilising community strengths will lead to the provision of support to the whole family, resulting in a more effective response, whereby families are safe and remain united, and therefore is planning to continue this valuable work.

### LEARN MORE

Watch Australian Red Cross videos to prevent and respond to child marriage and read the report *Forced Marriage: Community Voices, Stories and Strategies* which highlights the important role that communities and families themselves play in finding solutions to the complex issues they face. <https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/help-for-migrants-in-transition/forced-marriage-temp>.



## RESULTS

Effective advocacy for those facing situations of child and forced marriage has resulted in the Australian Government funding a new two-and-a-half-year trial, delivered under the Support Program, which allows clients referred for forced marriage to access longer-term assistance, without having to contribute to the criminal justice process. The trial incorporates a simultaneous evaluation, providing an opportunity to continue building an evidence base of needs, gaps and challenges in relation to the current model of support.

Australian Red Cross has also collaborated with key sector partners to establish and jointly lead State and Territory Forced Marriage Networks, which seek to improve information-sharing and coordination across the wide range of government and civil society stakeholders. Australian Red Cross is also a key contributor to and participant in the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery, a government and civil society consultative mechanism.

## CHALLENGES

In its work to prevent and respond to child and forced marriage, Australian Red Cross has identified several challenges.

- Identification of those impacted or at risk is often challenging due to issues including limited awareness of frontline workers and community stakeholders.
- The suitability of mainstream services in providing specialised support to those impacted, including a lack of safe and culturally appropriate accommodation options.
- Uncertainty in visa status may increase an individual's vulnerability as insecure immigration status may contribute to the

decision of an individual to not leave their situation of exploitation or risk.

- Working with individuals in isolation of their family, as well as supporting family reunification, can pose complex risks to safety and wellbeing.
- Working with individuals under the age of 18 involves engagement with state and territory government child protection services, of which responses can vary significantly.
- Understanding of the factors that might lead to a situation of child marriage, including the complexity of family relationships, intergenerational and cultural conflicts, currently has limited influence on shaping the structure of the response.
- Access to the Support Program for individuals currently requires an initial engagement with the Australian Federal Police, which can act as a barrier for multiple reasons. For example, individuals may be hesitant to report being at risk of child marriage as they do not want their families involved or 'get in trouble' or they are potentially fearful of shame being brought on the family through police involvement.

## KEY LEARNING

Building and maintaining strong and respectful relationships between family members and extended family is a strategy specifically identified by communities in response to dealing with child marriage. Providing support to children impacted by child and forced marriage and their family and community members to successfully build and maintain these relationships is key. Working with children, young people, families and communities collectively also requires a significant time investment, and often needs to be tailored to suit each individual set of circumstances, therefore a flexible and non-time limited framework is required.

Forcing a marriage is often considered a solution to various problems and pressures that families may face. Seeing marriage as a solution can be a traditional norm that is often maintained by social expectations and pressures – both by families and communities. It can be further perpetuated by factors such as migration, rigid gender roles and intergenerational conflict. In Australia, forced marriage and the various social expectations that hold it in place are often misunderstood, resulting in responses that may not fully meet individual and family support needs.

Through Australian Red Cross' Free to Choose, Empowered to Respond project, it has been identified that some skills and opportunities which can support people threatened or impacted by child and forced marriage include:

- Building self-esteem, self-confidence and self-trust;
- Children and young people learning negotiation strategies;
- Whole families learning how to respectfully communicate;
- Parents and children learning and using conflict resolution strategies;
- Opportunities to form, attend and be part of peer support groups, building strength together, increasing social capital, learning what works from others and taking collective action;
- Learning how to stand up for yourself and ask for help, as well as where to ask for help.

**When women and girls come together in groups to share their voices, they get stronger.**

Participant of Australian Red Cross community project

# Bangladesh



**4,451,000**  
CHILD MARRIAGES



**22%**  
before  
15 years



**59%**  
before  
18 years



## BACKGROUND

Fifty-nine per cent of girls in Bangladesh are married before their 18th birthday and 22% are married before the age of 15.<sup>16</sup>

According to UNICEF, Bangladesh has the fourth highest prevalence rate of child marriage in the world, and the second highest number of absolute girls who are married: 4,451,000.<sup>17</sup>

Human Rights Watch found that families made decisions about marriage for reasons directly related to natural disasters. For example, parents were rushing to marry off a daughter in anticipation of losing their home to river erosion. Other families described natural disasters as a recurring stress factor where child marriage was viewed as the best option for a girl and the family.<sup>18</sup>

## BANGLADESH RED CRESCENT APPROACH

The Bangladesh Red Crescent operates 56 Mother and Child Health (MCH) Centres spread over 29 districts of the country. Most of the centres are situated in remote, rural and natural disaster-prone locations. Within a sample of these, the Red Crescent conducted a survey and found that SGBV, including child marriage, was a common problem being reported to its volunteers.<sup>19</sup>

The Bangladesh Red Crescent then began integrating SGBV prevention and response, including child marriage, into its health services in the Mother and Child Health Centres. This was done through a pilot in three flood-prone districts:

Horinagar, Satkhira, and Kazlakati. Integration was done using the IFRC Community Based Health and First Aid Module on Violence Prevention and Response. This module was localized through consultations with twenty-five technical experts from local NGOs, international NGOs and government ministries.

## RESULTS

- In the pilot locations, parents, teachers and secondary students have reported to the Red Crescent that child marriage has been reduced.
- 6,000 people in local communities were reached through home visits.
- Messages on prevention of child marriage have been included inside the Mother and Child Health Centres.
- Regular meetings are held with school teachers.
- 25 health and youth volunteers have received a training of trainers on violence prevention and response. An additional 49 community volunteers received basic training.
- The pilot projects are currently being scaled up to 10 other Mother and Child Health Centres.

## CHALLENGES

The project has taken longer than originally planned to pilot and scale up. This is mainly due to several disasters and a migration crisis interrupting progress. As well, it became clear that partner mapping and relationships would be a priority and that more time than expected would be needed to develop and build these relationships.

<sup>16</sup> Girls Not Brides. (2018). *Bangladesh*. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/bangladesh/>.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF and UNFPA. (2017). *Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage*, <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document/responsibility-prevent-respond-sexual-gender-based-violence-disasters-crises/>.

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch Report. (2015). *Marry Before Your House is Swept Away*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/06/09/marry-your-house-swept-away/child-marriage-bangladesh>.

<sup>19</sup> MCH centers are primary health care units serving to a population of 5000 and focusing on the health and nutrition issues of the mother and the child.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The following are key lessons learned by the Bangladesh Red Crescent.

- Building on existing mother and child healthcare programming is a natural fit and provides opportunities to have a wide reach in disaster-prone, hard-to-access locations.
- Making linkages to other projects such as Water and Sanitation can open new ways to reach communities.
- Working with local government and non-governmental (NGO) partners to build capacity and seek advice is essential and needs appropriate time at the start of a project to ensure it is done thoroughly.
- Thoroughly training local Red Crescent branch volunteers and leadership is important for success.
- More needs to be done to support communities to take comprehensive action for girls at risk including improved education and livelihood opportunities.

When a girl is married, in a single day she is expected to transition from being a child into an adult. It places too great a burden on her physical and mental health. While a child herself she might have a baby putting both of their well-being at risk, and she must still find ways to meet the demands from her husband and in-laws.

Rezina Halim,  
Bangladesh Red Crescent



# Egypt



## BACKGROUND

In Egypt, nearly 1 in every 20 girls (4%) between age 15 to 17 years and 1 in every 10 adolescent girls 15-19 years (11%) are either currently married or were married before, with large differentials between the rural and urban residence. In fact, adolescent girls living in rural areas are three times more likely to marry than girls in urban areas.<sup>20</sup>

## EGYPTIAN RED CRESCENT APPROACH

The Egyptian Red Crescent began its work to address child marriage through an assessment that covered children aged 13 to 17, their parents, school teachers, school principals, social workers, and community leaders from 15 schools and 162 households.

The assessment found that most parents believe it is completely wrong to get married before the age of 18. A significant minority, however, believed that child marriage depends on the situation of the boy or girl. Parents also emphasized the importance of education, saying that 20 years of age or above is a better time for marriage because girls will by then have completed studies and be responsible enough to take care of a household. Other parents were happy for their girls to become 'engaged' while still in primary school, waiting until they are older than 18 years to proceed with the marriage.

After the assessment, 75 volunteers participated in three days of training on Community Based Health and First Aid "CBHFA", Psychosocial Support and SGBV.

Once trained, volunteers supported communities around:

- peer support and access to counseling
- community-mobilization activities that engaged adolescent boys and girls in dialogue and group activities
- workshops and campaigns aimed at men and boys to increase awareness about inequitable gender norms and the consequences of violence against women
- a football (soccer) tournament at Zeinhom youth club to bring the messages of the workshops to the communities at a more informal and social level and to encourage higher participation by men in the activities
- the 16 days of activism against GBV where an Egyptian Red Crescent hashtag was launched for "open discussion and dialogue is the solution to end violence".

While conducting psychosocial support, Egyptian Red Crescent also began integrating prevention and response to child marriage into its health services. In particular, basic health care services were provided, particularly to adolescent girls and newly married women, through the Egyptian Red Crescent Zeinhom health clinics.

To reach children a school project, "Seha w Salama", was also initiated in seven schools for 350 children aged 12-14. The project included messages on nonviolence and the importance of child marriage prevention.

## RESULTS

Results show a change in attitudes among men in the intervention community and in the control community. Most participants in the soccer tournament said that they spoke about the themes of the campaigns with others.

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<sup>20</sup> NCCM Child Rights Observatory. (2018). Policy for Action: Ending Child Marriage. <https://www.unicef.org/egypt/media/1731/file>.

Teachers and parents evaluated the workshops as helping them to: be better individuals, teachers, partners and to be good listeners; be better equipped to deal with issues of abuse affecting students; have increased awareness of gender and gender stereotypes, causes of violence and tips on classroom management.

900 people were directly reached through education sessions and an additional 700 households were supported in discussing child marriage issues.

## CHALLENGES

Access to counseling services is an essential aspect that requires significant time to map, plan and support from the start. In addition, incorporating adolescent girls and women in efforts to engage men in SGBV prevention and to serve as a voice of accountability should be improved.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Bringing groups of adolescent boys and men together, in a participatory approach, enables them to reflect on their life experiences including how they have been socialized and it creates safe spaces for men to reflect, share, exchange and question patriarchal ways of being men and to

consider ideas to change attitudes and behavior that contribute to gender inequality.

There is utility in combining evidence-based group education with other community campaigns and training or sensitization of community leaders and volunteers. To complement this, specific interventions need to include a well-established parent education programme that is implemented by volunteers targeting the most vulnerable families.

Breaking the cycle of violence in adolescents' lives and helping them cope with its consequences requires specialized focused services such as safe counselling, and support to access complaint and reporting mechanisms.

There is need for increased provision of survivor-centred, lifesaving health and emotional support response services for survivors of SGBV. Access to health care, family planning and psychosocial services should be considered priorities.

Also, prevention activities need to be targeted to address the risks faced by adolescent girls. Specifically, the risks need to be identified and then efforts taken to reduce those risks by using awareness and prevention tools that are based on community realities.

**It is the power of community-based programs in education, reproductive health, and awareness of children's rights that are the engines to prevent child marriage in our communities. Our role in the Red Cross and Red Crescent is to provide channels for girls and boys to express their issues. This enables us to have open dialogues with stakeholders to prevent and respond to child marriage.**

**Dr. Mahmoud Tharwat**  
Egyptian Red Crescent



# Lesotho

## CHILD MARRIAGES



**17%**  
before  
18 years

## BACKGROUND

Seventeen percent of girls in Lesotho are married before the age of 18.<sup>21</sup> Traditional practices, including child marriage, remain common in rural villages of Lesotho. There are reported incidences of girls being abducted and forced into marriage,<sup>22</sup> occurring when they are fetching water from distant or hidden sources or relieving themselves in the bushes.

## LESOTHO RED CROSS APPROACH

The Lesotho Red Cross Society project *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion Interventions for Rural Communities in Lesotho* aimed to deliver sustainable access to water and sanitation as well as improved hygienic practices. LRCS worked with small rural villages in the districts of Maseru and Maseru in the Lesotho Highlands where the terrain is mountainous, with limited road access and several small scattered villages.

The project intended that this improved access to WASH facilities would improve the safety of women and girls. By bringing water supply closer to homes, it was expected girls would have less distance to travel, reducing the instances where they were alone and therefore vulnerable to abduction. Supporting households to build latrines within their yards would also enable girls to use latrines in secure places. The project also used advocacy campaigns to promote gender rights and raised awareness of child abduction and child marriage. Girls are often considered ready for marriage once they start menstruating. Through WASH clubs, established by the project in schools, teachers are raising awareness with students and parents about the risks of child marriage and encouraging students to remain

in education. Similar discussions took place at women's gatherings, initially facilitated by the project team, and continued through the WASH committees and hygiene groups established in the target communities.

## RESULTS

While it was expected that the WASH interventions would help address issues of child abduction and child marriage, the research showed mixed results. Each village interviewed had different experiences and therefore reported different results, however, focus group discussion and key informant interview respondents agreed that the provision of safe water and especially toilets contributed significantly to reducing the risk of young girls being raped and/ or abducted and forced into marriage. This has boosted girls' sense of safety and dignity, as well as increased household harmony. 95% of girls now feel safe and secure while accessing WASH services provided by the project.

## CHALLENGES

The interventions have not been adequate in stopping child marriage. While rates of child marriage remain high in these villages, the research highlighted this was often not the result of abduction. The practice of arranging marriages continues to be passed down through the generations, but more recently boyfriends and girlfriends are committing to marriage themselves, without consent of their parents. Where child marriages are happening, respondents described they are mainly a result of teenage pregnancies, boys wanting to marry at an early age following initiation and the fact that girls in these communities are groomed to be housewives with no other role models except for

<sup>21</sup> Girls Not Brides. (2018). Lesotho. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/lesotho/>.

<sup>22</sup> "Chobeliso" was the Basotho traditional way of getting married whereby a boy or a man or a group of males abducted a girl and forced her into marriage.



married women. It appears that in some situations the couple stage an 'abduction' as a way of forcing families to agree to the marriage.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons from the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Promotion Interventions for Rural Communities highlight that while WASH interventions can significantly improve the safety and dignity of women and girls and provide a pathway to promote and advocate for issues related to forced and child marriage, change needs to be reinforced through tailored non-WASH strategies.

Other specific learning includes the need for:

- a) raising awareness through advocacy on the illegality of abduction and child marriage specifically targeting the remoter and more isolated communities in the highlands.
- b) empowering young girls and discouraging them from child marriage by retaining them in school.
- c) working with initiation school leaders to discourage young boys from child marriage.
- d) taking action with local communities to reduce adolescent pregnancies as this is one of the contributing factors to child marriage.
- e) discouraging married women from assisting girls to get married.

**Girls in these areas think marriage is the next step after dropping out of school.**

Local police officer

# Malawi



## CHILD MARRIAGES<sup>23</sup>



**9%**  
before  
15 years



**42%**  
before  
18 years



<sup>23</sup> Girls Not Brides. (2019). Malawi. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/malawi/>.

## BACKGROUND

Child marriage is pervasive in Malawi, despite recent laws making it illegal for persons under 18 years to marry. Local social norms that support child marriage include preference to educate boys over girls, families encouraging females to continuously bear children, and a sense that marrying girls can reduce the economic burden for girls' families.

## MALAWI RED CROSS APPROACH

The intervention facilitated by the Malawi Red Cross targeted three districts in Malawi. It sought to change community behaviours and attitudes towards child marriage by:

- Bringing parents, children and influential people in the communities (teachers, local leaders, etc.) together to discuss the dangers of child marriage
- Developing key messages to give to the communities
- Facilitating the co-education of boys and girls
- Highlighting the different roles that parents and local networks and agencies can take to collectively prevent child marriage
- Fighting any cultural bylaws which promote child marriage and are harmful to children
- Encouraging former child brides to advise other girls on the disadvantages of getting married at an early age
- Linking girls with positive role models - educated, working women who have delayed marriage and pregnancies till adulthood
- Providing education support to 1500 vulnerable girls & boys
- Taking perpetrators to court

In communities where child marriage has been prevalent, child protection committees have been established in conjunction with Malawi Red Cross

volunteers. These committees have assisted in breaking up informal marriages and returning girls back home. When identifying a case where a girl has been married, the committees confront both the parents and the community chief who typically formulates bylaws which permit the marriage. The committees address dissolving the marriage and getting children back into their family homes. Every local leader is expected to report on the status of child marriages in three-month review meetings. Information given in these meetings is checked and verified by Malawi Red Cross volunteers. If leaders/chiefs are caught lying about the existence of child marriages within their communities, there are financial repercussions.

## RESULTS

The Malawi Red Cross have so far facilitated the break-up of 52 cases of child marriage and helped to reintegrate girls back into their homes and schools. Many communities now believe and accept that it is appropriate for girls to wait until they are adults to get married, and through improved support from community structures, girls report feeling better able to set themselves different life goals. There has also been an increase in knowledge on gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights for both boys and girls.

Malawi Red Cross has partnered with local media houses to document successful cases and cases of violence against women. This exposure has acted as a deterrent for communities to practise child marriage. Malawi Red Cross have also partnered with local police forces and support mobile courts (whereby magistrates and prosecutors go directly to communities and handle cases). This has expedited the judicial process of prosecuting offenders and encouraged witnesses not to drop their case due to the physical and financial burden of travelling to court.

## CHALLENGES

Reintegrated girls who came from child marriages still face stigma/discrimination at home and at school. Malawi Red Cross are exploring ways of providing rigorous psychosocial support and counselling to these girls, their families, and communities to face these challenges.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Through innovative community-centred approaches, Malawi Red Cross has managed to change community attitudes towards child marriage, giving girls brighter prospects. In future, Malawi Red Cross aims to expand support groups to include males as well as females and it hopes to expand provision of supportive services, e.g. counselling and psychosocial support.

**We had to establish a dialogue with both the policy makers and the local leaders, so they could not put the messages of protecting girls from child marriage under the mat.**

**Taonga Nyekanyeka, Malawi Red Cross Society**



# Mali



## CHILD MARRIAGES



**20%**  
before  
15 years



**50%**  
before  
18 years



## BACKGROUND

In Mali, 50 per cent of women aged 20 to 49 have been married before the age of 18 and 14% of girls and women aged 15 to 49 are estimated to have married before the age of 15.<sup>24</sup> According to the most recent (2012-13) national Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 20% of girls were married before 15 years of age and 50% before 18. New legislation adopted in 2011 defines the minimum age of marriage as 16 for girls and 18 for boys, yet community members and service providers describe the practice of marrying girls even earlier (as young as 10) as common and polygamy as a contributing factor.<sup>25</sup>

## MALI RED CROSS APPROACH

As part of its work on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, that is implemented in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Family Promotion, the Mali Red Cross has included prevention and response to child marriage in six districts and 758 communities.

Activities include:

- A group of master trainers from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Family Promotion and Mali Red Cross have been trained to train Red Cross and community volunteers, community members and leaders on the impact of child marriage and other harmful practices (e.g. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting)
- Training of Mali Red Cross volunteers and community members to conduct regular social and behavioral change communication activities
- Support to communities to identify their own gender champions and equip them to conduct regular discussions with their communities on gender issues and to negotiate with parents to prevent child marriage
- Conducting regular advocacy meetings with the Muslim leaders and village chiefs on how they can contribute to the reduction and elimination of child marriage.

## RESULTS

For the prevention of child marriage, 6,411 home visits, 2,713 counseling sessions and 704 negotiations have been conducted by volunteers. Altogether, the project has thus far reached a total of 274,141 persons. However, clear links to how the reach has resulted in reductions of child marriage are not yet quantified; however, trying to determine this will be part of the project endline.

## CHALLENGES

Changing cultural and traditional norms that have been entrenched in Malian society for centuries has been the greatest challenge. The influence of religious and local leaders in maintaining these harmful traditions and any opposition to change are the main contributing factors towards this challenge. This has required much understanding of the situation on the part of local health volunteers. Time consuming face to face negotiations with parents and community leaders, negotiating delays in child marriages, as well as conducting community awareness sessions and advocacy has been useful in overcoming this challenge to some extent.

<sup>24</sup> UNICEF. (2014). *Ending Child Marriage. Progress and Prospects*.  
[https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child\\_Marriage\\_Report\\_7\\_17\\_LR.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/Child_Marriage_Report_7_17_LR.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF. (2015). *Protecting the Rights of Girls by Ending FGM and Child Marriage*.

## LESSONS LEARNED

One interesting lesson learned thus far in the project is that classical social and behavioral change communication activities such as theatre, radio messages and direct messages against child marriage have been the least successful elements. A particularly effective element of the project has been the direct negotiations by community health volunteers and local gender champions with parents and community leaders.

Another important lesson learned has been to focus more on the impact of child marriage on the health and education of girls rather than emphasizing human rights, women's rights, national and international law since there is an aversion to rights-based language and approaches in the community.

I am 21-years-old, and I am now married to the person I have chosen. This wouldn't have been possible without the support of the Red Cross. My family decided 5 years ago to marry me to an old man and without my consent; the repeated awareness sessions plus the household visits by the Red Cross volunteers in my community were very supportive and enabled my parents to change their decision.

Participant of Mali Red Cross project

# Montenegro

## CHILD MARRIAGES IN ROMA & EGYPTIAN COMMUNITIES



**17%**  
boys  
15-19  
years



**28%**  
girls  
15-19  
years



## BACKGROUND

Child marriage in Montenegro affects around 1% of the total population. However, the percentage is more significant within the Roma and Egyptian communities, in which, 28.1% of girls (1 in 3) and 16.5% of boys (1 in 6) aged 15-19 are married or in formal or informal unions.<sup>26</sup> The high incidence of child marriage in the Roma and Egyptian population is accompanied by a high level of acceptance of domestic violence.<sup>27</sup>

## MONTENEGRO RED CROSS APPROACH

Montenegro Red Cross, in partnership with UNICEF, has a project to address child marriage focusing on Roma and Egyptian populations. During the first phase, five municipalities were covered, during the second phase, an additional 7 municipalities were reached, and in the third phase, a further seven municipalities are being targeted.

The project objectives are to:

- raise awareness of and improve access of Roma and Egyptians to child and social protection services and benefits.
- raise awareness of and improve networking of Roma and Egyptian women to relevant institutions in violence and child marriage prevention.
- empower Roma and Egyptian women to fight against family violence.

To prevent or reduce the prevalence of child marriage, awareness raising workshops are organized for parents and adolescent girls. For these workshops, the Montenegro Red Cross engages psychologists who are staff of local Montenegro Red Cross branches.

One of the discoveries during this process has been that most child marriages of girls were agreed upon between parents or grandparents when the girls were very young. Therefore, the project has put special attention on fathers and grandparents. Psychologists work with these two groups by explaining to them how child marriage can have negative physical and psychosocial consequences for children and negatively impacts their health and wellbeing.

The Montenegro Red Cross, in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities, also organized a “No Early Marriage” campaign. As part of this campaign, awareness raising workshops were conducted for teachers in several elementary schools in selected municipalities.

## RESULTS

A total of 63 workshops, classes, and campaigns were delivered in schools and among Roma and Egyptian communities for prevention of family violence and the prevention of child marriage, reaching 935 people. Of these, 65% were females and 35% were males. Although more is needed to identify how this reach has resulted in any changes of behaviour and reductions of child marriage.

At the beginning of the workshops, participants often denied the existence of child marriage, but with regular communication with Montenegro Red Cross field staff and psychologists, they gradually opened up and admitted that there were such cases in their households and communities.

<sup>26</sup> Monstat and UNICEF. (2014). *Montenegro: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2013*. <https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media/6516/file>

<sup>27</sup> NVO Centar za romske inicijative. (2018). *Prevention of Child Marriage in Montenegro: Challenges, Lessons Learnt and a Theory of Change*. <https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media/2586/file/MNE-media-MNEpublication23.pdf>.



## CHALLENGES

One of the challenges has been the remote and hard-to-access locations of some Roma and Egyptian community settlements. However, the Montenegro Red Cross teams overcome this problem by planning more frequent field visits to far away communities.

At the beginning of the project, there was a sense of distrust of the Montenegro Red Cross by the Roma and as a result poor cooperation from them. Yet, with continuous engagement the communities began to realize that the Red Cross Society's objective was to support them. On several occasions, the Montenegro Red Cross has provided humanitarian aid in the form of food, clothes, hygiene material, and footwear, especially to families who cannot obtain social and child benefits and services because of the lack of documentation. This also helped to build trust with the Roma.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A key lesson learned has been to focus more on women's and girl's empowerment through vocational training which helps them to feel productive and improves their self-esteem and makes them more independent.

Another lesson is the need to engage men, boys and adolescent girls (not only women) to make them recognize the importance of preventing child marriage and family violence.

Orhan, a father of four children, was seventeen years old when he got married. Looking back at his experience he says that he would not allow any of his children to do the same. "I would like my children to study, go to school and then go to work. I want them to have good living conditions."

# Nepal



## BACKGROUND

Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia – for both girls and boys. Although the legal age of unions for both sexes is 20, more than a third of young women aged 20-24 report that they were married by the age of 18, and just over 1 in 10 by 15. Nepali boys are among the most likely in the world to be child grooms. More than 1 in 10 is married before they reach 18 years.<sup>28</sup>

## NEPAL RED CROSS APPROACH

The Nepal Red Cross Society in partnership with UNFPA has been implementing a child marriage prevention project as part of UNFPA's and UNICEF's initiative 'Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage' in the districts of Rotahat, Rolpa, Bajhang and Baitadi since 2017. The project targets adolescent girls ages 10-19 and their parents, primarily focusing on the following:

- Formation of adolescent girls circles in every local ward and conducting weekly meetings.
- Delivery of social and financial skills training sessions to members of the adolescent girl's circles.
- Training in self-defense for adolescent girls to build critical mental, vocal and physical skills to mitigate the risk of sexual violence.
- Creation and facilitation of parent support groups to facilitate a dialogue on gender equitable norms including delaying child marriage.
- Provision of financial support in the form of a scholarship to adolescent girls to enroll and remain in formal and non-formal education including the transition from primary to secondary education.

- Development of adolescent-friendly information corners in schools and supporting these corners by providing awareness raising and other edutainment materials.
- Mass awareness about preventing child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, and other discriminatory practices, as well as providing information about adolescent sexual and reproductive health through street drama conducted by a professional group.
- Door-to-door awareness of preventing child marriage with the involvement of schools and adolescent girls.

One of the key activities of the project is the delivery of the Social and Financial Skills Package (SFSP) that is delivered through trained Red Cross facilitators and social mobilizers. The SFSP package contains 15 modules. It aims at empowering adolescent girls through weekly sessions over a period of nine months. The training is locally known by the name "Rupantaran" (transformation).

SFSP provides the girls with practical skills and knowledge on gender equality and human rights (including child marriage related information), reproductive health, SGBV, nutrition, communication, decision making, and negotiation skills. Girls are also linked to health centers that provide adolescent sexual and reproductive health services. The package helps expand girls' support networks and enables them to become change agents in their communities.

The project has also established adolescent girls' circles. These create a cohesive and supporting platform in which girls create positive peer pressure to stay in school, help each other advocate with parents against child marriage, and build social networks.

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) [Nepal]. (2012). *New ERA, and ICF International Inc, Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011.*

## RESULTS

A total of 96 adolescents have been enlisted from the municipalities of 4 districts. These adolescents have been trained as peer educators. To date, these adolescents have reached 2,451 adolescent girls with “Rupantaran” training.

One of the key benefits following the “Rupantaran” training has been the remarkable change in attitude of the participants. Girls who were shy and had low self-esteem have become more confident in their day-to-day activities both at school and at home. In rural Nepal, girls are banished from their homes to live in a shed during their menstrual period. This practice known as Chaupadi has caused much distress and gender inequality. Some adolescent girls who have received training have been able to convince their parents of the negative impact of this deep-rooted cultural practice and to end it. Also, parents are now more supportive in encouraging their daughters to continue with their school education than before.

For background on child marriage in South Asia see this IFRC article: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/married-young-the-scourge\\_b\\_4560523](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/married-young-the-scourge_b_4560523).

## CHALLENGES

A significant challenge has been the inability to include adolescent girls from some areas due to the geographical terrain that makes access very difficult. This is a problem the Red Cross continues to grapple with. Also, some Dalit families were reluctant to let adolescent girls participate in the training and awareness sessions due to mistrust which was overcome with better communication by the local Red Cross volunteers. Some parents were also unwilling to attend sessions without receiving a payment in return.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A key lesson of the project has been the advantage of using a mix of strategies and activities targeting different groups – parents, adolescents, teachers and the community in general. The SFSP – “Rupantaran” sessions – is a major contributor to the success of the program. Rather than limiting the sessions to information sharing and awareness raising, building social skills of the participants has empowered them to take responsibility for change. Using trained and empowered adolescents as peer facilitators was also another reason for the success of the project.

There are many of my age who married early and are now suffering for various reasons. Child marriage is a social crime and I believe by providing this training to all the adolescent girls in the community, we can minimize it.

Girl child participant



## Norway



## BACKGROUND

In 2015 during the European Migration Crisis, the Norwegian government handled several cases of child marriage among migrant populations. At that time there were several public discussions around how this issue should be met within the Norwegian support system and Norwegian law. The Norwegian Red Cross Helpline plays an important role in preventing and responding to child marriages.

## NORWEGIAN RED CROSS APPROACH

The Norwegian Red Cross Helpline program was established in 2000 and is fully funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs. The program and helpline are operational Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm. The program encompasses a wide range of activities including a helpline, and conducting advocacy, raising awareness and delivering actions aimed at prevention, and supporting persons who have been married as children.

The helpline provides information and guidance to young people subjected to honour-related violence, child marriage, forced marriage, and negative social control. The helpline staff can be reached by phone, chat, e-mail or in person. It also assists and facilitates children and young people to establish contact with the public authorities and the public support system.

The Norwegian Red Cross advocates with politicians to change the Norwegian law and regulations to better protect children from child and forced marriage. It does this in a variety of ways including direct conversations and

participating in seminars, forums and meetings where representatives from government authorities are present. In addition, it contributes to research on honour-related violence. The Norwegian Red Cross experience has been acknowledged in different national action plans related to honour-related violence, child and forced marriages.

The Norwegian Red Cross also raises public awareness about negative social control, honour-related violence and child and forced marriage through: campaigns (Facebook, Instagram, outdoor campaign), its website ([www.rodekorstelefonen.no](http://www.rodekorstelefonen.no)), articles in local newspapers, public lectures, sharing information brochures, and through public events.

Since 2017, the Norwegian Red Cross has held several parenting groups based on the International Child Development Program (ICDP) for young parents with a minority background. ICDP is a program where the goal is to strengthen already existing parenting skills and to address the problem of child and forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and negative social control. Moreover, the Red Cross hosts and organizes female groups where discussions on women's rights related to marriage and divorce are facilitated, as well as other issues related to services provided by the helpline.

Currently the Norwegian Red Cross is in the process of starting a new project called "Mentor-family" for young people who have broken ties with their family because of child or forced marriage and honour-related violence. This project is also financed by the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs.

## RESULTS

The helpline receives on average 350 new inquiries annually. In 2017 there were more than 300 meetings held with clients and over 2000 individual correspondences or phone conversations.

## CHALLENGES

Since the helpline was established 19 years ago a lot has changed. The environment in which the Red Cross works has expanded and the need to continuously tailor the services provided to children to meet the changing needs has been challenging. For example, the project team has been working with young women who were subjected to forced marriages when they were children but were given false identification papers to get a permit in Norway. After notifying the authorities of the real situation, they have lost their permits to live in Norway. The team has assisted several such young women with false identities, who are too frightened to reveal their real age.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Providing a quiet and safe environment and allowing children and young people to begin to share their experiences in their own time is of central importance.

Empowering girls and boys, by allowing them to lead the conversation, respecting their boundaries and not pushing them to reveal more than they wish are also important factors in building a trusting relationship.

Another important lesson that has been learned is the importance of clarifying the role of the service provider from the beginning, preventing any unrealistic expectations on the part of the child or young person.

The helpline has been an invaluable resource in the prevention of child marriage. Anyone can call the number anonymously and get advice from an experienced professional. This has helped both potential victims and girls who have already been married against their will.

**The Red Cross Helpline helped me believe in myself when I had no one. They basically saved my life.**

Helpline user

# South Sudan

## CHILD MARRIAGES



**9%**  
before  
15 years



**52%**  
before  
18 years



## BACKGROUND

South Sudan has the seventh highest prevalence rate of child marriage in the world.<sup>29</sup> In fact, 52% of girls in the country are married before they turn 18 and 9% before the age of 15. Unlike in many countries, child marriage rates do not vary significantly among girls of different education levels, wealth indexes or rural or urban locality. Recent studies show that with the increase of the conflict and insecurity in the country the rate of child marriage has increased.<sup>30</sup> Child marriage in today's South Sudan is seen as a means of survival and protection from instability.

## SOUTH SUDAN RED CROSS APPROACH

In Terekeka county and in two rural areas of Juba (Kwarijik and Nyaying Payams), South Sudan Red Cross in partnership with the Netherlands Red Cross works with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Interior to prevent and respond to SGBV. As the project has been implemented, a high presence of child marriage with a high level of school drop-out of girls as well as cases of domestic violence and rape related to refusal of marriage proposals have been observed.

Action taken by the South Sudan Red Cross has focused on prevention and response:

### Prevention

- Formation of 8 school clubs (5 in Terekeka and 3 in Juba) where girls and boys are given the opportunity to express their concerns about violence including child marriage through sports, debates and drama. This includes awareness on sexual and reproductive health and talking about gender norms.

- Sensitization sessions with teachers and parents on national laws and the consequences of SGBV (including the prohibition of child marriage in national and international laws).
- Capacity building of various stakeholders (community leaders, teachers, women groups, youth and men groups) through trainings on the dangers of child marriage.
- Training of clinical care workers on effective ways to respond to sexual violence affecting both adult and child survivors.
- Advocating with government ministries for by-laws<sup>31</sup> that protect children against violence.
- Organization of mass campaigns on the consequences of SGBV, including child marriage, and awareness of national laws in communities through the use of radio talk shows, drama and educational materials.

### Response

- Referrals to multi-sectoral services, such as medical and psychosocial support for child survivors of sexual violence or safe shelter for girls rescued from marriage.
- Social support in the form of school materials for those who need to be transferred to other schools for fear of stigma (after being subject to attempted sexual violence or marriage).

## RESULTS

Despite some challenges, some remarkable improvement has been recorded. Local leaders interviewed during the midterm review, reported that the project shed light on the consequences of child marriage for girls and communities and created a link among formal and informal court systems. The awareness is seen by the community as a powerful means to unlock the taboo around SGBV. More trust has been built in local institutions: some cases of women, youth and teachers going to

<sup>29</sup> Girls Not Brides. *South Sudan*. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/south-sudan/>.

<sup>30</sup> Oxfam. (2019). *Born to be Married*. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/born-be-married-addressing-child-early-and-forced-marriage-nyal-south-sudan>.

<sup>31</sup> Rules by the community to regulate themselves as allowed for by legislature and other government bodies.

report child marriage cases to local justice or police have been reported. Local service providers are more aware of the issues related to child marriage and are now willing to support the South Sudan Red Cross in combatting the problem.

## CHALLENGES

There were several key challenges for the project.

### Cultural/ behavioural:

1. Deeply rooted cultural practices that condone child marriage.
2. Parents and children do not discuss sexual and reproductive health issues, so parents fear that girls can become pregnant before marriage, and to protect the honor of the family they prefer to marry them at an early age.

### Economic:

1. The depressed economy has an impact on child marriage. Dowry is an easy coping strategy to deal with lack of revenue at household level.
2. Government ministries and authorities could be a deterrent for child marriage at the village level, but their plans of action are not operational due to a lack of funding.

### Legal/ judicial system:

1. Weak judicial systems combined with traditional systems that do not provide adequate protection are translating into a lack of justice for survivors and the risk of further harm.

### Services:

1. Existing services are not able to address all the protection needs of survivors.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The South Sudan Red Cross has identified a number of key lessons learned.

- Addressing root causes is very context-specific and requires more informed and focused interventions (both for the prevention and response component).
- Intensifying outreach sessions with parents and guardians, as the key decision makers in deciding when their children are married and by whom, is essential.
- Empowering women and girls, and working with men and boys, is essential to create more gender balanced relationships in communities. Engaging adolescents and youth is often an effective approach.
- Establishing formal communication between traditional court systems and the judicial system is vital to ensure that the rule of law is observed. This needs to be accompanied by intense awareness sessions on the legal provisions related to SGBV.
- Using interactive approaches, such as drama, makes it easy for communities to relate to topics as well as providing them with opportunities to raise their voices and find solutions against child marriage.

Before, child marriage and rape were happening and people were blaming this only on survivors. With the training and especially the awareness in the community with volunteers and staff many changes have been noticed. Some people feel more concerned and engage as agents of change. Others understand the causes and the consequences and especially that it is not the survivor's fault.

South Sudan Red Cross volunteer

# Turkey



## CHILD MARRIAGES



**3%**  
before  
15 years



**18%**  
before  
18 years



## BACKGROUND

Child marriage is a harmful traditional practice that is prevalent in parts of Syria, especially rural areas, from where most refugees in Turkey are from. Prior to the conflict, it was reported that 17.7% of girls married before the age of 18 and 3.4% of girls married before the age of 15.<sup>32</sup>

As a fundamental violation of human rights, child marriage negatively affects the lives of children, both boys and girls. While both boys and girls are being married off, adolescent girls are particularly at risk.

A rise in child marriage is consistent with coping mechanisms observed in emergencies and crises.<sup>33</sup> In Turkey, refugee girls as young as 13 years are married.<sup>34</sup> There are complex factors driving child marriage among Syrian refugees. These include:

- a lack of decision-making powers given to girls;
- girls being discouraged from attending school once they reach adolescence; there is a lack of possibility to create options or a meaningful life for girls who, once taken out of school are, confined to domestic labour with limited employment opportunities;
- long-standing cultural practice;
- the coping mechanism of parents trying to protect their children from harm and insecurity; and
- parents' inability to economically provide for large numbers of children.

## TURKISH RED CRESCENT APPROACH

Cases of child marriage are identified by the Turkish Red Crescent through their protection programme under community centres, by referrals from the government or other agencies, community outreach activities, internal referrals from other departments or programmes of Turkish Red Crescent or through monitoring of the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) program, which provides families with funds each month in a bid to increase school attendance. to encourage girls and boys to attend school.

The Turkish Red Crescent provides several interventions to address child marriage among Syrian refugees.

When a risk of child marriage is identified, the Turkish Red Crescent protection teams of a relevant community centre conduct a household visit with the family of the child to make detailed protection assessment and confirm the details, before notifying the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services. If there is an impending threat to the child, the protection team stays with the child until the police come and take the lead.

For each case that is identified, the Turkish Red Crescent conducts a protection analysis, before developing a support plan when an individual requires further assistance from the protection team.

<sup>32</sup> Bureau of Statistics/UNICEF (2006). *Pan-Arab Project for Family Health/League of Arab States, Syrian Arab Republic Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women*.

<sup>33</sup> Girls not Brides. (2016). *Child Marriage and Humanitarian Crises*. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Child-marriage-and-humanitarian-crises-June-2016.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> CARE. (2015). *To Protect Her Honour: Child Marriage in Emergencies – the Fatal Confusion between Protecting Girls and Sexual Violence*. [https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE\\_Child-marriage-in-emergencies\\_2015.pdf](https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_Child-marriage-in-emergencies_2015.pdf).



Prevention activities include:

- information sessions on prevention of child marriage with children and adults. Discussions with adults centre on childhood memories, what children's basic needs are, perceptions of the participants on child marriage and what risks it poses to children. The aim of these sessions is for adults to promote the prevention of child marriage.
- where a marriage is planned but the girl is not yet married the Turkish Red Crescent holds meetings with the child and her family separately and together to persuade them to find alternative solutions.

When a child has already been married, the Turkish Red Crescent activities include:

- making a notification to the "Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services in line with the legal obligation of notification"
- holding meetings with the girl, her partner, her family and her in-laws to determine what options are available;
- psychosocial support is provided to the child either in the house or in the Community Center, to the child (or children in case both partners are children) and where applicable to the children of the married girls
- helping individuals gain access to Turkish Red Crescent, external organisation or government in-kind or financial support like through CCTE, ESSN etc. to eliminate or decrease the financial difficulties that caused child marriage.
- where married girls have given birth, support is provided for the mother on mother and child bonding and linking her to mother and child support groups where applicable.

## RESULTS

Between March 2017 and June 2019, in fifteen provinces 64,788 children have been reached with an almost equal number of girls and boys. Through these efforts, approximately 9660 children who were not regularly attending school now are which is a signal that the girls and boys involved are not in marriages.

## CHALLENGES

It is very difficult to end a child's marriage once it has occurred. This is due to social pressures on the child and her family, the social stigma that would follow the child into the future, the limited options available to the child and her own children if she were to leave her partner, and often a limited desire among girls to be separated from their partners. In these situations, the Turkish Red Crescent focuses on ensuring a safe and healthy environment for the married girl and, when applicable, her own children to prevent further physical and psychological damage.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. Prevention is key. After the fact, child marriage is very hard to address and the focus then shifts to mitigating risks for married girls and their children.
2. Parents are key decision makers around when and who children will marry. Alternative solutions other than marriage need to be promoted to parents.
3. Outreach to vulnerable households is essential to reduce risk and to intervene. Many of the children who are married come from disadvantaged, isolated, or hard-to-access populations among the Syrian refugees.

Our character is written by our mothers. So, if we do not have a good relationship with our mothers we do not learn the right things and are less safe. Healthy children and families means not marrying when a girl is still a child.

We want to respect the decisions of others. But when we see harmful practices that can make children less healthy we need to speak up.

Huriye Tak, Health and Psychosocial Support Officer and Clinical Psychologist



# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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The vision of the IFRC is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view of preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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