

Human Rights 2, Topic #2

Protecting the rights of underage women who are forced into marriage



1. Background

According to the definition, child marriage is any formal or informal union, where one or both of the parties are younger than 18 years old.¹ Despite all of the attempts to end child marriages, approximately one third of young girls in developing countries are forced into marriage. Underage marriage is a huge threat either for young girl's mental and physical health. Those kind of marriage is usually followed by pregnancy which can be devastating for young girls under 18 as they are not ready for such a commitment.

Underage marriage is often a consequence of poverty and gender inequality. Parents of underage girls believe that the marriage can secure their daughters financially.

2. UN Involvement

United Nations is deeply concerned by the number of underage marriages worldwide. There are several suggested solutions, one of them is already active – The United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), which is, according to their description: *“UNFPA is committed to delivering concrete solutions to child marriage, with an emphasis on efforts that can be scaled-up and produce measurable results. UNFPA works with governments and civil society partners, at all levels, to promote and protect the human rights of girls, including assisting with the development of policies, programmes and legislation to address and curtail the practice of child marriage. Many of these efforts, such as the Action for Adolescent Girls programme and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, empower girls to know their human rights, including their right to choose, as adults, whom to marry.”*²

The Human Right Council Resolution (A/HRC/26/22)³ April 2014 recommends amongst others the following steps:

- a. Set the age for marriage at 18 years old in every world country, to prevent mental or physical unpreparedness for getting married.
- b. The policy and protection measures, actions and strategies should be guided by the best interest of the child and in accordance with international human rights standards. It is especially important to eliminate discrimination against woman and girls (such as access to education, areas of employment or political participation).

¹ <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

² <http://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

³ http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Documents/A-HRC-26-22_en.doc

3. Blocks positions

Asian Region

There are at least 14 million underage girls forced into marriage worldwide each year for economic, cultural and family reasons. More than half of those girls are from the Asian region. Their potential is cut off at a very young age and they have no opportunity to reach their goals, or even finish their education.

European Region

European Region is the least touched by child marriage in the world. The whole content of underage marriage is banned by European law as it is considered as violation of basic human rights

American Region

29% of girls in Latin America are getting married before the age of 18. One of the biggest reasons for underage marriages in Latin America is poverty spreading around the continent – the marriage is usually a way out of poverty for the parents.

In the United States the situation is different: *“Child marriage, as defined by UNICEF, is observed in the United States. The UNICEF definition of child marriage includes couples who are formally married, or who live together as a sexually active couple in an informal union, with at least one member — usually the girl — being less than 18 years old. The latter practice is more common in the United States, and it is officially called cohabitation. According to a 2010 report by National Center for Health Statistics, an agency of the government of United States, 2.1% of all girls in the 15-17 age group were in a child marriage. In the age group of 15-19, 7.6% of all girls in the United States were formally married or in an informal union. The child marriage rates were higher for certain ethnic groups and states. In Hispanic groups, for example, 6.6% of all girls in the 15-17 age group were formally married or in an informal union, and 13% of the 15-19 age group were. Over 350,000 babies are born to teenage mothers every year in the United States, and over 50,000 of these are second babies to teen mothers. In 1991, underage teen pregnancies were significantly higher.”*⁴

African Region

According to World Health Organisation, underage marriage in Africa is almost the most common on the world. *“Early marriage is most common in Africa and South Asia. In Ethiopia and parts of West Africa, for instance, marriage at the age of 7 or 8 years is not uncommon. In Nigeria, the mean age at first marriage is 17 years, but in the Kebbi State of northern Nigeria, the average age at first marriage is just over 11 years. High rates of child*

⁴ http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/child_marriages

marriage have also been reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Uganda.”⁵

4. Questions to Consider

How does your country treat women?

What is the number of underage marriages if they are allowed in your country?

What is your country’s position on underage marriages? Are they allowed or banned?

What is the legal age for marriage in your country?

5. Works Cited and Useful Links

<http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

<http://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session26/Documents/A-HRC-26-22_en.doc

<https://plan-international.org/asia/child-marriage-asia#>

http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/child_marriages

http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf

<https://www.unicef.org/>

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/pages/hrcindex.aspx>

DEAR DELEGATES, PLEASE BEAR IN MIND THAT YOUR POLICY PAPERS SHOULD BE SUBMITTED BY 22ND OF DECEMBER ON THIS E-MAIL: marie.smejkalova98@gmail.com

⁵ http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf