***Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage***

**Submission to OHCHR report on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Contexts**

**September 2018**

**1. Please provide information and data on the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage, in relation to the number of women and girls living in specific humanitarian settings. Kindly provide data disaggregated by sex and age, and in relation to the overall number of women and girls, as well as boys where relevant, in the population.**

* Nine out of the ten countries with the highest child marriage rates are considered either fragile or extremely fragile states.
* Seven out of the twenty countries with the highest child marriage rates face some of the biggest humanitarian crises.
* In Yemen, child marriage has increased at an alarming rate. Over 65% of girls are married off before 18, compared to 50% before the conflict.

**3. What are the specific challenges and gaps in the prevention and eliminating of the practice of child, early and forced in humanitarian settings? How could such challenges and gaps be overcome?**

* **Recognise child marriage as a critical issue in times of crisis as well as in times of stability:** Child marriage has devastating consequences for girls in these settings. It deprives them of any chance of a bright future after a crisis. Child marriage is caused by a complex set of factors that take root in more stable contexts and are exacerbated in times of crisis. Humanitarian and development efforts to prevent child marriage and enable girls to thrive must be complementary. In June 2017, a Human Rights Council resolution recognised for the first time the need to address child marriage in humanitarian settings. However, more needs to be done to achieve widespread recognition and ensure child marriage in on the agenda of humanitarian actors.
* **Identify risk factors for child marriage by involving adolescent girls from the early stages of crises and including their issues in assessments and planning:** Better programming requires gender-sensitive assessments from the early stages of crises, including through responses to basic needs such as food distribution, and through household economic surveys. These assessments should be carried out by trained staff and informed by mapping and participatory consultations with girls, including married girls, who are often especially vulnerable and isolated. Key community members that have a major influence on adolescent girls’ lives should also be engaged to ensure comprehensive assessments.
* **Integrate child marriage prevention and support to married girls across sectors in any humanitarian response from the early onset of crises**: Child marriage is a cross-cutting issue, which requires coordinated action across all sectors from the earliest stage of crises. The lack of a framework to address child marriage within emergency management systems and structures aggravates the problem. Examples of responses that can be integrated and, which address both the risk factors for child marriage and support and services for married girls include:
  + Provide services to adolescent girls - e.g. access to quality non-formal education, reestablishment of formal education as soon as possible after the acute phase of a crisis; safe spaces coupled with life skills programmes; economic empowerment; alternatives to marriage; access to comprehensive health information and services including sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial counselling; support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence; legal support; access to asylum seeking process, etc.
  + Consider girls’ safety and well-being in all other services - e.g. lighting and security in places such as detention centres, water points, and latrines; dignity kits, changing rooms; attention to distances to schools and health services, etc.
  + Ensure that families’ basic needs are met and that they have the resources to care for their daughters without turning to child marriage as a coping strategy.
  + Increase efforts to keep families together where possible in order to avoid the breakdown of social networks, especially among displaced populations.
  + Build solid registration systems for refugees.
  + Work with families, communities and young people to address social and cultural norms which influence decisions of child marriage.
  + Recruit female humanitarian staff on the ground and train all staff – including camp managers - to be able to address issues faced by adolescent girls
* **Invest in the evaluation of programmes addressing child marriage**: Almost none of the few initiatives to address child marriage in humanitarian settings have been evaluated. Interventions on other issues such as education, food security or poverty, also tend not to measure their potential impact on child marriage. More funding should support efforts to pilot and evaluate programmes to understand what works to address child marriage in these settings and support practitioners operating in very challenging crisis contexts. More research is also needed to understand how different types of crises and phases of crises affect child marriage. Reliable data disaggregated by marital status, gender and age should be collected to understand the needs and risks of girls affected by crises, including for adolescents in the 10-14 age range. Field research and quality data analysis is critical to understand how programmes can be adapted for such situations.

**5. What impact have exacerbating factors had on child, early and forced marriages in humanitarian settings?**

* Growing evidence shows that in these settings child marriage rates increase, with a disproportionate impact on girls. While gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage in both stable and crisis contexts, often in times of crisis, families see child marriage as a way to cope with greater economic hardship and to protect girls from increased violence.
* Families living in crisis-affected contexts often anticipate a rise in violence and see marriage as a way to protect girls. Yet married girls face increased sexual violence within marriage. In many communities, female sexuality and virginity are associated with family honour and parents marry their daughters young to guarantee their virginity at marriage.
* Displacement itself can also increase girls’ vulnerability to child marriage due to the breakdown of social networks, the lack of other protection systems, and the risks of sexual violence. In the Kobane refugee community in Turkey, families reported fleeing partly to protect girls from sexual violence and forced marriage to armed combatants.
  + In 2017, child marriage was in the top three key protection needs identified by communities in Syria.
  + In Iraq and Syria, terrorist groups have abducted girls and women as ‘spoils of war’ to be raped, sold, offered, and forced into marriage. The Yazidi minority has been particularly affected.
  + In Somalia in 2010 and 2011, girls were abducted from school and forced to marry fighters of the Islamist armed group al-Shabaab. Parents refusing to give their daughters away were threatened or killed.
  + In north east Nigeria, various armed opposition groups use similar methods, as shown by the example of over 270 school girls who were abducted in 2014 and subjected to various forms of violence including child marriage.
  + In some contexts, families use child marriage to try to protect girls from other types of violence. During the war in Sri Lanka, parents believed that the armed group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would not recruit married girls.
* Conflict drives displacement around the world. In some cases families flee conflict zones because of the risks that girls face in such contexts. Displacement itself can also increase girls’ vulnerability to child marriage due to the breakdown of social networks, the lack of other protection systems, and the risks of sexual violence. In the Kobane refugee community in Turkey, families reported fleeing partly to protect girls from sexual violence and forced marriage to armed combatants.
  + In Syrian refugee communities in Jordan, child marriage has rapidly increased. Between 2011 and 2014, the rates of registered child marriages almost tripled, from 12% to just under 32%. Protection of family honour and control of girls’ sexuality were major drivers in this context. While it is illegal to marry before 18 in Jordan, the complex process to register a marriage and the fact that many refugees lack official identification means that girls who can’t prove their age are even more vulnerable.
  + In Lebanon, 41% of young displaced Syrian women are married before 18.
  + In displacement contexts in the Middle-East and in Europe, girls who divorce following a child marriage are left stigmatised and marginalised by their community.
  + In Chad, thousands of cases of sexual and gender based violence among refugees were reported in 2016. Child marriage is the most commonly reported form of violence among young Sudanese and Central African refugee girls.
  + In northern Cameroon and Nigeria, families facing extreme poverty in internally displaced populations and refugee camps often marry off their girls because of a lack of other alternatives and the breakdown of social networks. In northern Cameroon marriage is also used as a way to recover family debts.
  + In India, Malaysia and Indonesia, many Rohingya women and girls who fled persecution in Myanmar became child brides and faced domestic violence within marriage.
  + In Malaysia and Nigeria, child marriage is also arranged by brokers, with higher risks of being used as a cover for human trafficking.
  + In Afghanistan, where thousands of refugees were repatriated from Pakistan in 2016, child marriage was identified as a major risk for returnee children who are not in school.

Over the last few decades, the number of natural disasters has been increasing, which threaten access to basic services for girls such as education, thus adding to the risk of child marriage. Several countries with high vulnerability to climate change also have high child marriage rates.

* Following the 2004 tsunami, girls in Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka were forced into marriage with tsunami widowers and in many instances did so to receive state subsidies for marrying and starting a family.
* In Bangladesh and northeast India, extreme poverty and difficult access to education provoked by river erosion and floods often pushed families to adopt child marriage as a survival strategy. Organisations working in urban slums in Dhaka saw many girls abandon school and migrate to work in the garment industry or as maids, and face high risks of sexual abuse in the slums. Most never returned to school and got married.
* In Nepal, anecdotal evidence has shown an increase in gender-based violence and child marriage following the earthquake in 2015.
* A similar increase was reported following disasters in Lao and the Philippines.
* In Somaliland and Mozambique, research suggests drought drives child marriage because marrying a girl off frees the family from providing for her.
* This contrasts with Ethiopia, where community members suggested that drought was one of the reasons for a reduction in child marriage as families could not afford to organise weddings.

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