

UNICEF

Focusing on a global effort to prohibit child marriages



Names +

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Introducing Your Chairs

My name is Julayka van Beukering, and I will be the Chair of UNICEF together with ... during the 2024 FAMUN conference.

I am 18 years old, and am currently studying at the PABO in Amsterdam to become a primary teacher. I graduated from the Farel College in May 2023, and I am really happy to be returning back to my old school to pass along the wonderful experience that is MUN.

Last year during FAMUN 2023 I was part of the Executive Team, as Head of Hospitality.

I am very excited for this year, and I hope to get into a lot of fruitful debates with all of you.

So, let's make FAMUN 2024 the best one yet.

Welcome, delegates and distinguished guests.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the FAMUN Conference. I am honored to serve as your chair for this event, and I am committed to ensuring that it is a successful and enriching experience for all participants.

As the chair, I play a crucial role in organizing and overseeing the entire conference. I work closely with the organizing committee to select delegates, prepare debate topics, and ensure that all aspects of the conference run smoothly. My goal is to create a neutral and fair environment where delegates can engage in meaningful debate and foster a spirit of cooperation and diplomacy.

I am confident that this conference will be a valuable learning experience for all delegates. Through rigorous debate and interaction with peers from around the world, participants will develop their critical thinking and communication skills, enhance their understanding of global issues, and gain a deeper appreciation for the importance of international cooperation.

I expect all delegates to participate actively in the conference, conduct themselves with professionalism and respect, and uphold the principles of MUN. I am confident that with your dedication and commitment, we can make this conference a resounding success.

Ekansh Talwar

An Introduction To The Topic

UNICEF

UNICEF, originally called the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund in full, now officially United Nations Children's Fund, is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. The agency is among the most widespread and recognizable social welfare organizations in the world, with a presence in 192 countries and territories. UNICEF's activities include providing immunizations and disease prevention, administering treatment for children and mothers with HIV, enhancing childhood and maternal nutrition, improving sanitation, promoting education, and providing emergency relief in response to disasters.

Child Marriage

Despite a steady decline in this harmful practice over the past decade, child marriage remains widespread, with approximately one in five girls married in childhood across the globe. Today, multiple crises – including conflict, climate shocks and lingering effects of COVID-19 – are threatening to reverse progress towards eliminating this human rights violation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals call for global action to end child marriage by 2030.

Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth that among girls.

Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and threatens their well-being. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school. They have worse economic and health outcomes than their unmarried peers, which are eventually passed down to their own children, straining a country's capacity to provide quality health and education services.

Child brides often become pregnant during adolescence, when the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth increases. The practice can also isolate girls from family and friends, taking a heavy toll on their mental health.

Definition of Key Terms

Child marriage: refers to any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child

UNPF: The United Nations Populations Fund

A General Overview of the Issue

Child marriage refers to the union where one or both parties are below the age of 18. Despite global efforts to combat this practice, millions of children, primarily girls, continue to be subjected to early marriages, often resulting in severe violations of their rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underscore the urgency of eliminating child marriages to ensure the well-being, empowerment, and development of children.

Although illegal in most countries, child marriages are prevalent across diverse regions, with Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia reporting the highest rates. Disparities exist within countries, reflecting socio-economic, cultural, and educational variations.

Girls are disproportionately affected by child marriages, with consequences ranging from limited educational opportunities to increased vulnerability to violence and health risks.

1. Drivers of Child Marriages:

- Deep-rooted cultural practices, poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality contribute to the persistence of child marriages.
- Armed conflict and humanitarian crises exacerbate the vulnerability of children to early marriages.

2. Consequences:

- Child marriages have severe and lifelong consequences, including adverse impacts on physical and mental health, limited access to education, increased vulnerability to violence, and perpetuation of the cycle of poverty.

3. Legal Frameworks and International Commitments:

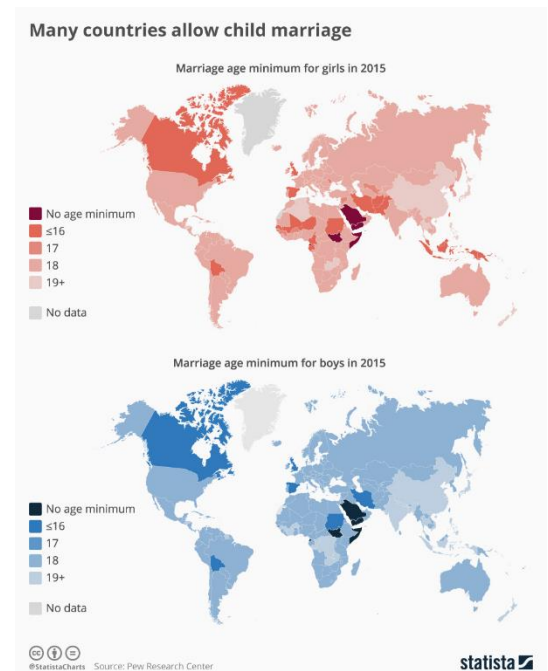
- Many countries have established legal frameworks to address child marriages, aligning with international commitments such as the CRC and SDGs.
- Challenges persist in the enforcement and implementation of these laws.

Historical Background

Throughout history, in many different cultures, child marriages have been common. In the Roman empire females were allowed to marry at the age of 12, boys at 14. England followed suit and spread this rule to their colonies. During the Middle Ages this trend continued, where it was often viewed as practical due to the short life expectancy, as it would ensure family stability and security. In China and the Indian subcontinent there is a tradition of child marriage. In India children were often married by their parents for economic and social reasons. Across the continent of Africa child marriage has been prevalent for similar reasons.

In Christianity girls were forbidden to be married before puberty. In Judaism the minimal age was 12. In Islamic law there was no specific age mentioned however it was only accepted once a girl was deemed mature enough for marriage.

During and after the Industrial Revolution life expectancy increased, women got better education and started entering the workforce. This has caused a shift in the view and prevalence of child marriage. In the modern world most countries have the minimum marriage age set at 18, there are however countries with other minimums or exceptions to their laws.



Major Parties Involved

India & Bangladesh

India and Bangladesh are the countries ranking first and second respectively on the list of countries with the greatest number of child brides with a combined number of more than 19 000.

Niger

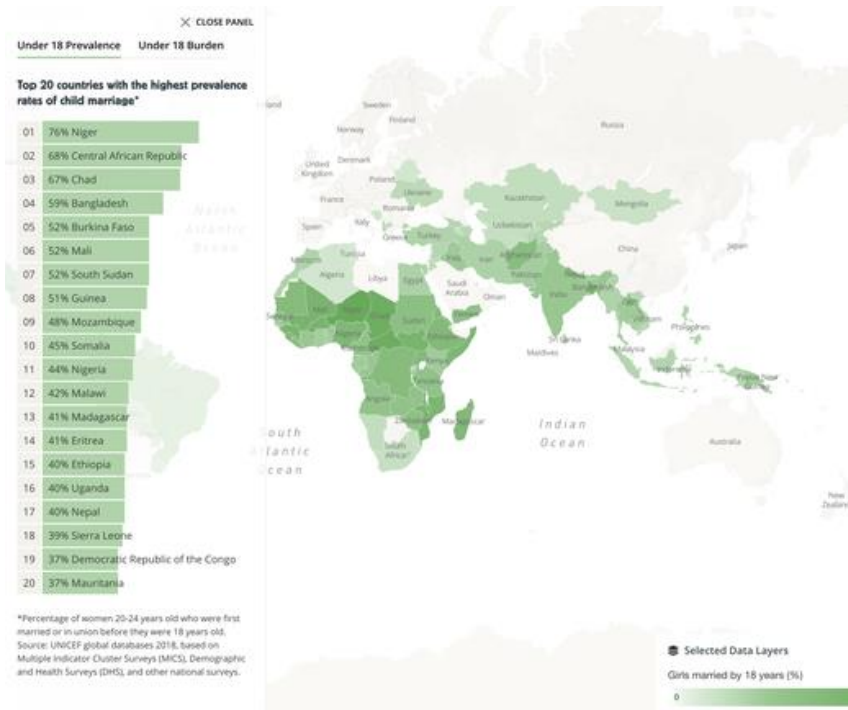
Niger has the highest rate of child marriages in the world with 77% of married women between the ages of 20 and 49 having been married before having reached the age of 18.

UNFPA

The United Nations Populations Fund is an UN body working to ensure reproductive rights for all. They are taking actions on many different issues including child marriage.

Girls Not Brides

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership working collectively to ending child marriage. They have a partnership of more than 1600 organisations in over 100 countries.



Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UNICEF

UNICEF has already taken various measures to help further prevent child marriage from occurring. They have taken different prevention steps in countries as diverse as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. There they have included support for hotlines and referrals to services that offer direct support to girls. Their programmes use robust evidence, shaped by the perspectives of underprivileged girls and boys, to empower communities and fortify the societal safety and education institutions that serve as barriers to child marriage.

Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality

In southeast Turkey, UNICEF is working with the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality to identify causes and cases of child marriages and develop mechanisms to prevent them. The programme aims to reach around 50,000 children and 50,000 parents by the end of 2017. UNICEF signed key partnerships with government and NGO partners to expand access to education and child protection services, including targeted interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage and child labour.

Ethiopia: Berhane Hewan project

Multiple organisations, including the Ethiopian government, Population Council, UNFPA, UN foundation and Nike Foundation have worked together to establish this programme. It targets married and unmarried girls ages 10 to 19 in Ethiopia's Amhara region. It also engages girls' families as well as the broader community. The programme's strategies to prevent child marriage and to support married girls include forming girls' groups, providing school materials to keep girls in school, holding community conversations about child marriage, and enlisting adult mentors to support girls. Impressive results have been concluded from this ongoing project and it is now being scaled up in other parts of Ethiopia.

Possible Solutions For The Issue

Every community has a distinct perspective on child marriage. There is not one single solution to the issue, however one thing is certain: nations must all work together. A global effort is needed.

The girls affected by this should be at the centre of the solutions to stop child marriage. It is the responsibility of homes and communities to change the harmful societal norms that restrict the options available to these young people. Gender equality can be expanded in the home and public areas by working cohesively, enabling children to realise their full potential.

International organisations, governments, and religious and political leaders must unite and pledge to implement human rights norms globally in order to bring about significant change. In order to prevent child marriage and strengthen children's agency, this calls for focused funding and programming. It entails guaranteeing that those affected have access to high-quality education, healthcare related to sexual and reproductive health, gender-responsive social security programs, and an equitable and just labour market.

UNICEF sees ending child marriage as essential for girls' empowerment and well-being, and work with partner to tackle this rights violation wherever it occurs. It is most focussed on creating programs in which the promotion of high-quality education and mobilisation is of utmost importance, in order to give these girls more control over their own lives and prospects. UNICEF believe there are five key areas which support the prevention of this harmful practice:

- Support for development and participation of adolescent girls;
- Strengthening legal systems to protect the rights of adolescent girls and boys;
- Carrying out innovative research to build a robust evidence base for advocacy, policies, programmes and tracking progress;
- Strengthening services to help adolescents at risk of, or affected by, child marriage, particularly girls;
- Raising awareness of the need to invest in and support girls, and shifting the social expectations that stifle their prospects.

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