

# The Roles of UNFPA-UNICEF in the Case of Child Marriage in Yemen 2016-2019

## Los Roles de UNFPA-UNICEF en el Caso del Matrimonio Infantil en Yemen 2016-2019

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24197/st.1.2023.127-144>

RECIBIDO: 12/04/2022

ACEPTADO: 17/08/2022

**Resumen:** Esta investigación está motivada por el hecho de que actualmente el matrimonio infantil es una forma de violación de los derechos humanos y es un indicador de varios otros problemas de salud global. Yemen es uno de los mayores contribuyentes a los casos de matrimonio infantil en el Medio Oriente y Yemen alberga a 4 millones de niñas novias, y 1,4 millones de ellas se casaron antes de los 15 años. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar y describir el papel de UNFPA- UNICEF en el programa de acción acelerada para poner fin al matrimonio infantil para reducir el matrimonio infantil en Yemen en 2016-2019. Este estudio utiliza métodos de investigación cualitativos y utiliza una técnica de recopilación para recopilar datos de investigación bibliotecaria utilizando datos secundarios recopilados de los informes anuales, libros, revistas, artículos y medios de Internet de UNFPA y UNICEF. Los resultados de este estudio muestran que la implementación global del programa UNFPA-

**Abstract:** This research is motivated by the fact that currently child marriage is a form of violation of human rights and is an indicator of various other global health problems. Yemen is one of the largest contributors to child marriage cases in the Middle East and Yemen is home to 4 million child brides, and 1.4 million of it got married before the age of 15. This study aims to analyze and describe the role of UNFPA-UNICEF in the accelerate action to End Child Marriage program to reduce child marriage in Yemen in 2016-2019. This study uses qualitative research methods and uses a collection technique for collecting data of library research using secondary data collected from UNFPA and UNICEF annual reports, books, journals, articles and internet media. The results of this study show that the global implementation of the UNFPA-UNICEF program has had an impact on reducing child marriage in Yemen.

**Keywords:** UNFPA, UNICEF, Child Marriage, Yemen

UNICEF ha tenido un impacto en la reducción del matrimonio infantil en Yemen.

**Palabras clave:** UNFPA, UNICEF, matrimonio infantil, Yemen

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a violation of human rights which is increasingly recognized by international actors as an indicator of various other global health problems. Child marriage is an ongoing humanitarian problem in almost all parts of the world. Child marriage is a serious offence because it directly threatens the health and life, and limits the future prospects, safety and education of boys and girls (UNFPA, 2022). The internationally recognized definition of a child established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), is that every human being under the age of 18. It is one of the most universal and widely ratified treaties in history and is also the legal definition used in most parts of the world.

Various terms are used to define child marriage, namely early marriage or forced marriage. Any marriage done without the one- or two-persons' full consent is coercion. Child marriage or early marriage are defined as almost the same concept, which refers to a formal or an informal marriage between a child under the age of 18 with an adult or another child. In international conventions and many countries, child marriage is considered a form of forced marriage because children under the age of 18 are considered unable to give full free consent. (Landini, 2021).

This dangerous practice that is not proportional really affects the lives of children, especially girl. Based on the 1948 UN Human Rights Declaration and *the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) the minimum age for marriage is 18 years old for women and 21 years old for men. International agreements, such as CEDAW, have prohibited child marriage. In fact, in 1994 the International Conference on Population and Development called on countries to abolish child marriage (UNFPA, 2022).

Child marriage is often the result of deep-rooted gender inequalities, where girls are affected the most by the practice. Child marriage take the childhood of children, especially girls and threatens their life and health. Girls who get married before the age of 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school (UNICEF, 2021). Often, child bride was forced to get married with a man older than her. The age gap is crucial because the more gap they have, the more possibilities the girl experience the domestic violence. In fact, globally, nearly half of girls aged 15-19 think that their partner is justified in hitting them under certain circumstances (Oranje, 2016). WHO found that young married women with low levels of education have a higher risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence from their partners than women who are older and have higher education (WHO, 2005).

Child marriage is also often accompanied by early pregnancy and childbirth, so it often results in higher average of maternal morbidity and mortality. Child marriage has dire consequences for the physical and psychological health of girls, especially younger girls. These consequences impacted the girl's entire life. Married girls are often locked up at home, so they could do the household chores and care for

their family, including their in-laws. Married girls are isolated from friends and family and may rarely have someone to share their pain with.

Some children all over the world are forced to face this reality. Even child marriages occur in developed countries such as the United States and England. However, child marriage is more common in developing countries because one of the main driving factors is poverty (UNFPA, 2022). According to UNICEF, more than 650 million women alive today were married as children. Of this number, 40 million or the equivalent of 6% of child brides are in the *Middle East and North Africa* (MENA) region, and the highest number are in Sudan and Yemen (MENA, 2022). Every year, at least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18. It means that there are 28 girls under the age of 18 get married every minute. One out of every five girls who get married is under the age of 18. In some poorer countries, these number get doubled. There are 40% girls get married before the age of 18 and 12% girls get married before the age of 15. This practice has spread in countries that are affected by the war and humanitarian crises.

Parents who are economically incapable often believe that child marriage will guarantee the future of their daughters by having the husband responsible for her. This is common for girls who are forced by circumstances to drop out of school. The parents considered the dowry as an important income, especially during difficult time. Especially in times of crisis, people often choose marriage as a way to protect their daughters from sexual violence. Child marriage rates are known to increase during the turmoil of war, as families experience economic instability and fear of violence (UNFPA, 2016). However, child marriage itself causes girls to experience high levels of sexual, physical and emotional violence from their partners.

The increase in child marriage in countries affected by the humanitarian crisis is generally caused by high levels of insecurity and violence including gender-based violence, school closures and lack of educational opportunities, disruptions in social and health services (including contraceptive services), high poverty rates and decreased livelihood opportunities, and other social support disorders. Families can force their daughters to marry underage as a negative coping strategy, to avoid the stigma of pregnancy outside of marriage, the perception that marriage would provide 'protection', family honor, social norms, customary law, or religion that justifies this practice. Although this practice is more common among girls than boys, it is an offense regardless of the gender (Committee, 2019).

Yemen is one of the biggest human crises in the world. Child marriage in Yemen has long been and is a phenomenon of human rights violations that has been going on for centuries. Yemen is one of the countries with the highest child marriage rates in the world. There are various factors driving the high number of child marriages in Yemen, namely poverty and conflict. Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East and the ongoing deadly conflict in Yemen is causing millions of Yemeni people to suffer and their lives are threatened by hunger and disease. As of

December 2019, 24 million Yemenis are in need of humanitarian assistance (Commission, 2019).

The failure of Yemeni government to address this issue made the country became one of the countries with the highest child marriage rate. Thus, UNFPA and UNICEF targetted Yemen as part of the twelve countries in the Global Program to end child marriage. The Global initial program is a joint program initiated by the United Nations to end child marriage in the world by 2030.

In dealing with this problem, 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, is collaborating with another international organization, namely UNFPA (The United Nations Population Fund). The UNFPA, formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, is a UN agency aimed at improving reproductive and maternal health worldwide. UNFPA aims to create a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is loved, and the potential of every child is easily fulfilled. UNICEF and UNFPA both have a long-term committment to promote the rights and well-being of all girls and boys, to achieve the SDGs in 2030. The collaboration between UNFPA and UNICEF is built on the basis of available evidence and based on the experience of the two institutions for a decade in reaching out to girls. Data and evidence show that child marriage is driven by many interrelated factors. UNFPA focuses on dealing with problems after child marriage, while UNICEF focuses on raising awareness of families, communities, and the government about the impact of child marriage. Therefore, this research tries to analyze the roles and challenges of UNFPA and UNICEF in dealing with the problem of child marriage in Yemen.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study focuses on discussing child marriage in Yemen. The research uses a qualitative approach which combines multiple relevant datas and references. The qualitative research method in this study seeks to provide a description of UNFPA-UNICEF's efforts to end child marriage in Yemen in 2016-2019. In collecting data, this research uses mainly *library research collection techniques* using secondary data such as the UNFPA and UNICEF annual reports, online medias, articles, books, websites, journals, and some other relevant references.

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1. CONCEPT OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION**

To understand a phenomenon and answer a problem, a basic framework of thought is needed in the form of a theory or concept to analyze the problem. In this

study the framework that is used to answer the problem is the concept of international organization.

International organization is an interstate organization that is bound by an agreement to guarantee common goals (Krisna, 1993). International organization is formed because of the need for cooperation to overcome the problems, in this case it would be the global humanitarian issue. International organizations have a role as a forum for fostering cooperation and preventing intense conflicts among fellow members. International organizations play a role as a means for discussing and producing joint decisions that have been agreed upon and going out to provide benefits to the parties involved. In addition, international organizations play a role as an independent institution in carrying out activities such as humanity, environmental preservation, and social activities. The role of other international organizations is to promote and assist other international organization that aim to improve health, prevent, and reduce suffering of the people throughout the world.

According to Daniel S. Cheever and H. Field Haviland jr. international organizations are forms of institutionalized international cooperation between countries, generally based on a basic agreement to carry out functions that provide reciprocal benefits carried out through meetings and activities periodically. Dr. Boer Mauna (2005) defines an international organization as an association of independent and sovereign nations which aims to achieve common interests through the organs of the association itself.

International organizations are formed to carry out the roles and functions that are in accordance with the goals of the organization. According to Harold K. Jacobson (1979: 88-90) the functions of international organizations are categorized into five categories, namely:

1. *Informative functions* include collecting, analyzing, exchanging, and disseminating various data and facts that occur in the international world. In this function, UNICEF collects and analyses data about the cases of child marriage in Yemen before UNICEF-UNFPA design the overall program. UNFPA and UNICEF officially provides a report on the problem of child marriage in Yemen. This information is in the form of journals and annual reports which are distributed on the official websites of UNFPA and UNICEF with the aim that the international community knows and understands the impact of child marriage.
2. *Function of regulations* includes the formation and declaration of a norm or principle. The function of these regulations does not have legally binding instruments, however the statements that can affect the awareness of the domestic and international community. In this function, UNFPA and UNICEF suggested such policies, programs and legislation designed to end the child marriage.
3. *Function of making regulations*, which can be a new regulation or to ensure the existing regulations that have been agreed upon, signed, and ratified can

be effective on the parties. In the case of Yemen, UNICEF and UNFPA could not make any binding policies, but they could support the government of Yemen to adopt laws on child marriage minimum age. However, due to the instability in Yemen, the Yemeni government has not been able to enact the law yet so far.

4. *The oversight function* is related to taking action to ensure the enforcement of regulations is taking place by the international actors. This oversight function requires steps in its implementation, such as compiling the facts that have been obtained from the violations that have occurred and then these facts need to be re-examined for the imposition of witnesses. In this function, UNFPA-UNICEF have to use strong data and evidence to inform programs and policies on ending child marriage.
5. *Operational function* includes the utilization and operation of all existing resources within the organization, such as funding, operating the sub-organizations and building military strength (Jacobson, 1984). In this function, UNFPA and UNICEF secured funding and support to undertake joint efforts to combat child marriage. This Global Program is supported by the governments of Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, the European Union, and Zonta International (Zonta International is an international service organization with the mission of advancing the status of women).

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. UNFPA-UNICEF PROGRAM TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

The Yemeni conflict that has occurred since 2015 has made Yemen one of the countries with the worst humanitarian crisis. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen has paralyzed the economy, schools, infrastructure, health facilities and has caused some 24 million Yemeni people to depend on humanitarian aid. Since the Yemen conflict escalated, Yemen has become the worst place for children. Because of that, UNICEF as one of the international organizations under the auspices of the United Nations engaged in the humanitarian field, especially to help and protect the rights of children and women. UNFPA played a major role in protecting and dealing with child problems in Yemen, especially the problem of child marriage in Yemen.

The United Nations has adopted the elimination of child marriage as part of its gender equality goals under Target 5.3 in the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals): Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. With this goal in mind, UNICEF and UNFPA secured funding and supported to undertake joint efforts to combat child marriage. With significant support from partners and donors, UNICEF and UNFPA launched a joint effort on 12 countries in four regions: East and South Africa, Middle East and North

Africa, South Asia, and West and Central Africa. Some progress that has been made are:

1. More than 754,000 girls were reached out through girls' communities, schools initiatives, and skills trainings in 2016.
2. Initiatives designed to facilitate changes in attitudes and practices related to girls' rights are well established and have reached more than 1.6 million individuals, including girls, boys, religious leaders, and elders.
3. Engaged regional and national governing bodies to galvanize action and political will, and to promote appropriations of resources to end child marriage.
4. Strengthened the sectoral systems such as education for girls at school and outside of school to prevent the child marriage (UNFPA&UNICEF, 2017).

Elimination of child marriage is currently recognized globally as the main target for achieving the SDGs by 2030. This issue has also been included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that every child must be protected from all kinds of discrimination against them. Elimination of child marriage is a form of protection of children's rights to grow and develop. UNICEF and UNFPA launched the global program of *Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage* in 2016.

The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program was conceptualized from 2014 to 2015 and was implemented in its first phase from 2016 to 2019 in 12 countries, which later to be continued in the second phase, for the period of 2020-2023. The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program to end child marriage has been implemented in the countries with the highest rates of child marriage, namely: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia. This program has partially exceeded its major target, reaching millions of people in 12 countries with the intervention designed to end child marriage and continues to expand its coverage to the bigger population of girls and societies. The Global Program is supported by the governments of Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom, the European Union and Zonta International (UNFPA, 2022).

The Global Elimination of Child Marriage Program aims to ensure that all girls enjoy their childhood and are free from the risk of child marriage, ensuring that children experience smooth transition from childhood to adulthood, and free to decide what best for them, including the decisions to get married and to have a child. The program prioritizes the girls because they are considered vulnerable. Even though some boys in certain countries are getting married at an early age, the quantity is not as many as girls. Girls are at risk of gender-based violence, early pregnancy, and various diseases. The key to reducing child marriage is ensuring that girls get access to education and sexual and reproductive health services. A comprehensive policy environment that supports and promotes human rights, develops capacity and gives people, community stakeholders, and organizations the power to change



attitudes and cultural and religious norms that support child marriage must be put in place in conjunction with the introduction of national laws (UNFPA-UNICEF, June 2017).

#### 4.2. THE PROBLEM OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN YEMEN

Child marriage is a social norm that is deeply ingrained in Yemeni society. The practice of child marriage is widespread in rural and urban areas. Child marriage in Yemen occurs because it is driven by gender inequality and the belief that girls are inferior to boys (Commission, 2019). According to a statement by the UN Security Council working group, one of the main driving factors for the increase in the number of child marriages in Yemen is the conflict that started in 2015. Ahmed al -Qurashi, President of the Seyaj Yemen Child Protection Organization, justified the increase in child marriages since the war began, citing damage government as the main cause. Yemen does not have a central authority enforcing children's rights. Courts, prosecutors, and police are no longer carrying out their duties in most parts of the country, especially in rural areas where child marriage is more common.

a UNICEF KAP (Knowledge-Attitude-Practice) survey conducted in 2016 in Yemen revealed that more girls married early during the war. Some families marry their sons early, in some cases as young as six, to prevent them from joining armed groups (UNICEF, 2017). This conflict has exacerbated Yemen's situation, causing Yemen to be hit by chronic poverty, making 24 million Yemenis dependent on humanitarian aid. High levels of poverty, lack of opportunity, falling wages and high levels of corruption among humanitarian aid play a role in contributing to the problem of child marriage (Mahdi, 2020).

In the face of increasing poverty, many parents who are unable to care for and provide for their children's needs have turned to child marriage. The parents force their children to marry men who are much older than the girl, as they cannot afford to support children financially. However, unfortunately, child marriage is a very fatal agreement because child marriage increases the risk of experiencing violence, harassment and endangering their health. In addition, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that girls affected by the conflict were forcibly married off by members of Ansar al-Sharia, a jihadist group with links to Al-Qaeda (Commission, 2019).

In 2017 the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 52% of teenage girls had been married before they were 18 years old. Between 2017 and the following year, OCHA reported [a threefold increase](#) in under-18 marriages (Ferguson, Helping Girls Escape Early Marriage in Yemen, 2020). As conditions in Yemen worsen, the number of child brides has increased. According to a 2019 report by the *United Nations Children's Fund* (UNICEF) and the *United Nations Population Fund* (UNFPA), [more than four million Yemeni girls](#) are child

brides and 1.4 million of these brides are under the age of 15 (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2019).

Apart from the conflict or war factor, child marriage is also justified by claims of traditions or religious reasons. Yemeni society has traditions that are classified as patriarchal and conservative, so that girls cannot fight against this practice of child marriage. These daughters can only comply with the wishes of their father who they perceive as the person who has the ability to make the best decisions for the family. According to some parents, child marriage that occurs is not interpreted as a violation of human rights, but to protect family honor and to protect and prevent girls from sexual activities outside of marriage.

The next factor causing child marriage in Yemen to continue to increase is the poor quality of education. The illiteracy rate in Yemen is among the highest in the middle east region, especially among women. Before the conflict, when girls have entered puberty, most parents force them to leave the school and help them with the household chores as well as preparing the children for marriage. According to *Girls Not Brides*, since the conflict started, two million children have lost access to education, which makes girls more vulnerable to early marriages (Brides, 2020).

In Yemen, girls who drop out of school see marriage as the only option, as man who would propose the girl would not only come with a dowry but also a promise to bear the cost of education for the bride. However, in reality, after marriage, the bride must face the responsibility of giving birth and taking care of the baby. Giving birth to a baby at young age can face several risks such as premature birth and even death during the labor. At a global level, the number one cause of death for women aged 15-19 years is pregnancy and childbirth (Hasan, 2019).

Yemen has committed to eliminating child marriage by 2030 in accordance with target 5.3 of the *Sustainable Development Goals*, achieving gender equality and empowering women to eradicate child marriage. In 2019, at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) which marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the movement, Yemen had committed to ending all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030, including in the practice of early marriage and forced marriage. During the 2019 Universal Periodic Review, Yemen supported the recommendations to take steps to end the practice of child marriage and forced marriage and accelerate the drafting, adoption and implementation of laws setting a minimum age limit for marriage (Commission, 2019).

#### **4.3. THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF UNFPA-UNICEF IN ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN YEMEN**

To run the Global Program in a country like Yemen, with the on-going humanitarian crisis, violent conflict, and the economic downturn that affects household affairs in Yemen, in September 2017, UNFPA and UNICEF had a meeting in Cairo between country and regional offices to select five main sets of

interrelated activities to achieve the goals of this Global Program. As a result, the child marriage program in Yemen embraces a holistic integrated approach that focuses on empowering girls to speak out on issues that are important to them and to act as agents of change in their communities. UNFPA and UNICEF would strengthen efforts to capitalize on resources and increase cooperation with other sectors. This program aims to promote positive behavior and social change and at the same time provide multisectoral services to child marriage victims who are at risk. The global initial program focuses on five key strategies for producing meaningful and lasting change through evidence-based programming and advocacy, which include:

1. Building the skills and knowledge of girls who are at risk of child marriage or who are married already

UNFPA and UNICEF in running this global program decided to use soft skills as an entrance for the empowerment of girls. In 2018, customized life skills package from the *Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) framework from the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office* was developed in consultation with various actors including the ministry of education. The LSCE framework is designed to address the need for a holistic, long-lasting, and rights-based education that maximizes the power of all children and young people in the region and prepares them for the transition from childhood to adulthood, from education to employment, and from development, which is not reflective to become a responsible and active citizen. This LSCE framework supports better learning through investment in individual, social and economic development, and focuses on 12 life skills using a 4-dimensional learning model, namely: Learning to Know (Cognitive Dimension), Learning to Do (Instrumental Dimension), Learning to Become (Individual Dimensions) and Learning to Live Together (Social Dimensions) (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2019).

The life skills package adapted and developed in Yemen has been implemented mainly in schools and surrounding communities by UNICEF. This life skills package is intended for young men and women. Children who drop out of school are also reached through interventions led by UNFPA. Regardless of security issues and challenges in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, this program could develop a life skills package that is integrated in the collaboration of various actors to support education in schools. During phase I, this program has succeeded in reaching 19.750 girls and more than 50.000 boys aged 10-19 years *with life-skills training*, information, and psychosocial support services. In 2019, 5.324 girls aged 10-19 years actively participated in this program. A total of 62.293 parents are involved and equipped with positive parenting skills and knowledge about development to overcome child marriage (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2019).

In addition to life skills, skills in finding livelihood and information on sexual and reproductive health were given to Yemeni children. the program also invested in a peer-to-peer education approach, whereby girls who receive life skills at school are

encouraged and supported to transfer the knowledge they receive to their peers. Literacy training is provided by UNFPA to help build the capacity of girls who are at risk of child marriage to encourage them to return to school. The process is carried out through a participatory approach using the REFLECT methodology (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques), which is a structured (informal) participatory learning process for girls (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2019).

UNFPA-UNICEF was challenged to introduce this life skill for the first time. According to the Yemeni authorities, this project is considered a western idea that aims to change the culture of the country and will damage the relationship between the child and the parents. “Empowerment” for girls and boys is considered a “weapon” against the family. This erroneous perception has led to delays in the approval of this program by the Ministry of Education. This life skills project is also continuously interrupted by the Yemeni authorities, the interference of the authorities in determining recipients of aid is also another challenge for UNFPA-UNICEF.

Child marriage has been firmly entrenched in Yemeni culture, therefore efforts to overcome had to be carried out holistically and integratedly. In deceiving girls, boys should not be sidelined. At the same time, the empowerment of the family must be considered more important as the economic motives are the driving factor for the occurrence of these marriages. Because of that, opportunities for social economic empowerment had to be offered to families where their daughters and sons are at risk of experiencing child marriage.

## 2. Engage families, communities, and leaders to protect girls from child marriage and uphold their rights

During the implementation of this global program, UNFPA-UNICEF realized that teenage girls did not have enough understanding about reproductive and sexual health, and the dangers of giving birth to children at a young age. Not only that, UNFPA-UNICEF was aware that the lack of knowledge also occurred on the parents where they did not know the dangers of child marriage, so that practices that violate children’s rights are normalized in society. Because of that, UNFPA-UNICEF created a community for dialogue. Within this community, UNFPA-UNICEF provided public service information and mass media campaigns that are expected to reach the wider community. All community leaders were expected to be involved in developing and leading community dialogue on child marriage. To increase the awareness of the child marriage, the discussion focuses on the negative impacts of child marriage and child pregnancy, as well as the importance of the added value of education for girls. The message has reached the community, including religious leaders.

For example, a religious leader in Dar Saad District, who is the Imam of Al-Khair Mosque, has started to include in his speeches the call about reducing child marriage and its consequences for the health and development of girls in his Friday

sermons. Additionally, in December 2019, in Qalou'ah Bir Ahmad, a village where child marriage is common, the citizen is gathered under the leadership of a sheikh of religious and community leaders, to sign an agreement limiting child marriage and sending them back to school. The Imam encouraged parents to wait for the marriage of their children until they at least at the age of 18, while waiting for the laws to be legalized.

In 2016, UNFPA-UNICEF is targeting as many as 15.500 Yemeni people to be given knowledge about the impact of child marriage. The program conducted by UNFPA-UNICEF has exceeded the target. This program reaches 278.080 Yemeni people, although it has lower intense involvement than other countries, this result shows that the program carried out by UNFPA-UNICEF is welcomed by some Yemeni people. In 2019, a total of 38.564 individuals, both women and men, participated regularly in dialogues promoting gender equality norms including the petite child marriage campaign. In addition, more than 392.000 individuals were reached by the half campaign focused on ending child marriage. However, progress in outreach to the public has been unstable due to the unpredictable nature of emergencies and the reluctance of people to attend meetings due to the risk of airstrikes.

In carrying out this strategy in Yemen, UNFPA-UNICEF faced several challenges, such as the difficulty of introducing social and behavioral changes. Giving an information about the adverse effects of child marriage was difficult for the public to accept. Another challenge is that some religious leaders refuse to promote awareness to end child marriage. Though the religious leaders have a significant influence on changes in family perceptions and are proven to have a real positive impact on society in some cases.

### 3. Strengthen the prevention and protection system

The Initial strategy focuses on discussing health, education, and the system for protecting girls in the countries under the program. In the health sector, this includes the development and implementation of a training package for health service providers, quality improvement, and certification of female - friendly health services. In 2019, there were 83 service points in the program area to implement guidelines for health services and protection for girls. A total of 10.102 girls have utilized health services, such as medical services and psychosocial support for cases of violence against children and victims of child marriage (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2019).

In the field of education, it includes the support for girls to enroll and remain in formal or non-formal education, training of teachers, instructors, and educational curricula. In 2019, a total of 273 girls aged 10-19 years were supported by UNICEF through global for the re-enrolment and continuing education program for the child marriage. Of these, 21 girls were able to integrate into the formal education system after acquiring the necessary knowledge through informal education supported by UNFPA (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2019).

Finally in the field of child protection, it covers the support for strengthening the structure of society and the legal and justice system related to gender-based violence. Girls are provided with legal services, safe housing, and cash support. This program also directly gave several girls a package to start a business as an alternative to avoiding child marriage although it was difficult for the program to measure the proportion of girls who could express and exercise their choices in program areas. The challenge of this strategy was the lack of availability of services in several areas where they postpone the services and prevent the victims from receiving the appropriate services.

#### 4. Develop and implement policy or laws that protect girls and boys from harmful practices

In 1979, the United Nations officially adopted a legal instrument specifically related to the women's rights, namely the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women/CEDAW*. CEDAW strives to protect women from discrimination in the civil and political spheres, as well as in the economic, social, and cultural spheres. As well as this convention also creates the foundation and establishes obligations for its participants to deny eliminating discrimination, by adopting laws that prohibit discrimination, prevent discriminatory actions, to protect women from discrimination by non-state actors both in the form of individuals and corporate organizations.

Yemen is a party in the main international agreement that protects the human rights of women and girls. In 1984, Yemen has ratified several international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the 1964 Convention on the Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991 (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Many national laws in several countries are not in accordance with the international and regional commitment due to the difference with the customary law. Yemen is one of them. Yemen is a country that ratified the international convention that protect women's rights. The law was to determine the minimum age to marry. However, this contradicts with the Yemen's customary law. When the Yemeni government wanted to enact a legal minimum age for marriage, this proposal was rejected by the Sharia Legislative Committee. In March 2010, Parliament re-drafted the draft law, but the Sharia Legislative Committee rejected it once again. When asked why there is no minimum age for marriage, the Sharia Legislative Committee stated that having a minimum age for marriage is "un-Islamic", which is of course it is not correct as it is more on the customary law.

In January 2014, the Yemen National Dialogue Conference, which is a forum of 565 members, was formed with the aim of supporting efforts to end child marriage.

The legal age for marriage is unclear (Nagi, 2022). Until now, Yemen still does not have a law that sets a minimum age for marriage. The progress in developing a National Action Plan to end child marriage in Yemen has stalled due to the ongoing state of emergency.

Women and girls will continue to face hardship under Yemen's current laws and the resulting conflict is likely to exacerbate these inequalities. Due to the absence of the ability to reform the new laws, the girls shall understand and can take advantage of the protections provided by UNFPA-UNICEF. In addition, the campaigns have been done in schools, communities and among parents to raise an awareness which ensure that girls and boys have access to correct information about their rights.

#### 5. Using solid evidence to inform programs and policies to end child marriage

There is strong evidence on the relationship between child marriage and conflict. The conflict that occurred affected Yemen's social norms and traditions. Every family has different motives when they are forced to marry off their daughter at an early age. This evidence is necessary to understand not only the reasons why families engage in child marriage, but also how conflict influences decisions about child marriage. A lot of research is needed in the community, to understand why some families in difficult economic conditions and conflicts do not practice child marriage. As the research was done in situations of conflict, the lack of human, material, and financial resources hindered the evidence base needed to understand what worked and what did not work (UNFPA-UNICEF, June 2017).

The UNICEF Middle East and North Africa office and UNFPA were commissioned to conduct formative research on the drivers of child marriage and used the findings to jointly organize a technical meeting held in Cairo to develop implementation strategies for child marriage programs in humanitarian situations, including in Yemen. UNICEF was tasked with analyzing the situation of women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa in collaboration with UNFPA and other partners. Although it did not exclusively focus on child marriage, this was a critical issue that was included in the list to be analyzed in 2020. The regional offices were also jointly developing a study on the prevalence of child marriage in humanitarian situations. The focus of this framework was to reduce the impact of conflict and humanitarian crises on the increase in child marriage. Another multi-states study is underway, led by UNFPA which explores more deeply the dynamics of child marriage in the region, particularly in the humanitarian situation (UNFPA-UNICEF, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Child marriage in Yemen is a serious problem, moreover Yemen is one of the countries with the highest child marriage rate in the Middle East. The main factor causing the high number of child marriages in Yemen is the conflict that has occurred

since 2015. This conflict has an impact on the economy of the Yemeni people, causing poverty, and led to the child marriage. Other factors causing child marriage in Yemen are the quality of education that is very bad and claims of tradition for religious reason. The high number of child marriages in Yemen has attracted the attention of UNICEF and UNFPA. Through the global program, namely the *accelerate action to End Child Marriage program*, UNFPA and UNICEF provide a series of life skills for Yemeni children, especially girls after experiencing marriage. UNFPA-UNICEF aided in the form of medical and legal support for children who experiencing violence during marriage. In addition, UNFPA-UNICEF also focused on improving education for girls to avoid the child marriage. UNFPA-UNICEF provided a number of information regarding the negative effects of child marriage and make every child aware of the importance of education. During Phase I, the global program conducted by UNFPA-UNICEF had several challenges in its realization. This is due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen. The global program phase I is considered successful in the short term where it reduced the numbers of the child marriage. However, it is homework for a long-term goal as until now the Yemeni government has not yet enacted a law regarding minimum age of the marriage. The second phase expects to realize the remaining goal for the long-term.

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