



## Policy Brief : Child Marriage in Jordan



2017

## **Executive Summary**

The Higher Population Council (HPC) regards the marriage of underage girls as a violation of the legitimate human rights to education, personal development, free and informed choice of a marriage partner, marriage compatibility and the right to establish proper family relationships. This violation negatively affects the quality of life and reproductive health of girls. It also has negative economic implications, hinders the ability of families to properly raise their children and build future generations, and poses a threat to the demographics of society and the efforts to benefit from the demographic transition that Jordan is experiencing.

HPC had conducted a study on the marriage of underage girls in Jordan, which has served as the basis of this policy brief. The policy brief consists of several parts; the first part identifies the problem on various levels and shows that in 2015 out of every 10 married women in Jordan two were married as minors, 1 out of every 10 married Jordanian women was married as a minor, and 4 out of every 10 married Syrian women in Jordan were married as minors. The policy brief also reveals that there is an upward trend nationally in the number of child marriages, mainly driven by the number of marriages involving Syrians, and that there has been a recent upward trend in the numbers of marriages involving underage Jordanian females since 2013.

The second part of the policy brief overviews the current situation of married underage girls and reveals that these girls are less educated, have the lowest participation in the economy, have limited health coverage and their husbands often lack stable jobs. The third part focuses on the causes of child marriage in Jordan, including the desire to be relieved of the financial burden of providing for girls in the family, repeated failure in school, the desire to be rid of the responsibility of protecting the honor of girls, customs and traditions and social upbringing. Moreover, the Policy Brief highlights the main health, psychological and social implications of child marriage on girls.

This policy brief tested seven suggested policies to address this issue and listed them in order of priority as follows:

1. Address the reasons that lead girls to drop out of school and make education compulsory up to the secondary level.
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive awareness plan on child marriage and its negative side effects on individuals, families, children and the society as a whole.
3. Provide financial support as well as family guidance and counselling to families that seek to marry off their daughters due to poverty and poor financial conditions.
4. Abolish the exception in paragraph (b) of clause (10) of the Civil Status Law
5. Enhance remedies and prevention programs and services related to child marriage
6. Develop a national strategy on child marriage.
7. Re-orient the focus of scientific research towards identifying gaps in interventions aimed at protecting girls, and treat child marriage as a serious matter.

## Introduction

The marriage of girls under the age of 18 is a social issue that requires serious attention as it is linked to the level of physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and social growth and the ability to make informed decisions. Several expressions are used to refer to the marriage of girls under the age of 18, such as “the marriage of minors”, which strictly rejects marriage, “child marriage” or “early marriage”, all of which reflect the UNICEF 2015 definition of a “formal marriage or informal union before the age of 18, which is a reality for both boys and girls, although girls are disproportionately the most affected”. The definition does not only offer an objective description but further notes that the marriage of girls has a more profound negative impact than the marriage of boys as it “effectively brings a girl’s childhood and adolescence to a premature and unnatural end by imposing adult roles and responsibilities before she is physically, psychologically, and emotionally prepared<sup>1</sup>”.

Many international conventions and agreements have called for fighting child marriage, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals as the third objective under the fifth goal.

Jordan spares no effort to support the development of its human resources through better healthcare and education, but has recently witnessed an increase in child marriage cases. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to address this problem and its negative impact on the wellbeing of the society as it impedes development and the participation of women in the workforce, and puts substantial pressure on social protection systems in Jordan.

Moreover, child marriage is detrimental to the social, health, psychological and economic conditions of girls and denies them the right to enjoy a healthy life and leads to higher rates of violence. Family Reconciliation Homes of the Ministry of Social Development reported that 60% of female victims of violence are victims of forced and child marriage.

Child marriage affects a family’s ability to carry out its role of raising the young generations, especially that this role is largely carried out by women rather than men. Therefore, children who are victims of disintegrated families are often the result of child marriage, incompatibility in marriages, poverty and lack of full awareness by girls about married life and dealing with children. Moreover, child marriage can cause other social and health issues that accompany girls throughout their lives.

As part of the efforts of the Higher Population Council for track and monitor demographic changes in Jordan and current population issues, and propose policies to enhance the demographics of Jordan, this document looks into the marriage of underage females and presents appropriate solutions to limit the problem and enhance the role of women in development.

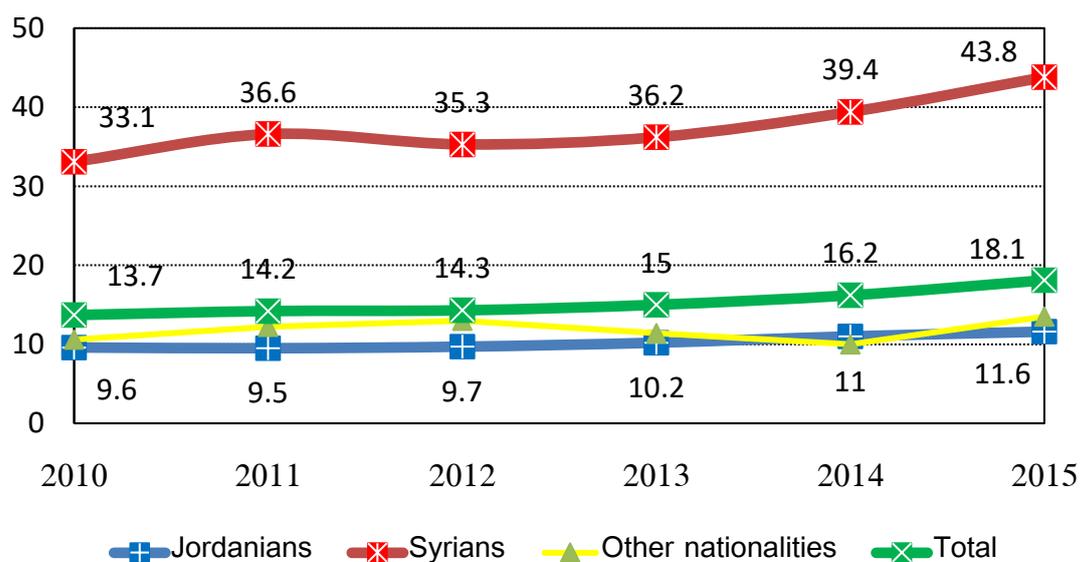
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<sup>1</sup>United Nations Children's Fund (2015). Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse.

## Child Marriage females in Jordan Prevalence rate of marriage under age 18

- The analysis of the 2015 Population and Housing Census shows that there are 414353 females who married under the age of 18, of which 253155 are Jordanian, 113370 are Syrian and 47883 are females of other nationalities. The percentage of married underage females out of the total number of females aged 13 and above is (13.5%, 11.2%, 29.2%, 11.6%) on the national level, among Jordanians, Syrians, and females of other nationalities respectively. On the other hand, the percentage of married underage females out of total married females is (12%, 17.6%, 29.5%, 19.2%) at the national level, among Jordanians, Syrians, and females of other nationalities respectively.
- An analysis of the 2015 Population and Housing Census revealed that the percentage of females who married in 2015 under the age 18 to total females married in 2015 reached 18.1% on the national level, with Jordanian females representing 11.6%, Syrian females representing 43.7% and females of other nationalities representing 13.5%. Simply put, females married as minors in 2015 represent 2 out of every 10 married females at the national levels, 1 out of every 10 Jordanian married females, 4 out of every 10 Syrian married females, and 1 out of every 10 married females from other nationalities.
- An analysis of the 2015 Population and Housing Census indicated an upward trend in the percentage of females marrying under the age of 18 in Jordan during the period of 2010 – 2015, increasing by 9% from 13.7% in 2010 to 15% in 2013. The increase continued in 2014 and 2015, reaching 16.2% and 18.1% respectively. These results show that the increase in the percentage of females marrying under the age of 18 in Jordan has reached 32.1% during the period of 2010-2015, with marriages involving underage Syrian females contributing significantly to this increase on the national level, as can be seen in the following figure.

**Figure (1): Percentage of married females under age 18 by nationality and year of marriage (2010-2015)**



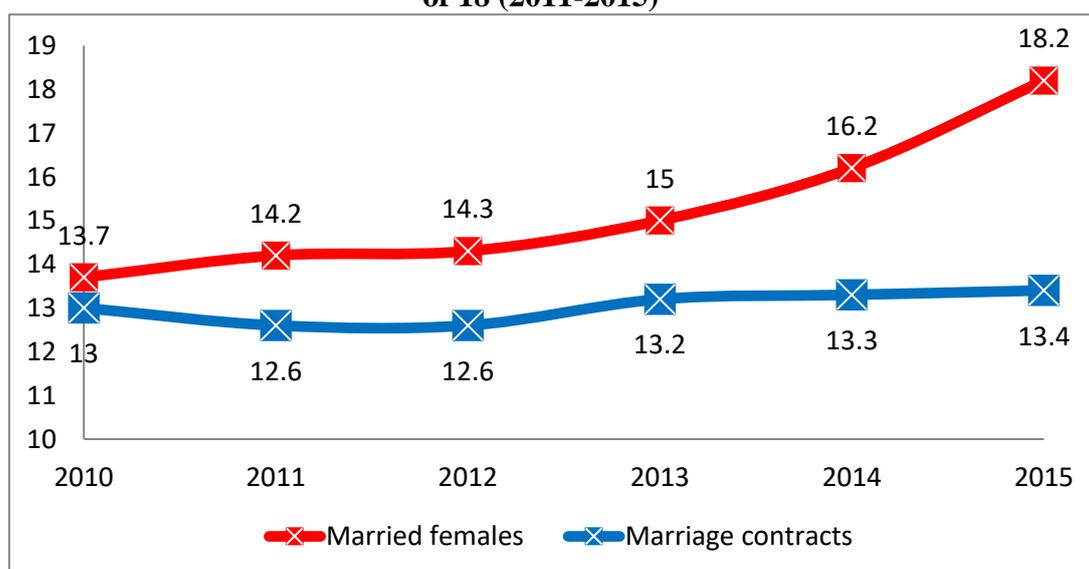
Source: Department of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2015

The percentage of married underage Syrian females increased from 33.1% in 2010 to 36.2% in 2013 and 43.8% in 2015. In numbers, the cases of child marriage among Syrians in Jordan increased from 3626 cases in 2010 to 4082 cases in 2015. On the other hand, the number of cases of child marriage among Jordanians stood at 4289 and 3752 for the same years respectively.

The above figure shows that child marriage rates among Jordanians were steadily below 10% during the period of 2010-2012, but began to increase in 2013-2015. As highlighted in a focus group meeting, this increase can be attributed to the influence of Syrian refugees on the customs and traditions of Jordanian households with regard to marriage under the age of 18, especially in the governorates of Irbid and Mafraq.

- The figure below shows that there is a significant gap between the percentage of marriages of underage females reported by the 2015 Population and Housing Census and the percentage of marriage contracts involving females under the age of 18 according to data from the Chief Judge Department. The census reported that marriages of underage females stood at 18.2% in 2015, compared to 13.4 % based on data obtained from the Chief Judge Department.

**Figure (3): Percentage of females aged 13 and more who married under the age of 18 (2011-2015)**



Source: Department of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2015, Chief Judge Department, Annual reports

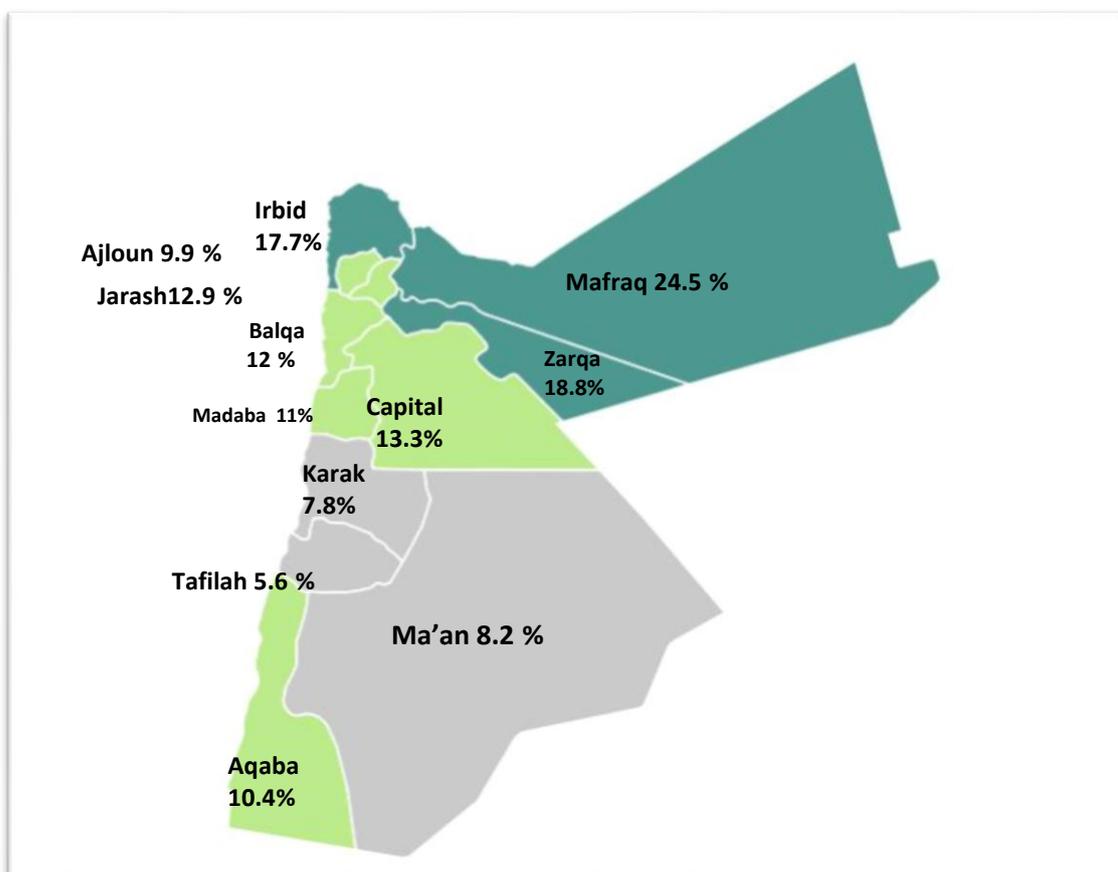
This reflects a low tendency among Syrians to register cases of marriage of underage females as the marriage contracts documented at the Chief Judge Department was lower than the number of married women (-98.2%, -96%, -82.2%, -50.9%, -47%) respectively for the years 2011-2015.

On the other hand, the number of marriage contracts among Jordanians exceeds the number of marriage cases, with marriage contracts in 2013 involving Jordanians stood at 8402 while the number of marriages stood at 4438. The same trend was recorded in 2011 and 2012 as well. Accordingly, the low tendency among Syrians

to register and document marriages will pose an obstacle in the future to analyzing the situation of child marriage among Syrians in Jordan and will have a negative impact on the rights of women and children, especially with regard to identity, nationality and care.

- Based on the 2015 Population and Housing Census data, the percentages of child marriages at the national level (for all nationalities) and by governorates are illustrated in the figure below. The governorates of Mafraq, Zarqa and Irbid recorded the highest percentages of child marriages in Jordan during the period of 2010-2015. Excluding the governorates of Aqaba, Ma'an and Madaba, the results show an upward trend in the rates of females marrying under the age of 18 in the other governorates during the period of 2010-2015.

**Figure (2): Rates of marriages of underage females to total married females in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan by governorate (2010-2015)**

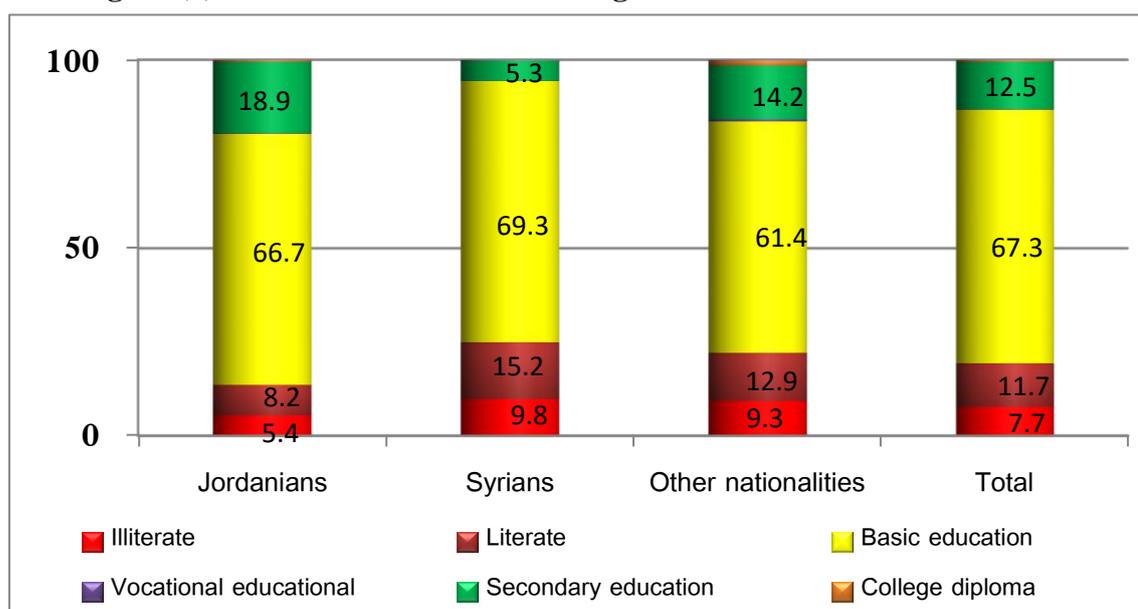


- The distribution of marriages of underage females in Jordan according to the administrative organization of the Kingdom during 2010-2015 was based on the 2015 census data and shows that in 23 sub-districts (*Qada'*) the number of child marriage cases was higher than 500 in 2010-2015. Those sub-districts are: Irbid, Markah, Qweismeh, Amman, Zarqa, Rusayfieh, Ramtha, Northern Badia, Al Jama'a, Sahab, Bani Ubaid, Ein El Basha, Wadi Sir, Jarash, Mafraq, Al Kourah, Al Azraq, Al Dulail, Northern Jordan Valley, Madaba, Aqaba, Bani Kinana and Al Hashmiyyeh. It is proposed that priority should be given to these sub-districts when conducting awareness programs. Regardless of the total population of a sub-district, a close look at the sub-districts where the prevalence of child marriage is increasing shows that 14 sub-districts have witnessed an increase in the number of cases of

child marriages for three years during the period of 2010-2015. These sub-districts are: Irhab, Al Jizah, Al Mazar Al Sharqi, Al Muwaqqar, Al Mazar Al Janubi, Al Wasatiyyeh, Sama Al Sarhan, Um AlJmal, Hosha, Al Qweireh, Petra, Barma, Al Qasr and Mleih. It is recommended that national awareness campaigns focus on these sub-districts to limit this trend.

- Based on the results of the census the age distribution of married Jordanian underage females reveals that the percentage of child marriages among older age group females is high, and among smaller age groups is lower, as it has dropped from 42.7% among the age group (50 and above) to 8.2% and 6.3% for the age groups (20-24 years), and (under 20 years) respectively, which confirms that this has been a lingering problem in society for many years but is beginning to decrease as circumstances improve and opportunities, such as education, have become better. Therefore, more effort should be exerted to curb the increase that began 2013. On the other hand, the percentage of child marriage cases among Syrian women aged (50 and above) stands at 17.7%, compared to 15.3% and 15% among the age groups of (20-24 years) and (under 20 years) respectively as the tendency towards child marriage has been reinforced in the past six years to the point that child marriages constitute around half of total marriages among married Syrian females in 2015.
- The census revealed that the number of Jordanian females who married under the age of 15 is 29246, of which 1638 females are under 25 years old, which means that there has been marriages recently involving Jordanians who are under the age of 15, on the other hand the age over 15 is the only age exception defined in the Civil Status Law, but no information exists on where the marriage contracts were registered.
- Based on the census data, the number of Syrian females who married under the age of 15 is 20448, of which 5196 are under 25 years, which represents one quarter of females who were married underage 15.
- Generally, females who marry under the age of 18 have less than elementary education (86.7%). The rates vary slightly between Jordanians and Syrians in Jordan in this regard, as it stands at 80.3% among Jordanians, and 94.3 among Syrians in Jordan.

**Figure (5): Educational level of underage married females in Jordan**



Source: Department of Statistics, Housing and Population Census 2015

- According to the Population and Housing Census 2015, the percentage of underage females whose husbands have below secondary level education is (46.5%), for Jordanian females (43.4%), for Syrian females (94.1%) and for females of other nationalities (79.6%).
- Generally, females married under the age of 18 are not economically active, as their ambition and desire to work ends when they become married. The percentage of females who are neither employed nor seeking employment is higher than 94% on the national level according to census data.
- The husbands of females who were married as minors often have unstable jobs. More than half of Jordanian females who were married as minors are unemployed or have unsteady jobs. The matter is worse for Syrians and holders of other nationalities, as more than 80% of them either do not work or do not have steady jobs, based on the 2015 census.
- Analysis of the census data revealed that despite the decline in divorce rates among females who were married as minors, divorce rates increase proportionately with the number of the years of marriage. This is true for both Jordanians and Syrians in Jordan. Divorce rates among Jordanian females who were married as minors reached 1.7% in 2015 compared with 4.3% in 2010. Similarly, divorce rates among Syrian women who were married as minors reached 1% in 2015 compared to 2.1% in 2010 due to grow awareness of girls under the age of 18 of their rights and duties.
- According to census data, 4 out of every 100 deaths of females who had been married in their lives and passed away within the 24 months prior to the 2015 census aged 13-54, were of females aged 13-19 and out of those three were deaths during childbirth.
- Females who were married as minors during the period 2010-2015 have limited health coverage. The percentage of insured females at the national level was 66.3%, Jordanian females (54.9%), Syrians 69.4% and holders of other nationalities is 75.2%, according to the census data.

### **Main causes of child marriage**

- The quantitative study carried out by HPC<sup>2</sup> revealed that child marriage occurs among Jordanian and Syrian families and in Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps due to the following reasons: poverty, desire to be relieved of the financial responsibility of providing for girls in the family, repeated failure and academic failure, and the desire to be rid of the responsibility of “protecting the honor of girls, customs and traditions, social upbringing, female friends, media, fictional TV dramas). The results of the study were consistent with the 2001 UNICEF report which indicated that poverty and social beliefs and customs are the main reasons for child marriage, and with a Study by Fadlallah (2013) which confirmed the impact that customs and traditions have on child marriage. similarly, numerous

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<sup>2</sup> Higher Population Council, 2017, Child Marriage in Jordan

studies have revealed that the poorest countries in the world are those where child marriage rates are high, as families resort to it to get out of poverty.

- According to the joint news release<sup>3</sup> of UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, WHO and the 2013 Global Alliance<sup>4</sup>, there are several causes of child marriage including: protection from sexual violence, poverty, culture and beliefs, and social pressures)

### **Social, psychological and health consequences of child marriage**

- The qualitative study carried out by HPC<sup>6</sup> showed that females who become married under the age of 18 are subjected to social and psychological pressures and often violence from their husbands, their husbands' families and their brothers. There is an acceptance of various forms of violence in the environment surrounding the females. Most of the female participants in the study noted that they although they work in social services and family protection but do not seek those services for fear of the "rift" that can be caused between them and their husbands if a third party like Family Protection becomes involved and require an undertaking from the husbands.
- Most of the female participants in the qualitative study carried out by HPC<sup>6</sup> agreed that divorce rates among females who are married as minors are high and are due to the females' inability to adapt to married life, especially when living with the extended family of the husband, interference by all family members in the life of the married couple, and being subjected to violence for the simplest reasons. All participants mentioned that one of the key reasons for divorce is that men do not take on the responsibilities that come with marriage, especially after having children, and that they start to have affairs outside marriage.
- Focus group discussions that took place as part of the HPC qualitative study<sup>6</sup> revealed that there are three factors affecting access to education for females who are married as minors: the personal desire of the female to not pursue education, the husband's refusal to allow the female to go to school, or the decision of the school to not allow the female to return to school and receive formal education. Most of the interviewed teachers noted that there is probably no law, but rather a "norm" that bans married underage females from going back to school on grounds that they would be a bad influence on their colleagues by sharing with them details about marriage and marital relationships.
- The focus group with health care professionals in health centers including doctors, psychologists, nurses as part of the HPC qualitative study<sup>6</sup> revealed the following:
  - Women who are married as minors suffer from various physical and psychological health problems. Biologically, the body, especially the reproductive system, of a female aged (15-17) is not fully developed yet. Females at that age may not have enough knowledge about puberty and menstrual periods and may have wrong information about marriage and sex. Moreover, females who are married as

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<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, 2014, New York Statement, Every Woman Every Child/ Girls Not Brides-Media Center/ Child Marriages: 39 000 Every Day, 7 March, [WWW.WHO.int/mediacenter/news/](http://WWW.WHO.int/mediacenter/news/)

<sup>4</sup> PMNCH/United Nations Foundation/ UNFPA/UNICEF/UN Women/WHO/World Vision /World YMCA

<sup>6</sup> Higher Population Council, 2017, Child Marriage in Jordan

minors suffer from physical problems including: severe infections, and vaginal fissures, which become worse especially if pregnancy occurs immediately after marriage and the uterus and the reproductive organs are not yet fully developed. Doctors noted that females also suffer from anemia, repeated miscarriages, and intrauterine adhesions due to miscarriage, and premature and difficult childbirth from having a small and underdeveloped pelvis which leads to resorting to caesarian sections.

- Families insist that a married female should become pregnant immediately after marriage, which leads to health complications such as ovarian cysts, or the need to use ovulation stimulants or IVF at the age of 17, causing unbearable abdominal pain and high temperature due to the enlarged ovaries despite the fact that the ovaries may be normal and do not require medical intervention, and the delay in pregnancy is merely due to the female being too young.
- Females who are married as minors lack awareness of birth control methods and the importance of pregnancy spacing, causing pregnancies immediately after childbirth. Some females and their husbands and families refuse the use of family planning methods, believing that their disadvantages outweigh their advantages. Families also lack awareness of the health needs of infants including breastfeeding and vaccinations.
- Psychologists believe that females who are married as minors experience a psychological trauma on the first day of marriage, they are unable to adapt later to the responsibilities of marriage and having families, may be subjected to violence and may fall into depression. They added that early divorce may increase psychological and social pressures as females become known as “divorced” while they are still underage.
- The 2013 UNFPA report<sup>7</sup> on adolescent pregnancies around the world indicated that 3.7 million adolescent females give birth under the age of 18. The report highlighted the effects of pregnancy on health, education and productivity and the pressure from different sides and on different levels. Adolescent pregnancies can cause a girl to leave school, brings her childhood to an end and imposes significant responsibilities on her towards her husband and his family. The report explained that the life of an adolescent female radically changes when she becomes pregnant and rarely for the better. The report noted that there are 70 thousand adolescent deaths every year from complications from pregnancy and childbirth, and that adolescent pregnancy perpetuates the cycle of poverty, denies girls of their fundamental rights and limits their potential. Moreover, the report indicated that the underlying causes of adolescent pregnancy before the age of 18 include child marriage, gender inequality, poverty, lack of reproductive health and education, and underinvestment in adolescent girls’ human capital. The UN report recommends that countries in which child marriage exists enact legislation to prevent marriage under the age of 18 to avoid health and physical risks to girls and their unborn children, if pregnancies occur before the age of 18, which could avert the tragedy caused by child marriage.

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<sup>7</sup> UNFPA, 2013, State of World Population 2013: Motherhood in Childhood, Facing the Challenges of Adolescent Pregnancies · [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/AR-SWOP13\\_0.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/AR-SWOP13_0.pdf)

## Strategies and Programs on Child Marriage<sup>8</sup>

A 2016 UNFPA report indicated that most child marriage prevention programs typically include strategies that primarily focus on empowering girls with education, skill development, support networks, education and mobilization of parents and members of the community, offering economic support and incentives for girls and their families, and fostering an enabling legal and policy framework. “Evaluation showed that programs that fostered information, skills, and networks for girls yielded the strongest and most consistent results, while programs that had the least impact on reducing child marriage were those that attempted to address the problem only at a macro-level, for example, changing laws”. The report further confirms that implementing incentive programs is necessary in the poorest countries. In Kenya, for example, incentives to enroll and stay in school, coupled with an awareness and prevention program, delayed marriage for 12 per cent of girls and 40 percent of boys.

The UNFPA also conducted an assessment of another skills-building program in Bangladesh from 2012 to 2016 which aimed to reduce the incidence of child marriage implemented through a local association. The trial study involved more than 9,000 girls, ages 12 to 18, in 72 intervention communities and 24 control communities that received no intervention. The intervention groups received one of the following three interventions:

- Education: girls in school received tutoring in English and mathematics, and out-of-school girls received computing or financial training
- Gender- and rights-awareness training: girls received life-skills training focusing on gender, rights and negotiation, critical thinking and decision-making
- Skills training: girls received training in computers, entrepreneurship, mobile phone servicing, photography and basic first aid.

The results of the assessment reveal that all intervention groups have witnessed a decrease in the likelihood of child marriage compared with the control group. It also showed that child marriage among girls who received training in legal education and gender has dropped by 31%, while child marriage rates among girls who are receiving better education has dropped by 23%.

### Challenges of addressing child marriage in Jordan

To limit the negative impact of child marriage, the following challenges should be addressed:

#### **First Cultural and Social Challenges:**

The study showed that the social and cultural reality of families of all nationalities residing in Jordan encourage the prevalence of child marriage and hinder efforts to combat it. This is due to lack of awareness among families of the disadvantages of child

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<sup>8</sup>UNFPA, (2016) State of World Population, 2016, UNFPA, P 72.

marriage and its negative impact on society and individuals and children born to child spouses and the prevalence of practices that support child marriage.

### **Second: Financing**

The needed procedures and decisions require significant efforts and large budgets that exceed the capacity of the Government of Jordan. Foreign and regional support as well as the support of local institutions and individuals is critical in this regard. Action plans and the projected costs of implementing strategies for addressing the issue should be analyzed, and efforts should be coordinated to initiate the implementation of plans. A policy can be adopted for setting priorities and implementing strategies gradually in order of priority and based on the available budget.

### **Third: Quality**

This includes the quality of services and service providers and the challenge of providing services consistent quality services to all regions, especially remote and poor regions, and the Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps.

This challenge is connected to the funding challenge. Local and international organizations and individuals can be invited to volunteer, and universities, psychological experts, the judiciary, the Ministry of Health, expert trainers and specialists as well as media figures and institutions and satellite TV channels can be engaged.

### **Fourth: Planning and Networking Challenges**

This includes the difficulty of formulating plans and strategies for implementation in partnership with all government and civil society actors and local and international organizations to achieve the desired results. Efforts of all concerned parties should be coordinated and should be systematic, informed and aligned with the agreed strategic plan. Many planning specialists, parents, beneficiaries, local and international specialists can be engaged to draw up strong plans that ensure the coordination of all efforts.

## **Policy Options to Fight Child Marriage in Jordan**

Jordan is taking informed steps towards sustainable development, family and health education, reproductive health, children's rights (individuals under the age of 18), and is following up on demographic changes that support social and economic development. In this context, the key policies proposed to address child marriage are:

### **Policy 1: Develop a national strategy on child marriage**

A strategy based on scientific studies and surveys and developed with the participation of specialists from universities, religious figures, community leaders, influential figures, and CSOs while benefiting from international and past experience in this field to identify the best solution for Jordan.

**Advantages:**

- Allow specialists who can enrich the strategy and related actions plans with their experience and support creative ideas that can achieve the vision for increased awareness and mitigate the impact of the problem and curb it.
- Ensure accessibility of awareness services for all, engage all sectors especially the youth and convey visions and disseminate services to all sectors and local communities.

**Challenges:**

- Financial challenges: quality planning, the engagement of all stakeholders, and the implementation of plans require financial resources that can increase the burden on the national economy. In this regard, the help of society, volunteers, and concerned international organizations can be enlisted, especially that international organizations should contribute to supporting refugee camps and host countries and the cost of implementing these plans should be allocated. and volunteer work can be considered
- Quality challenge: Addressing quality challenges requires experts and specialists, setting quality standards and key performance indicators which are linked to funding and volunteer work as well, review of previous local and international plans to benefit from them and launch of fulltime or part-time volunteer programs. This will ensure developing robust and comprehensive plans that achieve the desired goals at the highest quality.

**Policy 2: Develop child marriage prevention and Treatment programs and services**

Develop remedy and prevention services related to child marriage, initially focusing on informal education programs for girls and reproductive health services.

**Advantages:**

- Benefit from, and build on, current expertise, services, lessons learned and feedback on previous plans and services.
- Ensure the continued involvement of experts who are currently engaged in these services, and further enhance and improve the services and attract more experts to maximize results and achieve the desired vision.
- Take gradual steps to address and solve the issue of child marriage as it is the outcome of complex and interconnected issues.
- Be closer to families and associations that have caused this phenomenon and address the underlying reasons on the ground.
- Reduce financial costs: the cost of improving existing procedures and strategies is less than the costs of developing new ones.

**Challenges:**

- Current situation remains unchanged: previous services and efforts have not addressed all challenges, especially the Syrian refugee crisis and its related

burdens. This challenge can be overcome by intensifying efforts, maximizing opportunities, and benefiting from previous feedback to improve these services.

### **Policy 3: Prepare and implement a comprehensive awareness plan on child marriage and its negative impact on individuals, families, children and society as a whole**

Workshops can be organized for sociology experts, psychologists and social researchers to address and find solutions for the various problems related to child marriage and identify its main causes. All sectors can be invited to participate in the workshops including media and education specialists. The workshops would focus on determining and addressing the underlying causes and drivers of child marriage, not the apparent causes. The results of these workshops can be shared at meetings and conferences for youth to reach schools, worship places, clubs, and schools to raise awareness of families and youth. All satellite TV channels, the press and social media outlasts can be invited to participate in this volunteer campaign,

#### **Advantages:**

- Identify focus topics based on the outcomes of the workshops. The topics should be comprehensive and talk to the hearts and minds of all segments of society.
- Utilize the interactive theatre and develop strong scenarios that effectively address and influence youth.
- Engage civil society institutions in the awareness campaign to ensure reaching all segments of society and geographic locations.
- Promote and support national objectives in the media through enabling CSOs and child protection institutions to volunteer and limit this problem and its detrimental impact on development.
- Integrate topics in school textbooks to help change attitudes and perceptions of students and the target audience.

#### **Challenges:**

- Engaging all sectors in the awareness campaign is difficult
- Resistance to changing behavior and attitudes especially among the illiterate, poor segments of society, and tribes who are more influenced by customs and traditions than by reason.
- Behavioral change is a long-term process and therefore measuring the success of the plan will be delayed and could lead to frustration.
- The financial challenges of programs and activities,

### **Policy 4: Re-orient scientific research towards identifying gaps in interventions aimed at protecting girls, and treating child marriage as a serious matter**

Scientific research is essential for conducting comprehensive assessments and reaching meaningful, practical and innovative results and recommendations and can

reinforce the target goals that focus on limiting this problem and significantly reducing its prevalence rate.

### **Advantages**

- Engage universities and specialists in the national campaign to enrich and reinforce efforts and maximize results.
- Benefit from pilot studies and roll them out in the Jordanian society based on the local context.
- Engage young students in conducting the studies to ensure their participation in raising awareness and their opposition of child marriage.

### **Challenges**

- Current weaknesses in scientific research
- Research is limited to faculties of arts and humanitarian studies, which indicates a lack of engagement by scientific faculties (professors and students) in research. These colleges can be encouraged to participate in their own fields of specialty.
- Research conducted by school students is weak, but still considered an important attempt in itself as it helps to change their perceptions towards child marriage.

### **Policy 5: Abolish exceptions from the law**

Although the Civil Status Law No.36 of 2010 stipulated in article (10) that the marriageable age is 18 calendar years, there are exceptions to this general rule, allowing the marriage of females who have completed 15 calendar years under specific conditions set forth in the instructions issued for this purpose by the Chief Judge Department: *(b.) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (a) of this article, a judge may – upon the approval of the Chief Judge- grant permission in special circumstances for the marriage of a person who has completed 15 calendar years according to the instructions issued for this purpose if the marriage was a necessary requirement. A person who is married according to this paragraph will have full capacity regarding whatever is related to marriage, superstition and the implications thereof.*

Accordingly, the proposed policy is to amend this clause so that it reads “provided that each has completed 18 years calendar years without exception”. The law should apply to all Muslims, Christians and members of any other sect.

### **Advantages:**

- Ensure that legal provisions are not circumvented or misinterpreted, and avoid granting exceptions that cannot be controlled.
- Rapidly reduce the spread of the problem through the application of the law and substantially limit the number of illegal marriage contracts due to fear of punishment.

- Control and obligate Sharia judges to enforce the law through the agreed upon legal umbrella and provisions.

### **Challenges**

- Social resistance based on religious beliefs. This challenge can be addressed by holding sessions and convincing opponents and explaining the whole picture to them since religion and science are aligned
- Violations of the law

### **Policy 6: Address the reasons that cause female students to drop out of school and make education mandatory up to the Secondary level**

Studies have shown that females who marry before the age of 18 drop out of school. This requires implementation of policies that make it mandatory for girls to complete secondary education, and adjust the situation of low-achieving students through special education programs in schools.

Schools have a responsibility to play a central role in limiting the problem through providing education, awareness and follow ups to ensure that girls continue their education and to legally report any drop out cases immediately. This will enable legal authorities to follow up on any violation of the above mentioned proposed legal requirement that males and females who are about to be married must complete 18 years of age without exception.

### **Advantages:**

- Minimize the problem
- Increase awareness among men and women of their rights and duties
- Participation in achieving the sustainable development that Jordan seeks by increasing the level of universal education, thereby positively impacting production and improving parenting approaches among Jordanian families.

### **Challenges:**

- Resistance, and various attempts to drop up of school
- The financial cost incurred by the state as a result of increasing the numbers of male and female students in the secondary education level and the associated financial impact.

### **Policy 7: Provide financial support, as well as family counselling and awareness to families that marry off their young daughters due to poverty and poor financial conditions**

This entails providing assistance to families to enable their girls to continue education.

## **Advantages**

- Reduce the size of the problem by addressing the financial needs of families that seek to marry off their daughters due to poverty and inability to handle the family expenses.
- Support the continuing education of females to empower them, change their attitudes and prevent them from seeking child marriage due to poverty or lack of awareness.
- Increase women's participation in sustainable development, especially when loans and job opportunities are made accessible and women can be more self-reliant.
- Help to support families and the better upbringing of children by increasing the legal age of marriage and enhancing awareness of family responsibilities.

## **Challenges:**

- Financial challenges, which can be overcome, by engaging local and international organizations.
- Reaching these cases, especially in remote areas

## **Recommendations**

All of the above seven policy options are critical prevention measures and remedies for child marriage in Jordan. Below is a list of the policy options in order of priority:

1. Address the reasons that cause females to drop out of school and make education compulsory up to the secondary level.
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive awareness plan on child marriage and its negative side effects on individuals, families, children and the society as a whole.
3. Provide financial support as well as family guidance and counselling to families that seek to marry off their daughters due to poverty and poor financial conditions
4. Abolish the exception in paragraph (b) of clause (10) of the Civil Status Law
5. Enhance remedies and prevention programs and services related to child marriage
6. Develop a national strategy on child marriage
7. Re-orient the focus of scientific research towards identifying gaps in interventions aimed at protecting girls, and treat child marriage as a serious issue.

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