



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Expert Group Meeting The Cost of Child Marriage over the Life Cycle: Evidence from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia

9 – 10 November 2021

Background

In [the Arab region, 1 in 5 girls marries before her 18th birthday and 1 in 25 before their 15th birthday](#). Prior to 2010, there had been significant decline in the practice, but conflict and instability in the region have increased the likelihood of child marriage, likely affecting women and girls and their offspring in detrimental ways over the course of their lives, in addition to negatively impacting communities and States in the long run.

Child marriage affects women throughout their lifetime via several mechanisms. Women that marry when they are children themselves, have a longer reproductive span and, thus, are likely to have a larger number of children during their reproductive life. Adolescent pregnancy is associated with health risks that increase the likelihood of mortality and disease of these young mothers and their offspring. Several studies point to the fact that child marriage is positively correlated with domestic violence, as young women will have less bargaining power within their households and are often marrying older men. In the immediate, child marriage may affect the informed decision making of these mothers on childrearing and rearing practices, with profound negative intergenerational impacts. Education attainment is also curtailed by child marriage, with negative impacts on all future earnings of these women. Labor force participation of women can potentially be affected by child marriage; however, the effect is ambiguous. On the one hand, less educated girls will have a smaller opportunity cost of staying home since the returns to their labor market activities are low, on the other hand, as child marriage practices are disproportionately common in more deprived environments, these girls may be forced to join the labor force in low paying occupations to contribute to their families' subsistence.

Since child marriage impacts women's lives in a multiplicity of ways with repercussions over the life cycle and subsequent intergenerational effects, any exercise to cost its impact should try to address as many facets as possible. The framework to assess the economic impacts of child marriage was developed by Wodon et al (2015). Measuring these individual costs is a difficult task as it requires several levels of individual and aggregate data information. To date, however, there has been relatively little in the way of a rigorous assessment of the economic impacts of child marriage or how much child marriage may "cost" countries and societies.¹

The study under review, "The Cost of Child Marriage over the Life Cycle: Evidence from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia," drafted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in partnership with UN Women Regional Office for Arab States, UNFPA Arab States Regional Office, and UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, presents an estimation of the economic impact of child marriage in the Arab region with an analysis of various data, including girls' decision-making power, education attainment, fertility rates, health indicators and labor market participation in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia. The Expert Group Meeting aims to engage expert opinions on the draft study; validate the study's findings; and collectively develop relevant and actionable recommendations for member States.

¹ Wodon et al, 2017



The Expert Group Meeting will take place on-line over Microsoft Teams on 09 – 10 November 2021, from 15:00 – 18:00 (GMT+3). English will be the language of the Expert Group Meeting.

The Agenda of the Expert Group Meeting broadly follows the outline of the draft study and seeks to address the following objectives:

Objectives of the Expert Group Meeting

- Presentation of the draft study, “The cost of child marriage over the life cycle: evidence from Egypt, Jordan Iraq and Tunisia”;
- Discussion of the draft study’s conceptual framework, methodology, data and main findings; and
- Provision of comments, critiques and recommendations to augment the draft study

Experts

In addition to the participation of experts from ESCWA, UN Women, UNICEF and UNFPA, the Expert Group Meeting will engage the knowledge and experience of experts from the Arab region and globally in a discussion on the report’s methodology and main findings and present recommendations to augment the study. It will further seek to examine possible methodologies to follow up on this study with an estimation of the economic cost of child marriage in the region.

Provisional Agenda

Expert Group Meeting The Cost of Child Marriage over the Life Cycle: Evidence from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Tunisia 09-10 November 2021	
Tuesday 09 November 2021	
15:00 – 15:10	Welcome Remarks and Introductions
15:10 – 16:10	Child Marriage in the Arab Region: Legal and Policy Frameworks This session will provide a brief overview of the legal and policy frameworks governing child marriage in the Arab region, and will also discuss some of the loopholes that exist in some contexts that allow for child marriage. Session Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any policy frameworks or legislation missing from the member States under review? • Are there any other outstanding international frameworks that should be addressed? • Should there be a more pointed discussion of member States’ and civil society’s work to end child marriage? If so, what should that entail? • What international experiences tell us about addressing child marriage?
16:10 – 17:10	Conceptual Framework This session will share an overview of the study’s conceptual framework: the life cycle approach and delve into the relevant facets of a girl’s life that impact upon the possibility that she will be a victim of child marriage and the impact



	<p>upon her life as she reaches adulthood. The framework directly informs the study's methodology, to be discussed in the following session.</p> <p>Session Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the life cycle approach an appropriate framework for understanding the economic cost of child marriage in the Arab region? If not, then what is? • What other conceptual frameworks might contribute to better understanding the impact of child marriage on girls, their families, society and the State in the Arab region?
<p>17:10 – 17:50</p>	<p>Presentation of Methodology and Data Used</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the methodology that was utilized clear and understandable? If not, how can it be further clarified for the reader? • Was the appropriate data used to estimate the economic costs of child marriage in the Arab region? If not, what is missing? • What can be done to share the findings in the most concise and impactful manner?
<p>Wednesday 10 November 2021</p>	
<p>15:00 – 16:30</p>	<p>Presentation of Findings</p> <p>This session will present key findings made on the six stages of the life cycle</p> <p>Session Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the findings relevant to the situation of women and girls in the selected countries? • What key takeaway from these findings for you? • What are some of the policy recommendations that we could highlight in our future advocacy with countries?
<p>16: 30 – 17:30</p>	<p>Methodologies for economic costing of child marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of existing methods • General discussion and zooming in on future work.
	<p>Recommendation session on the way forward</p> <p>This session will recap the outcomes of the previous sessions with the aim of utilizing the recommendations to augment the research study and eventually share with member States.</p>