



UNICEF-2024

Children's rights in marriage

CHAIRS: Carla Trujillo y Mónica Salas

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LETTER FROM YOUR CHAIR:

Dear Delegates:

It is an honor to be participating as your chair for the UNICEF committee in this year's edition of the Saint Paul Model United Nations. My name is Carla Trujillo and I have the pleasure of being this year's chair alongside Mónica. We are both seniors in high school; therefore this will be my third and last SPMUN conference.

In eighth grade we were both in the same committee, UN Women's rights. I represented Japan and she represented Brazil. Since it was my first SPMUN, I was very scared but also very excited. I remember doing the research and writing my position paper, which wasn't easy, but I learned so much while doing that. When the day of the debate came, I was very scared to speak and of getting something wrong, but after a while I started talking and debating and it was amazing! Even when somebody made a mistake, we all laughed together and kept going. In those two days, I learned a lot, not just how to debate but also how to enjoy these incredible experiences.

Don't be scared to speak up during the debate and go out of your comfort zone! It is an experience from which you can learn many things and improve yourself in many ways. Remember that it is okay to make mistakes, the important thing is to have fun and learn from this SPMUN experience.

-Carla Trujillo



LETTER FROM YOUR CO-CHAIR:

Dear Delegates:

My name is Monica Salas and I will be your co-chair for UNICEF in this year's MUN. I'm currently an 11th grade student and this is my fourth year participating in SPMUN. I decided to take on this co-chair position as a way to give back to the school and to show the new delegates how fun SPMUN can be. During my first MUN, I was very nervous because I was surrounded by experienced students. As I began to speak, I became more relaxed and started to enjoy my experience as a delegate more.

For some of you, this may be your first experience in Model United Nations. I understand that representing a country in front of several people you don't know or who have more experience in SPMUN can be intimidating, but I assure you that participating in MUN is one of the best decisions you could have made and you will not regret it. Don't be ashamed of making mistakes or doubting yourself, that is something normal that has happened to all of us; what matters most is that you tried and got out of your comfort zone. The best advice I can give you as co-chair is to have fun and enjoy every minute of this unforgettable experience.

- Monica Salas

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE:

The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) was established in 1946 for purpose of helping children and young people whose lives and futures were at risk after World War II. UNICEF has consistently worked to contribute to the well being of the children of the world. Some ways the organization has intervened globally are:

- Supporting immunization programs for children with diseases
- Funding for health services and educational facilities. Providing vaccines, safe water and sanitation.
- Creating programs to prevent the spread of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS
- Promoting gender equality: UNICEF works all over the world to empower girls and women, and to ensure their full participation in political, social, and economic systems. (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF]. (2023))
- Through special protection for the disadvantaged kids



INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC:

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN MARRIAGE

According to the organization Save the Children (2024), "Child marriage is the formal or informal union of children before age 18. It is a violation of children's human rights and a form of gender-based violence that robs children of their childhood. Child marriage also disrupts their education and drives vulnerability to violence, discrimination and abuse." Child marriage requires specific factors. While the causes of this practice may change depending on the country and culture poverty, lack of educational opportunities, limited access to health care, and stereotypes around gender roles are some of the most prominent among them.

For example, some families marry their girls to reduce their economic burden or earn income. Additionally they may believe it will secure their daughters' futures or protect them.

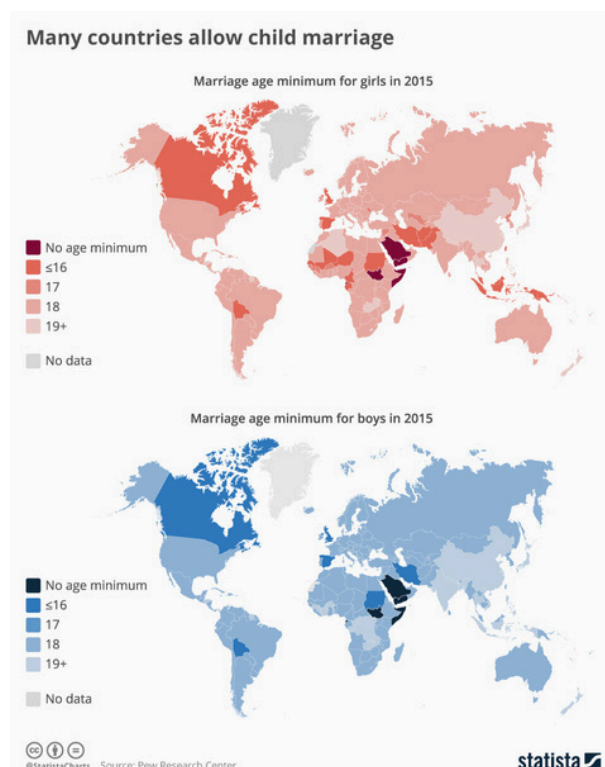


GENERAL INFORMATION

CURRENT CHILD MARRIAGE STATISTICS

- Despite the decrease in this practice over the past few decades, child marriage remains a widespread situation in some regions. Approximately one of five girls across the globe are married in childhood. Today, multiple crises like the Syrian war or the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar, and the health crisis of COVID-19 have been threatening to reverse the progress towards eliminating this human rights violation. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals ask for global actions to end child marriage by 2030.

FIGURE 1: CHILD MARRIAGE



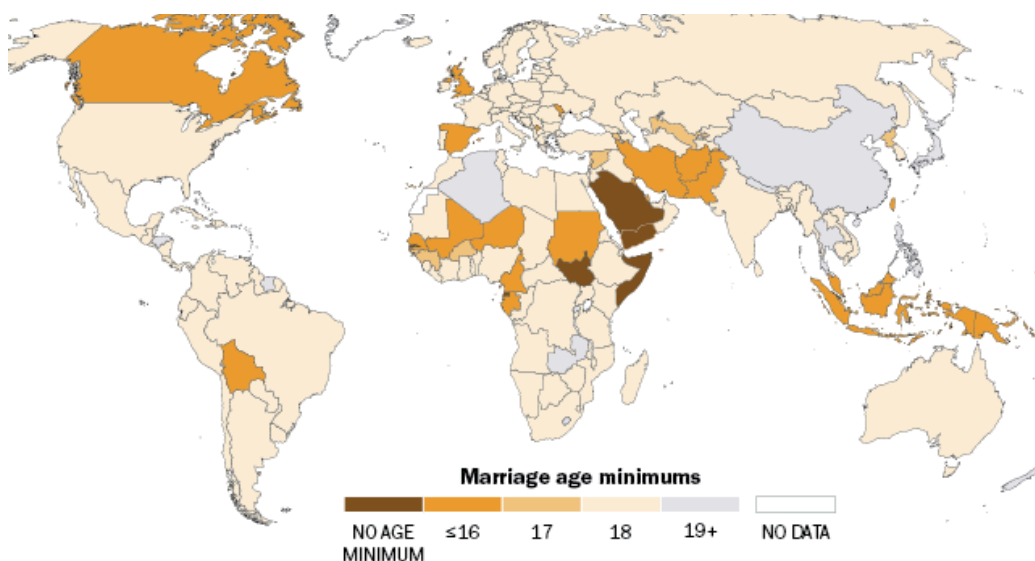


GENERAL INFORMATION

CHILD MARRIAGE IN FEMALES:

Child marriage is often due to gender inequality, affecting a bigger amount of girls compared to boys. Globally, the marriage prevalence among boys is of one sixth that of girls. Child marriage takes away the girl's childhood and threatens her well-being. Girls who marry before the age of 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school. They have worse economic and health outcomes than the unmarried girls, eventually passing it down to their own children. Child brides often become pregnant during adolescence, increasing the risk of complications. This practice also isolates girls from their families and friends, making a big impact on their mental health.

FIGURE 2: MINIMUM AGE FOR GIRL MARRIAGE



Note: Data show ages at which girls can marry without parental or judicial consent.
 Source: Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. State Department country reports on human rights practices for 2015.
 Supplemental data taken from the United Nations Population Fund. U.S. data taken from Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

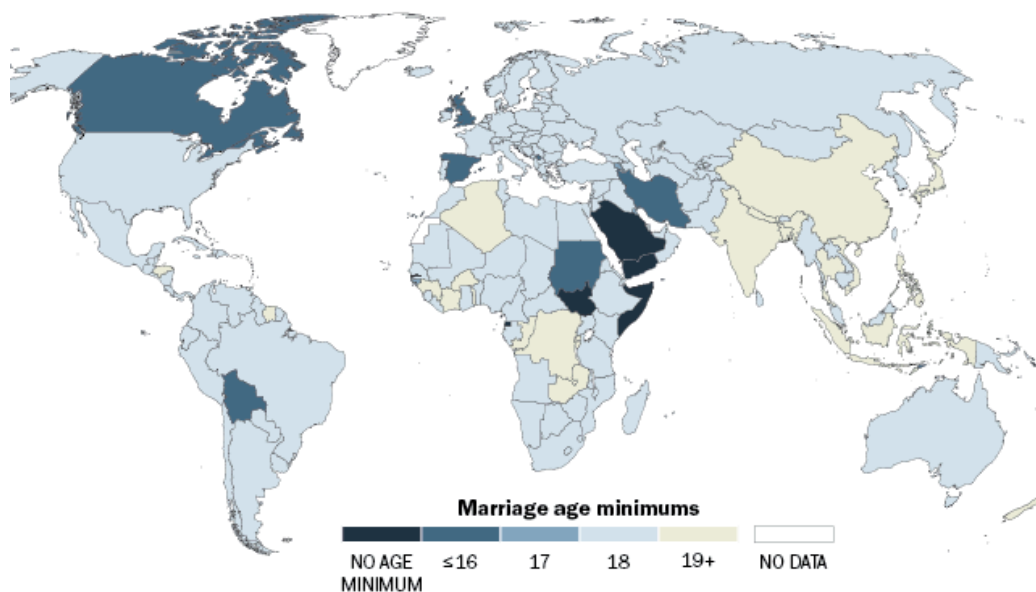


GENERAL INFORMATION

CHILD MARRIAGE IN MALES:

Eventhough boys and girls married in childhood do not face the same risks and consequences, they both suffer this issue. The practice of child marriage among boys has been less studied than that of girls, so there is little information about this topic. Around the world, an average of 4.5% of young men were married before age 18. However, this practice has become less and less common in the last 25 years. The countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage among boys are different from the countries where the practice is most common among girls.

FIGURE 3: MINIMUM AGE FOR BOYS MARRIAGE



Note: Data show ages at which boys can marry without parental or judicial consent.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. State Department country reports on human rights practices for 2015.
Supplemental data taken from the United Nations Population Fund. U.S. data taken from Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Sandstrom, A. & Theodorou, A (2016, September 12). Many countries allow child marriage. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/09/12/many-countries-allow-child-marriage/>



GLOSSARY

- **Child marriage:** Is the formal or informal union of children before age 18. Its causes vary depending on the country and culture poverty, lack of educational opportunities, limited access to health care, and stereotypes around gender roles.
- **Formal union:** The act of getting married or of causing two people to be married
- **Informal union:** Also called de facto relationship, it is a relationship in which they are living together as a couple, but aren't married or in a civil union.
- **Civil union:** A legal relationship between two people that gives them some of the same rights and responsibilities that married people have.
- **Domestic violence:** Is an abusive behaviors in which one individual gains power over another individual.
- **Gender inequality:** Is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another.
- **Statutory rape:** Is the act of sexual intercourse with a person under the age of consent, which is considered to constitute rape under the law, whether the person is willing or not.

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POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR CHILD MARRIAGE:

- Increasing girls' access to education: Education plays a critical role in keeping girls away from child marriage. In fact, the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before age 18 and have children during her teenage years.
- Educating communities on the dangers of child marriage: Parents and community leaders are often responsible for deciding when and whom a girl marries. In many traditional communities, it is believed that marriage keeps girls safe, protected and economically provided for by their husbands. However, early marriage endangers girls' physical and mental health.
- Increasing economic support to families: "Providing families with livelihood opportunities like microfinance loans is an effective way to prevent child marriages that occur as a result of financial need." Plan Internacional. (n.d).
- Strengthening and enforcing laws that establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage: In countries where child marriage is prevalent, petitioning the government to increase the minimum age for marriage to 18 years is a critical first step for change.
- Empowering girls: Every girl has the right to decide her own future, but not every girl knows this, that's why empowering girls is crucial to ending child marriage. Empowered girls are able to re-shape perspectives and challenge conventional norms of what it means to be a girl.



ROLE OF EACH DELEGATION

AFGHANISTAN

Between 30% and 40% of women are married in Afghanistan before the age of 18. The Civil Code of the Republic of Afghanistan, active since 1977, permits the marriage of a girl under the age of 15. However, religious and customary laws have been found to contradict and take precedence over civil law.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has the fourth-highest rate of child marriage in the world. In this country, child marriage has been illegal since 1929, and the minimum age for marriage has been set at 18 for women and 21 for men since the 1980s. Despite this, the lack of proper action by the government and the overlooking by local administration contribute to this law being disrespected.

CHINA

Under the 2001 Marriage Law, the minimum age for marriage is of 22 for men and 20 for women. According to UNICEF's calculations in 2020, 3% of girls in China were married before age 18. This law has been accused of being driven by gender inequality and the belief that women and girls are somehow inferior to men and boys.

COSTA RICA

The minimum age for marriage in Costa Rica is 18. In January 2017, the “improper relations” (Ley de Relaciones Impropias, Act No. 9406) passed and prohibited the civil marriage of a person under the age of 18. Before that law, minors from ages 15 and older could get married with parental consent.



ROLE OF EACH DELEGATION

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

In Dominican Republic, 31% of women are married or in an informal union before the age of 18 and 12% before they turn 15. 8% of girls are married before the age of 18. This country has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Informal unions are common because girls and teenagers move into the homes of adult men and become their wives.

ETHIOPIA

Child marriage have become less common in the recent years. In 2011, the median age of marriage for women was 16.5 years. 40% of them were married before they turned 18 and 8% before the age of 15. Ethiopian government has undertaken a range of legal, institutional and strategic measures, including committed to ending child marriage by 2025.

FRANCE

Under the Civil Code 2013 the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years. However, marriage before the age of 18 is possible with the consent of parents or the public prosecutor for serious reasons.

GERMANY

In 2017, Germany passed a law called the Act to Combat Child Marriage. It's main purpose is to protect young girls and women from being forced into arranged marriages. This law sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years, without exception. It also allows judges to annulled marriages contracted abroad if the person had not reached the age of majority at the time of the marriage.



ROLE OF EACH DELEGATION

HONDURAS

In Honduras, 34% of girls are in an informal union before the age of 18, and 9% before the age of 15. Also, 12% of boys are married before the age of 18. Child, early, and forced marriage and unions are accepted throughout the country, especially in rural areas where 42.4% of girls were married before the age of 18.

INDIA

According to India's Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, the legal age for marriage for girls is 18 years old and for boys it is 21 years old. Their law mandates punitive measures against all those who perform, permit, or promote child marriage. Despite the law, girls often marry between 14 and 16 years of age and few girls get married after they turn 18.

KENYA

In Kenya, Child marriage has been illegal since 2001, when the Children's Act became a law. Laws such as the Sexual Offences Act of 2006, and the Marriage Act of 2014, determine the age of marriage to be 18 years old. The government acknowledges that this practices have a harmful effect on the rights of women and girls. However, child marriage remains common with 23% of the population having gone through it.

MEXICO

21% of Mexican women are married before the age of 18 and 4% before the age of 15. These practice prevails the most in the Northeast and south regions. These officially registered unions have decreased in Mexico, because girls and teenagers are being obligated into informal unions, which in modern times are reported four times more common than registered marriages.



ROLE OF EACH DELEGATION

NEPAL

Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia in both genders. Even though the legal age for marriage is 20, more than a third of young women are reported to have been married by the age of 18, and one tenth of them by 15.

NIGER

In Niger, both girls and boys are affected by this problematic. 76% of girls are married before they are 18 and 28% before the age of 15. Additionally, 6% of boys are married before the age of 18. Child marriage is more prevalent in cities like Maradi (89%), Zinder (87%), Diffa (82%) and Tahoua (76%) (Girls not Brides).

PERU

In Peru, 4.1% of girls are married before 18 and 2% are married or in a union before the age of 15. The majority of these unions are informal. In 2020, a law proposal was submitted, which sought to eradicate adolescent marriage. However, it only aims to reverse the modification that allows children over 14 years old to marry, meaning that the minimum age of marriage would revert to 16 with judicial consent.

PLAN INTERNACIONAL (INTERNATIONAL PLAN)

Plan Internacional (International Plan) is a development and humanitarian organization founded in 1937. Its objective is to work alongside children, young people, supporters and partners aiming for a just world, where all populations are equal. They concentrate in the cause of the challenges and inequalities that children and young girls face.



ROLE OF EACH DELEGATION

RUSSIA

There is no official public data on child marriage made public by the Russian government. Despite this, and according to Rosstat (the Federal State Statistic Survey), 0.3% of Russian women were married before the age of 15 and 6% before the age of 18. As stated by article 13 of the Russian Constitution, under special circumstances approved by Federal and local legislations, children are allowed to marry if they are 14 or older. Other cases of this practice are evident through bride kidnapping, power dynamics, trafficking, and poverty.

SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, a person under 21 may only be married if the marriage officer has written consent from the legal guardian. If the minor is a male under the age of 18 or a female under the age of 15, the Minister of Home Affairs's consent in addition to the guardian's consent would be needed.

SWEDEN

According to Swedish law, no one is allowed to marry a person under the age of 18. It is also against the law to force a Swedish child to travel for the purpose of marriage in other countries. These actions are punishable by imprisonment.

UNITED STATES

Child marriage is currently legal in 37 states and only 9 states have set the minimum age at 18 and eliminated all exceptions. 20 states do not require any minimum age for marriage. Nearly 300,000 children were married in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018. The vast majority were girls wed to adult men. In most states, child marriage is considered as a valid defense to statutory rape. 14



ROLE OF EACH DELEGATION

URUGUAY

In Uruguay, 25% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 1% are married before the age of 15. Forced marriage is still prevalent in rural parts of Uruguay. Afro and other ethnic minority groups have the largest amount of child and forced marriage in these areas. In 2017, the government increased minimum age of marriage from 12 to 16 years old.

ZAMBIA

Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world. In 2002 it was reported that 42% of girls are married before the age of 18. Zambia's government has adapted a national strategy to end child marriage. This strategy set a goal of reducing child marriage rates by 40% by 2021 with a view to build "a Zambia free from child marriage by 2030".

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