

AFRICAN UNION

Study Guide

for

the African Union

Topic Area: Combating the practices of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in the African continent

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1. Welcoming Message

Dear Delegates,

We are honored to welcome you to this year's edition of the African Union, in RhodesMRC 2022. After a long year's wait, while also operating under difficult conditions due to COVID-19, RhodesMRC 2022 opens its doors to you once again more prepared than ever. It is both our honor and pleasure, as members of the board, to welcome you to our committee, the African Union, where challenging matters are going to be discussed making your participation crucial, as the fate of the continent lies in your hands. We are sure that your contribution to the committee will be significant and that you will handle every challenge to the best of your ability. Be sure that we, as your chairs, will be at your disposal any time you need us. As always, do remember that you will be representing your assigned country as a delegate and you will be counseling with your fellow participants in order to compose a resolution on this year's topic: **Child Marriage in Africa**. For a better experience, it is essential that you prepare yourselves before the conference. Keep in mind that you need to understand the social, political and economical background of your country, while also understanding its interests and views on the topic. Moreover, a thorough comprehension of the topic is of utmost importance and a deeper understanding of the structure of the African Union. Don't forget that a big part of the procedure is its rules. Be sure to study and understand them in order for you to be able to participate and understand each part of the process.

Our goal is not only to reach an agreement between all counties, composing a resolution together, but also to do it in a both professional and friendly manner. Remember that only by cooperating and working with each other will we be able to exchange useful information, learn and socialize with one another and in the end, achieve the goals of this committee. That said, we highly urge you to both be well prepared for the session and conduct the latter with the highest respect and understanding for your fellow delegates and chairs.

For a further familiarization with the topic and with the committee in general, we have taken the time to compose this Study Guide so as to aid you in your research and guide you throughout our session. Please, take the time to read and understand this and the Roles of Procedure, both of which will be valuable and of great assistance during the conference. We would like to remind you, again, that we are here to solve your problems and help you with your research, should you ask for it. We would once again like to welcome you to RhodesMRC 2022 and to the Island of Rhodes in general. We will do our best to ensure that you enjoy yourselves by making your experience as joyful as possible.

Best Regards,

Longinidou Elpida Sofia (President)

Aigyptiadis Aris (Secretary General)

2. Introduction to the Committee

Before pursuing the topic at hand, it is crucial to understand everything there is about the African Union. This will enable every delegate to think of solutions and highlight strong points in the committee's sessions, which fall under its mandate. From a realistic point of view, a resolution must not call for actions that the Union cannot fulfill, as it does not have the jurisdiction to do so. Almost the same can be said for points that have already been made from the committee in the past. For that reason, it is of utmost importance to acquire knowledge about the AU as it will furtherly allow for a smoother session.

Before the African Union (AU) was formed in 2002, there was a former International Organization by the name of Organization of African Unity¹ (OAU), which was founded in 1963. Its goals² were quite broad and they included diplomacy, conflict and civil war mediation and research in economics and communications and promoting unity and solidarity between African States. To achieve those goals the heads of the member states would assemble annually, while the policy decisions would be in the hands of the council of Ministers, where the foreign Ministers of each member state would participate. The OAU also maintained the "African Group" at the UN. Throughout its years, the Organization played its role as a peacekeeper, solving problems in Africa, like several border disputes (i.e Algeria and Morocco, 1963–64).

However, the heads of state decided in 2000 that the OAU should be replaced by a new body that would have a more economic nature, similar to the EU, which came to be known as the African Union (2002). With its launch, the Pan-African Parliament was inaugurated and the creation of the African Standby Force, a peacekeeping force, was agreed upon. Guided by the vision "An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena."³, the African Union aims to improve many aspects of the continent, like advancing its technology, advocating for human rights, cooperating internationally, promoting peace, security, stability etc. The AU carries out its aims with the assistance and mutual cooperation between its bodies and the member states.

¹ (African Union | intergovernmental organization, Africa, 2022)

² (About the African Union | African Union, 2022)

³ *ibid* 1

3. Introduction to the Topic

Child marriage has been a reality since the beginning of time⁴, when -usually- young girls are forced to marry men or young boys. As per definition⁵, child marriage is considered the engagement, where one or both persons is/are below the legal age of 18. Looking back, especially in the 20th century, it used to be common practice, especially in the undeveloped countries, where the problem still exists. However, in the past, when civilization was not as advanced as it is today, there were many reasons behind this practice. These problems of the past were strong enough to create a culture where children being married was not only to be considered as normal, but also as a necessity.

Nevertheless, culture played a big part in the perpetuation of this kind of marriage in such a way that social acceptance became a fact after some time. Indeed, a common, repeated and socially approved practice⁶ easily infiltrates the existing culture and revises it. At the same time, there were a plethora of reasons that aided the aggravation of this phenomenon. As a matter of fact, it became commonplace due to the low life expectancy of the people of the past, due to their lack of advanced technology and their undeveloped societies. Having said that, if a person lives for a maximum average of 45 years and most of the children die at a young age due to harsh conditions, it is a logical outcome that, in order to survive as a race, humans were in tremendous need to have many children as soon as possible. For that reason throughout history child marriage has been observed in a large extend. Many times, women were forced to get married by the time they were able to give birth, which they would do shortly after.

Another point that needs to be considered is the economic aspect. Due to extended poverty in the past, children as a form of marriage material, used to be traded for weddings in exchange for money. The large demand for girl brides altered the usual situation where in order for them to get married they had to have a rich dowry, depending on their social status. This demand actually reversed the beneficiary, from the husband to the wife's family, making the families able to overcome dowry while also making profit. Lastly, families used to agree to marrying their children to overcome their rivalries or even to benefit both financially and politically. The result of all the above was the emerge of young pregnant girls, who were more susceptible to medical issues, a rising number of infant mortality and young mothers who were deprived of their education, their financial independence, unsuitable to be mothers, victims of abuse and immature enough to not be able to protest about their own situation.

⁴ (Nag, 2017)

⁵ (Child Marriage: A Silent Health and Human Rights Issue, 2009)

⁶ (Psychology of Peoples , 1898)

4. Key – Terms and Definitions

- **Child marriage:** Child marriage is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age.⁷
- **Forced marriage:** Forced marriage is a marriage in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. A child marriage is considered to be a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent.⁸
- **Child:** a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.⁹
- **Age of consent:** The age of consent is the age at which a young person is legally considered capable of consenting to sexual relations. This is based on the assumption that children need special protection from sexual abuse, and that there is a certain age under which children are incapable of giving their consent to sexual activity. In many countries, the age of consent and the minimum legal marriage age are different.
- **Social norm:** a social norm is ‘a collective practice sustained by empirical and normative expectations and by preferences conditional on both these expectations’¹³. The concept of the ‘social norm’ centres on the idea that people’s knowledge, attitudes, and preferences toward a collective practice (such as child marriage) are strongly influenced by what other people around them are doing, and by what they think other people think should be done.¹⁰
- **Dowry or “bride price”:** Bride-price can appear to be the ‘buying’ of a wife as a commodity, which can result in abuse towards a woman if she does not fulfill her ‘value’ or if she attempts to leave and the bride-price cannot be repaid. Typically, bride-price consists of a contract where material items (often cattle or other animals) or money are paid by the groom to the bride's family in exchange for the bride, her labor and her capacity to produce children ¹¹

⁷ OHCHR. (n.d.). OHCHR | Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings. [online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>.

⁸ OHCHR. (n.d.). OHCHR | Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings. [online] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>.

⁹ United Nations (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online] OHCHR. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

¹⁰ Bicchieri, Jiang, and Lindemans, ‘A Social Norms Perspective on Child Marriage: The General Framework [DRAFT: Commissioned and to Be Published by UNICEF]’, 11.

¹¹ Hague, G. (2009). *Bride-Price, Poverty and Domestic Violence in Uganda*. pp.90–98.

- **Gender inequality:** Gender inequality means that women and girls are treated as second-class citizens, denied their human rights and valued less because of their sex.¹²

5. Legal Framework

5.1. UN General Assembly resolution 69/156 on Child, Early and Forced Marriage¹³

It is a landmark resolution which aims to ban child marriage and was agreed during the 69th session of the General Assembly. *“The resolution marks the first time that UN Member States have agreed upon substantive recommendations for the steps that countries, international organizations and others must take to address the problem of child, early and forced marriage.”*

5.2. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

“This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. The focus is on Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. More specifically clause 5.3 reads as “Eliminate all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.”

5.3. Convention on the Rights of the Child

“In 1989, world leaders made a historic commitment to the world’s children by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and has helped transform children’s lives around the world. More specifically article 19 of the convention reads as “shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or

¹² Girls Not Brides. (2017). *Economic empowerment and child marriage: lessons from Nigeria*. [online] Available at: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/economic-empowerment-child-marriage-lessons-nigeria/> [Accessed 28 Aug. 2022].

¹³ Refugees, U.N.H.C. for (n.d.). *Refworld | Child, early and forced marriage : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*. [online] Refworld. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/54c7a1254.html> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2022].

negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”¹⁴.

5.4. Resolution A/HRC/RES/29/8 on Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage

It is the first substantive resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council, recognizing child and forced marriage as a human rights violation¹⁵.

5.5. Resolution A/HRC/RES/41/8 on Child, early and forced marriage expressing concern on prevailing impunity and lack of accountability

This resolution presents consequences of child, early and forced marriage and takes action to enhance measures of elimination by urging states to take all necessary steps in order to “*respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of women and girls, including those subjected to child, early and forced marriage, to promote equality in all aspects of marriage and its dissolution and to address their specific needs*”.

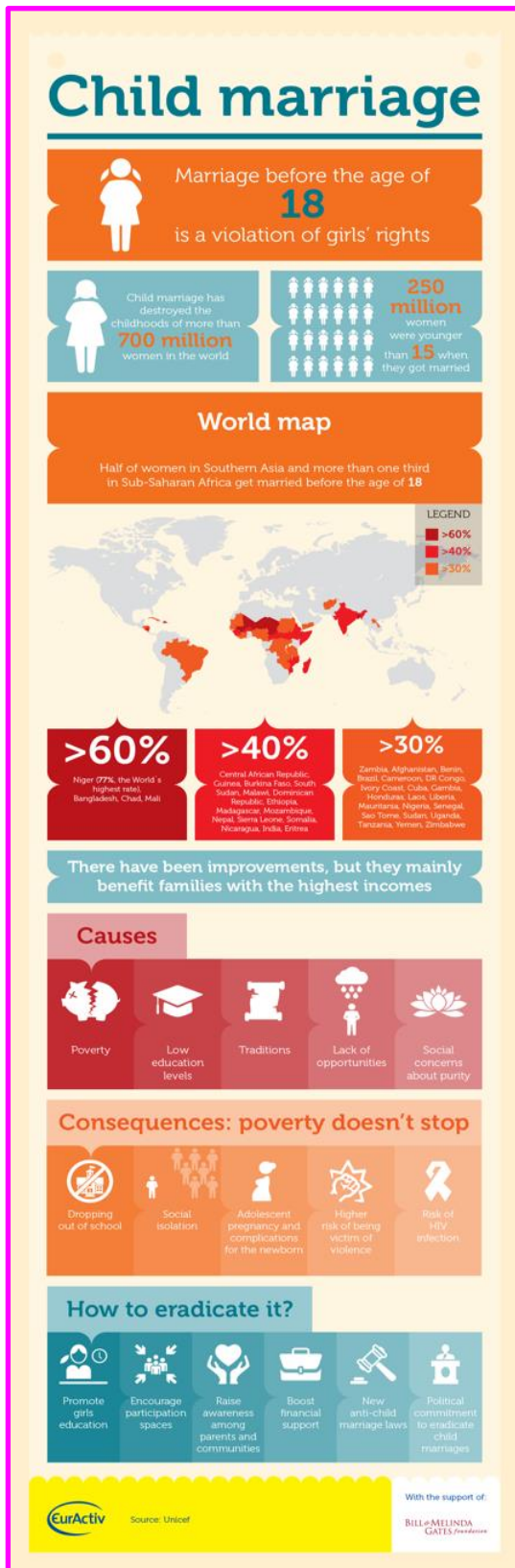
Other actions in recent years, to end child and forced marriage have increased at international, regional and national levels and include the following resolutions. A/HRC/RES/24/23; A/HRC/26/22; A/HRC/35/5; A/HRC/41/19; A/71/253; A/73/257; A/75/262). Moreover in 2014, the UN Commission on the Status of Women issued a document, which, among other things, noted the need to eliminate child marriage.

Furthermore, several other UN conventions treat child marriage and related phenomena as a violation of human rights. Among such international documents are: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

¹⁴ United Nations (1989b). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online] OHCHR. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

¹⁵[A/HRC/RES/29/8 \(undocs.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/article/4a694016.html)

6. Historical background



Early marriage has been a practice that has been tolerated for many years and in many locations around the world. It dates back to ancient times. Girls were typically married off at puberty or even earlier during the Ancient and Middle Ages. These norms were, however, first altered much later in the 20th century as a result of nations starting to raise the marriage age minimum.

According to Roman legal texts, women could not get married before the age of 12 in the Roman Empire. By the time they turned 12, women were believed to be physiologically capable of becoming pregnant and engaging in frequent sex with men. Of course, such behaviors took place while the couple was married. Additionally, the medieval legal texts support the Roman Law Religion has also played a role in the occurrence of child marriage over the years. The age requirements for marriage are various but modest according to Catholic and Islamic law. From those days till the present, the causes associated with having children and getting married young have not changed.

Worldwide, the occurrences of child marriage and forced marriage are both regarded as violations of fundamental human rights. The majority of UN members, or several nations, have set minimum marriage ages. However, because of insufficient enforcement and implementation of those restrictions, child marriage continues to occur often, is fueled by social norms, instability, gender disparity, poverty, and societal norms, and has grave negative effects.

The organization "GirlsnotBrides" estimates that 12 million girls get married before turning 18 each year, or

23 girls per minute and one every three seconds. Although the phenomenon is widespread around the world, it is more common in low-income nations in Africa and Southeast Asia. Poverty, a lack of

civil registration, discriminatory gender relations, and cultural and religious traditions are only a few of the factors that contribute to child marriage. More than 700 million women will wed before the age of 18, with nearly one-third of these unions occurring before the age of 15.

7. Recent Progress

It is obvious that efforts to stop child and forced marriage have grown at the international, regional, and national levels in recent years. The aforementioned initiatives are strongly tied to the 2030 Agenda and, especially, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and more specifically Goal 5.3, which calls for the abolition of all harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage.

25 million child marriages have been avoided worldwide in the last ten years thanks to initiatives including higher rates of girls' education, proactive government investment in teenage girls, and increased public awareness of the dangers of child marriage. Despite this, child and forced marriage rates are still high, especially in some areas, including South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where, according to UNICEF they account for 18% and 44% respectively of all marriages.

An important step in eliminating child marriage is **The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage** which promotes the rights of adolescent girls to avert marriage and pregnancy, and enhances their access to education and alternative pathways for their future. The Global Programme offers assistance to households in demonstrating positive attitudes, and strengthens the services that allow young girls to be in charge of their future, via inter alia sexual and reproductive health and social protection programmes. It also deals with the underlying conditions that cause child marriage, addressing the need for laws and policies that protect girls' rights.

However, no region will be able to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's goal of eliminating child and forced marriage with these efforts. It will need a major acceleration and continuous progress to put an end to the phenomenon on a global scale. UNICEF Global Data estimates that by 2030, over 120 million more girls will get married before turning 18 if current trends continue.

Lastly, it is important to mention that the African Union has also made steps in the effort to eliminate child marriage with the **African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage**¹⁶. The Campaign aims to promote, protect and advocate for the rights of women and girls in Africa. The purpose of the said Campaign, is to accelerate the elimination of the child marriage phenomenon in Africa by supporting legal and legislative measures in the protection and promotion of human rights, including the elimination of any harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage. The campaign has suggested actions including, but not limited to, increasing non-state actors' capacity to engage in evidence-based policy advocacy, including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring and evaluation, and mobilizing continental awareness of the detrimental socio-economic effects of child marriage. In conclusion the Campaign works towards building on existing activities of governments and partners in ending child marriage.

8. Main Discussion of the Topic

8.1. Child marriage as a Global phenomenon

It is important to understand that child marriage has not only been a common practice during the past, but also a worldwide¹⁷ phenomenon. For example, around 21% of young women worldwide have been married before they turned 18. Although many countries today are still not developed enough and despite the fact that child marriage used to be socially accepted throughout history, today, things have changed. Due to the financial and social development of many countries of the west, problems that concerned mortality rates, hygienic conditions, technology and undeveloped societies, have been countered in a large part. As a result, many phenomena that used to be common in the past have been flagged as human rights issues or as criminal acts. With the emerge of International Organizations¹⁸, child marriage began losing ground, until it has considered immoral, illegal and a human right violation.

¹⁶ au.int. (n.d.). *Ending Child Marriage and Stopping the Spread of HIV ... Opportunities and challenges for action African Union Commission December 2016 | African Union*. [online] Available at: <https://au.int/en/documents/20161222/ending-child-marriage-and-stopping-spread-hiv-opportunities-and-challenges-action> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2022].

¹⁷ (Child marriage around the world, 2020)

¹⁸ (Child and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings, 2022)

Keep in mind that the favorable conditions mentioned above, in combination with the action against child marriage, concerns, for the most part, the developed counties of the West. It is important to note that development is not equally distributed in the world and thus, child marriage is still considered to be an issue in some of the least developed states and continents. Today¹⁹, instead of the African continent, this issue can be observed in many other parts of the world, such as Asia, especially South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East etc.

However, global action has been taken. Since 1948, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, child marriage has been a target of the human rights advocacy. Through the years, international declarations and conventions, concerning human rights, never fail to condemn child marriage as an illegal activity. For example, it has been condemned by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990) etc. The problem occurs when such Conventions need to be passed as domestic law by each country. Not only do a vast number of countries not pass such laws, but also, if they do, they are not able to enforce it. As a result, child marriage keeps thriving in undeveloped region, like it poses no threat for human rights since states are not able to apply their own laws.

The reason behind its longevity and its survival, despite the “hostile environment”, resemble the past, although they have adjusted in today’s reality. For instance²⁰, it is almost two times as likely for young women that originate from poor families to be forced to get married for financial benefits. Another strong factor is the lack of education, which is commonplace in less developed states, especially when it comes to young girls. It has been proven that educated young girls are less likely to get married before the legal age, as stated by International Conventions and domestic law. Religion is also to blame for this reality. A variety of them tend to accept and pursue child marriage, making it not only common but also holy. Lastly, in the hunt for social status, families tend to marry their children in order to gain social power. Indeed, those kinds of marriage tend to also seal ties between the two families, while also ensuring the social status of the family, a common phenomenon, noticed mainly between tribes.

¹⁹ ibid 5

²⁰ (Child Marriage Facts and Figures - ICRW | PASSION. PROOF. POWER., n.d.)

8.2. Child Marriage in Africa

As mentioned above, child marriage is very common in the African continent. The geopolitical situation²¹ in Africa has not favored it historically, making it one of the least developed continents of today. That said, poverty, lack of government and rule of law, religion and tribal culture are a part of their reality. In combination with parastatal organizations, many activities that are considered illegal internationally are usual there, including child marriage. It is no coincidence that among the top countries with the highest percentage of children below 18 getting married are Niger, Central African Republic and Chad. Although this issue is still a reality, many actions have been taken in order to minimize it. However, further action is required in order to fully change public opinion in Africa, as happened in South Asia²².

Of course, measures have been taken in Africa as well. The African Union has led by example of other International Organizations and has taken steps to counterattack this phenomenon in the continent. For instance, the member states have signed the Charter on the Welfare and Rights of the Child (1990), clearly stating that marriage with at least one of the individuals being under the age of 18 is considered to be an illegal action. As stated above, the main problem is the enforcement of each law in African states. The character of the continent makes it more difficult for the rule of law to prevail.

Moreover, due to the absence of advanced medical technology and knowledge, African states possess insufficient awareness of the health consequences²³ of the phenomenon, while they also lack sensitivity on the matter, because of its -mainly financial- benefits. Child marriage is one of the factors that cultivates the ground for sexually transmitted infections, like HIV. Also, it poses a threat to both the girl and the soon-to-be-born child since the risks during pregnancy, labor and delivery are increased, as is the mortality rate of the infants that come from an underaged mother.

It is a fact that the strategy of the African Union is to combat child marriage and minimize it significantly, or even -if possible- to eradicate it completely. Keeping in mind the situation in Africa, it is easy to realize that a legislative approach, though advised, will not be as effective as some alternative ways²⁴ that can be adopted. Such actions are already taking place in the region but unfortunately, they haven't had any significant impact on that matter. However, promoting child education to a further extent is among the hardest but most reliable ways to counter the issue at hand.

²¹ (Tim Marshall, 2015)

²² *ibid* 7

²³ *ibid* 5

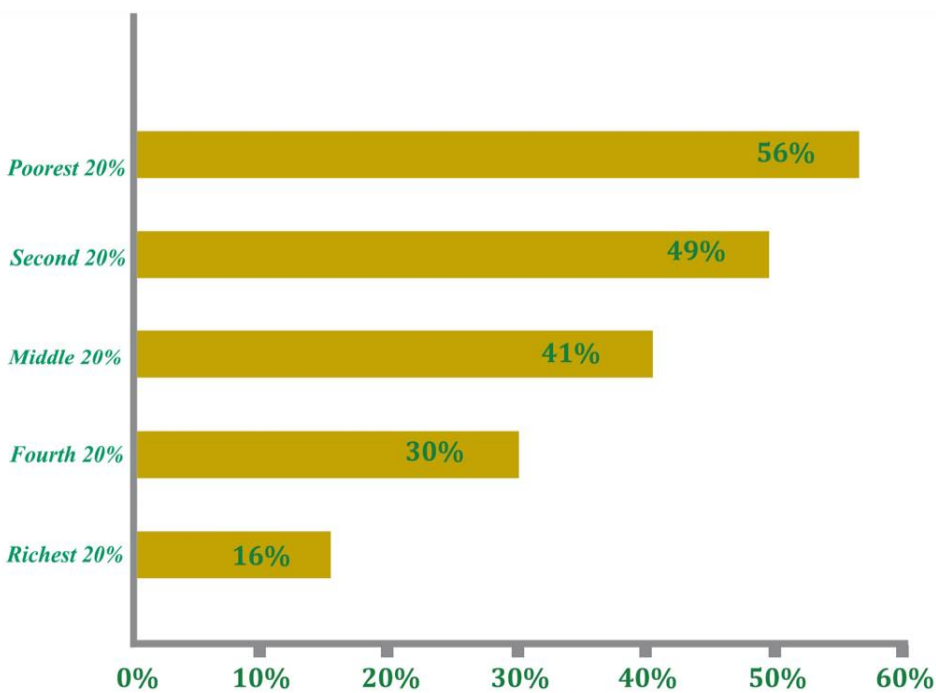
²⁴ (Recommendation for action against child and forced marriage, n.d.)

The use of social media, or of other means to spread awareness also has the potential of a significant impact.

All in all, the goal is to combat the reasons behind child marriage; the base of the problem. Two of the most important aspects that are to blame for the longevity and continuation of the problem in Africa are the economic and the cultural aspect. These aspects in combination with the continent's geography, have been generating most of the problems, including but not limited to child marriage.

8.3. The Economic aspect

Child marriage is often caused by poverty, low income and meager economic opportunities. Especially in the African Region, according to multiple studies, the main reason that leads families to exploit their children for child marriage is the need to improve family income²⁵. According to UNICEF data girls from the poorest households are three times as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households which indicates that child marriage contributes to, exacerbates and at the same time is a result of poverty.²⁶



More specifically and as shown in the infographic below more than 56% of child marriage occurs in the poorest families. We can definitely observe in the UNFPA figure that child marriage and poverty are strongly connected.

Figure 1: Percentage of women of 20-24 years old that married before the age of 18 (1987-2011) (UNFPA, 2012)

²⁵ Walker, J.-A. (2012). Early Marriage in Africa — Trends, Harmful Effects and Interventions. *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de la Santé Reproductive*, [online] 16(2), pp.231–240. Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23318031>.

²⁶ Girls Not Brides. (2017). *Economic empowerment and child marriage: lessons from Nigeria*. [online] Available at: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/economic-empowerment-child-marriage-lessons-nigeria/> [Accessed 28 Aug. 2022].

According to research by GirlsNotBrides, a whopping 40% of girls in the world's poorest nations get married as young children—twice the global average.²⁷

Due to their limited educational opportunities and low social, political, and economic position, girls in the poorest socioeconomic groups frequently depend on men for financial support and see marriage



as their only alternative as a way to save money for the family and secure their financial future. Additionally, supporting this viewpoint are patriarchal standards that devalue and treat girls like commodities. Their union may be utilized to make payments on obligations, resolve conflicts, or renegotiate social, economic, and political ties.

Another phenomenon linked to poverty and child marriage is a dowry or “bride price” as it may provide a welcome income for a girl’s family in times of economic hardship. Furthermore, we shall not forget that child marriage during a crisis is also a crucial factor linked to the phenomenon. Humanitarian crises can exacerbate disparities, including unfavorable gender norms, poverty, and access to essential services like sexual and reproductive healthcare - and raise the likelihood that children will be married off at a young age. A crisis also is directly in accordance with poverty as families who lose their jobs and income during a crisis consider child marriage as a way to stave off economic burden and as a coping mechanism to ensure financial security. Therefore, they see the marriage as a financial transaction.

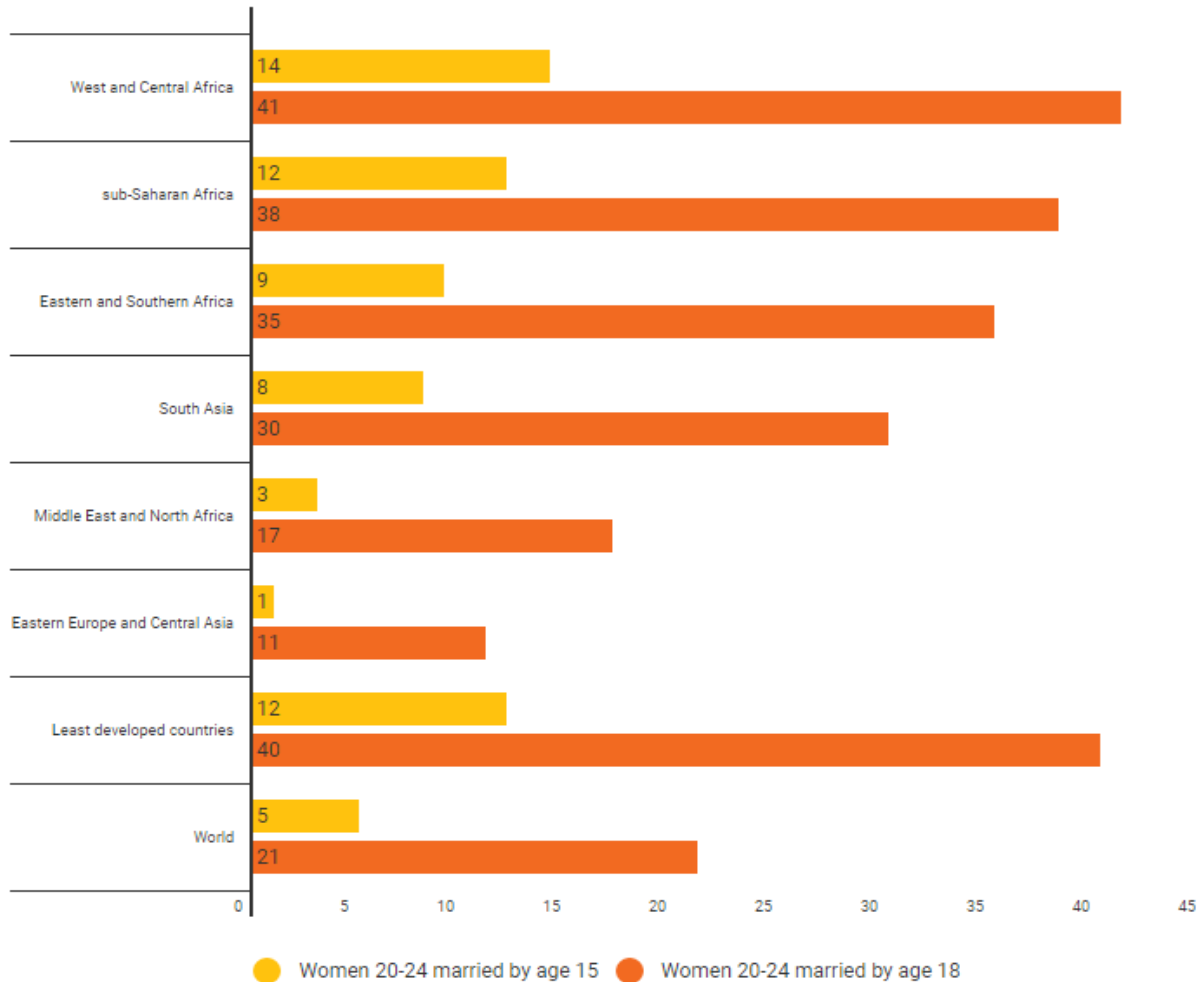
In the infographic²⁸ below you may observe that due to the aforementioned factors as well as for social reasons the levels of child marriage are especially high in Africa.

²⁷ Stith (2015). Child Brides to the Patriarchy: Unveiling the Appropriation of the Missing Girl Child. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 31(1), p.83. doi:10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.1.83.

²⁸ Girls Not Brides. (n.d.). *Infographic: child marriage in humanitarian crises*. [online] Available at: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.es/aprendizaje-recursos/centro-de-recursos/infographic-child-marriage-in-humanitarian-crises/#resource-downloads> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2022].

The highest levels of child marriage are found in sub-Saharan Africa

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 15 and before age 18, by region



Notes: Estimates are based on a subset of 107 countries covering 78 per cent of the population of women aged 20 to 24. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population. Data coverage was insufficient to calculate regional estimates for East Asia and Pacific, North America and Western Europe.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2018, based on DHS, MICS and other national surveys, 2010-2017.

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²⁹ World Economic Forum. (n.d.). *This app could end child marriage in Bangladesh*. [online] Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/05/game-changer-phone-app-aims-to-end-child-marriage-in-bangladesh/> [Accessed 27 Aug. 2022].

8.4. The Social aspect

Apart from the economic reasons that were already analyzed previously, there is a significant number of social factors linked to child marriage. One of them are social norms which are informal rules of behavior in a group. People imitate them to show that they are a part of the group, either out of habit from a young age, social pressure from authority figures, or both. Social norms are frequently gendered and work to limit the sexuality of women and girls. Child marriage is one of those practices. It has been happening for many generations and has become commonplace in many locations.

When a girl begins to menstruate, she is regarded in certain cultures as becoming a woman. She might take the next step toward becoming a wife and mother by getting married. We must not overlook the fact that, according to these standards, female genital mutilation is also associated with child marriage because it is thought to make a girl more marriable.

Another informal rule that causes child marriage is the idea that it protects the girl's and her family's reputation. In many places, girls who have relationships or become pregnant during the relationship are shamed for causing dishonor to their family and are a target for those communities and taken away from social activities like going out or even from going to school. In these conditions, parents consider early marriage as a means to offer protection to their daughters and their families.³⁰

Another crucial phenomenon linked to child marriage is gender inequality. The structural social inequalities that drive girls into early marriage are related intimately to the social, political and economic structures that prevent women and girls from exercising their rights to safe, healthy lives. Girls and female-headed households are more affected by poverty due to restricted economic rights according to the UNDP 2016 report.³¹ Gender inequality is strongly present in patriarchal systems, which are controlled by men. In these systems girls are valued according to their virginity and limits are applied on female sexuality and reproductive choices. This can mean controlling how a girl behaves and dresses, where she goes, who she sees, and if, who and when she marries. It is also common that her sexuality is criminalized and her access to care and information is blocked.

³⁰ Bichierri, C. (n.d.). *A Social Norms Perspective on Child Marriage: The General Framework*.

³¹ UNDP. (2017). *UNDP Year in Review 2016 | United Nations Development Programme*. [online] Available at: https://www.undp.org/egypt/publications/undp-year-review-2016?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=CjwKCAjwpKyYBhB7EiwAU2Hn2WjaJs7hdC4lky3FqUw1oG4-C_1AVNDE986vpY40UImzpyVk701gBhoCkPkQAvD_BwE [Accessed 28 Aug. 2022].

8.5. The Consequences

Child marriage has detrimental consequences is multiple levels. Early marriage curtails their education and denies them the opportunity to fully explore their potential and lift themselves out of poverty. Unfortunately, it is common to also increase vulnerability to HIV as poverty is interlinked to HIV as a factor and a result according to studies in East Africa. Moreover, girls in child marriage who are in poverty are less likely to access health care. Even where health services are provided free, additional costs of transportation and other expenses harden their ability to access health care³².

Furthermore, child marriage as a significant barrier to economic attainment and growth affects girls' employment opportunities. As explained in the Parsons review on child marriage and labor force *"Child marriage may influence female labour force participation in a number of ways, including through a reduction in expected returns from participation in paid employment due to lower educational attainment and an increase in the relative value of unpaid household work stemming from higher lifetime fertility... Child marriage may also reduce labour force participation by significantly increasing the barriers to employment posed by fertility and women's reproductive roles."* (Parsons et al., 2015). Other effects on the girls' health are complications during pregnancy and childbirth which are the main cause of death among adolescent girls age 15-19 in developing countries according to UNFPA. Lastly, girls who are forced into child marriage are also more vulnerable to intimate partner violence.

9. Conclusion

As described previously it is evident that child marriage has detrimental effects on a wide spectrum. If we want to address the phenomenon, we shall acknowledge all factors that enable it. Even though from the ancient times until today there are different practices around the world poverty, social and other political, religious and economic factors raise the percentages of early and child marriage. Some families choose to marry off their daughters in order to lessen financial strain or generate revenue. Others could act in this manner because they think it will safeguard or defend their daughters' futures. In general, marrying off a child was historically viewed as a positive and common practice and it took place in every undeveloped country worldwide. It is safe to say that this situation survived throughout

³² Plan International. (n.d.). *Child Marriage-Consequences*. [online] Available at: https://plan-international.org/srhr/child-marriage-early-forced/?gclid=CjwKCAjwpKyYBhB7EiwAU2Hn2WTkwRAIzbEevu4aTpRpEBadw1-A4ayWU8Q3by5H8Pg2tS0IkU57mBoCmpUQAvD_BwE [Accessed 28 Aug. 2022].

the ages due to its acceptance by each society and its positive outcomes for the families that practiced it. To this day, it remains a common phenomenon in undeveloped states and thus the AU needs to take further action to combat it in its territory.

To make changes at scale everyone should commit to putting human rights into action. International bodies, governments, NGOs and political leaders need to come together and act effectively enhancing the legislative system and finding measures to address the issue on many levels. In order to ensure that girls and women have access to excellent education, sexual and reproductive health care, gender-responsive social safety systems, and a fair and equal labor market, it is crucial to fight child marriage. As a matter of fact, because of the nature of the legislative approach in certain countries, alternative ways as the above are required to be combined and co-exist with a strict legal framework in order to achieve the minimization of the problem. Attacking the situation from multiple sides can be beneficial and also provide a turning point when it comes to societies' approval of child marriage in general.

10. Points to be addressed

- 1) How can the AU Member States eliminate the phenomenon of child marriage with respect to other countries' religious or cultural traditions around child marriage?
- 2) How can Member States address the economic burden that is a prominent factor of child marriage while eliminating the marginalization of vulnerable girls?
- 3) How can Member States prevent the spread of HIV and other diseases linked to child marriage?
- 4) What actions should be taken to eliminate gender inequality and gender based violence, two phenomena interlinked with child marriage?
- 5) How can Member States tackle the significant and disproportionate negative impact of teenage pregnancies on adolescent girls?
- 6) What measures can be retrieved to enhance the healthcare system and social support for individuals in child early and forced marriages?
- 7) In what ways can Member states create protection for the girls who could face risks of 'honour killing' if they remain unmarried?

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