

Desk review on impact of child marriage on children with disabilities in MENA/ASRO

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Overview

- 10 trends – global & MENA/ASRO
- Inclusive practices
- Considerations for research
- Recommendations in 5 outcomes

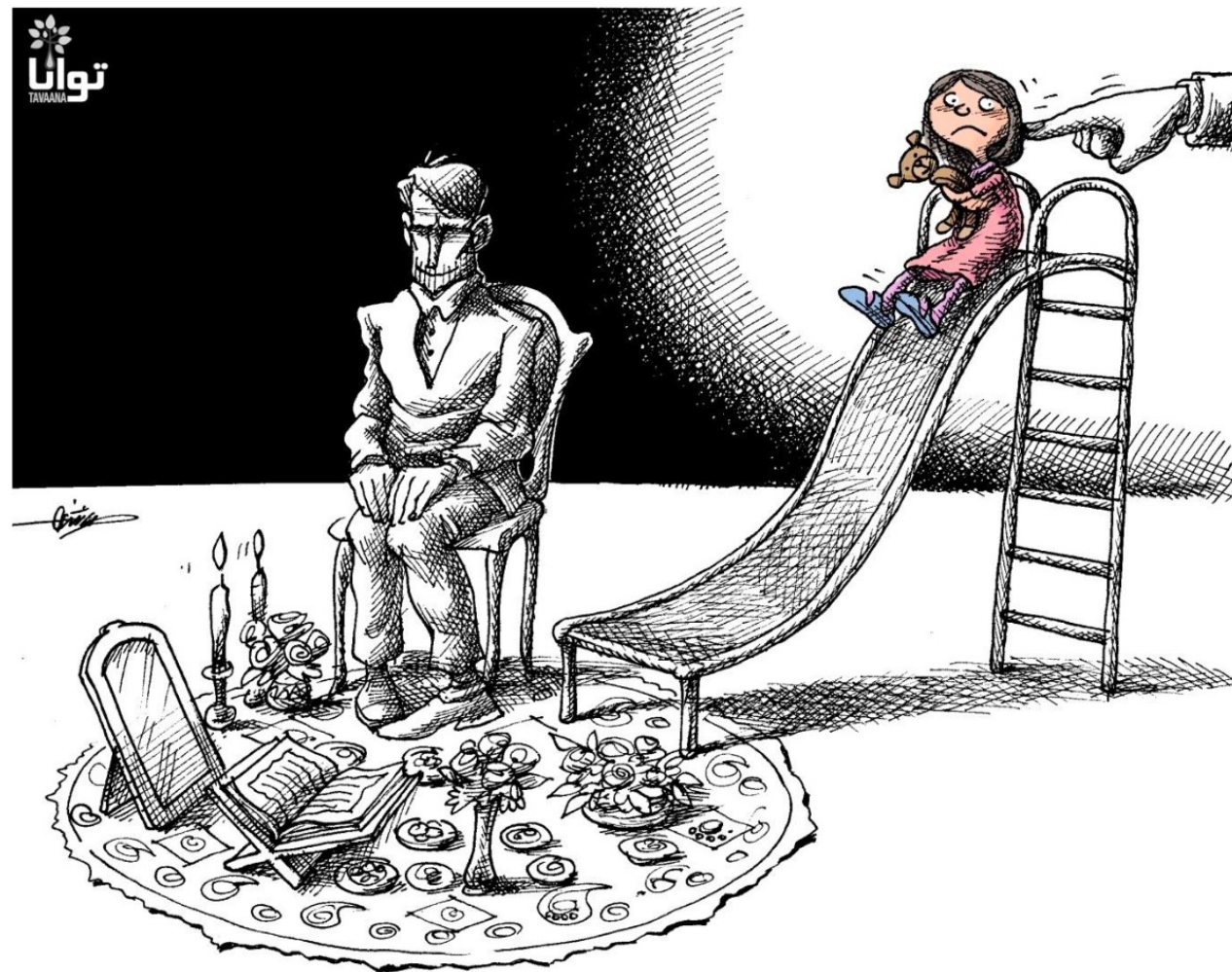


Photo credit: All Human Rights for All in Iran: <http://iranhrc.org/>

Question?

Do you think children with disabilities experience early marriage?



1. There is an association between child marriage and disability and it is under-reported

*Lack of disaggregated data in ECM work and myth around disability and marriage

Country where MICS data came from	# of women aged 15-19 years who are married		% of women aged 15-19 years who are married	
	With Functional difficulty (i.e. disability)	With no functional difficulty	With functional difficulty (i.e. disability)	With no functional difficulty
Algeria (MICS 6)	55	1,857	4.7%	7.3%
Iraq (MICS 6)	46	2,521	12.1%	29.1%
State of Palestine (MICS 6)	11	932	* (less than 25 cases)	15.8%
Tunisia (MICS 6)	39	598	3.9%	1.2%
Yemen (MICS 6)	166	2,682	30.6%	30%

2. Drivers of child marriage are the same and more severe for girls with disabilities (GWD)

poverty + social norms (age/disab/gender) + ↓ communication outside family = GWD at ↑ risk of early marriage

- 9/10 countries where CM prevalent are fragile states, disability prevalence ↑
- Research in 4 countries (Uganda, Haiti, Pakistan, Mali) showed girls with disabilities at greater likelihood of early marriage
 - < 15 y.o. girls with disabilities were ~ **1.7 x more likely** to be married
 - 15 - 17 y.o., ~**1.5 x more likely** to be married



Question?

What do you think motivates families to marry girls with disabilities early?



3. Family feels **pressured to mitigate child's disability** with early marriage

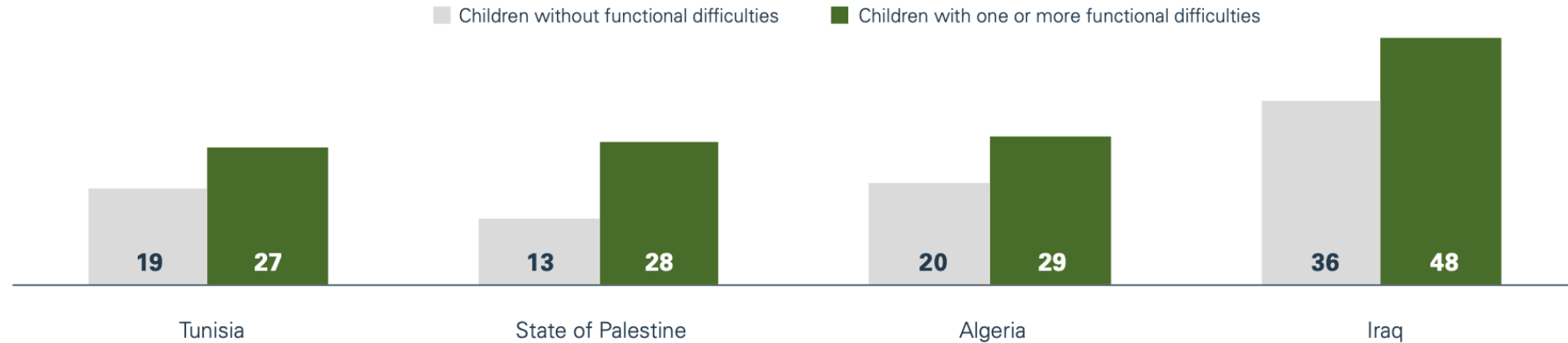
PEER PRESSURE



- Due to perceived unmarriageability of GWD (do not see her as a capable wife, mother and daughter in law), families engage in harmful practices (i.e. not disclosing invisible disabilities and early marriage)
- Parents have a fear of dying and leaving their child with disability without proper care, so they seek a husband (and their family) to provide this care, to transfer the ‘burden’.
- Families (e.g. Egypt) do not see early marriage of CWD as ‘forced’ and see it as a positive consideration for their future:
 - helping them have the rite of passage of marriage (e.g. normalizing their child)
 - as a girl w/disability may have non-disabled child to help her
 - older sibling w/disab needs to be married before younger ones

4. Inaccessible services - an additional driver of marriage for girls with disabilities

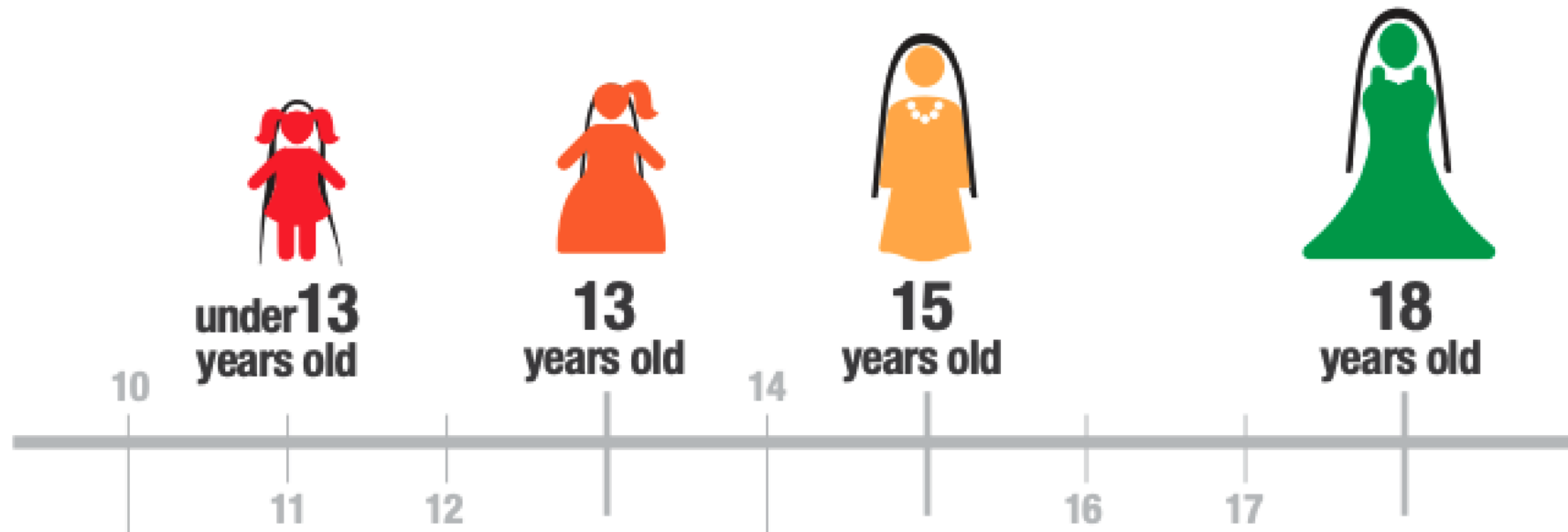
FIGURE 24 Percentage of children of upper-secondary-school age who are not attending primary, lower- or upper-secondary school or higher



- Education services:
 - Past pandemics (e.g. Ebola and Covid-19) been drivers of child marriage, GWD are more affected by school closures.
 - In Nepal, girls with disabilities who married early had never been to school or dropped out early.
- Child protection services : More barriers to CP for children with disabilities (e.g. attitudes; inaccessible sites and reporting mechanisms; unwillingness to report abuse when family are perpetrators, isolation of CWD).
 - Children with disabilities ~3X more likely to experience sexual violence than peers w/out disabilities = ↑ risk of child marriage
- SRH services: Barriers to SRH services exacerbate risks. Assumptions people with disabilities are not sexually active; exclusion from SRH/rights education, particularly for girls with intellectual disabilities or who are deaf.

Question?

Do you think children with disabilities experiencing early marriage, marry **earlier, at the same time or later** than peers without disabilities?



5. Children with disabilities may marry earlier or at same time as peers

- In Nepal, CWD proposed for marriage **around the same age** as peers w/out disab. Negative social norms lead parents to agree to early marriage to.
 - **In Lebanon**, GWD enter early marriage before they are less desirable both due to older age and disability.
 - In NW Syria, 61% strongly agreed that **families of girls with disabilities are more likely to choose child marriage and at a younger age than children w/out disability.**
- **Family desperate to secure child's future and accept proposals sooner rather than later.**
- **Girls more at risk than boys with disabilities** due to traditional gender roles and to prevent pregnancy outside of marriage. Some boys with disabilities seen as having greater economic potential.



UNICEF Syria, robotics training for girls with disabilities

6. Girls with disabilities enter the least favorable marital matches

- Arranged marriages is a community affair. Parents influenced by community perceptions that **'GWD have limited options'**.
- 'non-ideal' proposals are offered and accepted for girls with disabilities:
 - **widowers or a much older man** (e.g. said to be less sexually aggressive, more compassionate towards disability, less likely to leave wife)
 - **groom with severe disabilities in need of a caretaker**
 - **a union focused on child bearing and girl continues to live with her parents**
 - **A union where girl with disability is a 2nd or 3rd wife**
- In Egypt, a deaf women was married twice.
 - First, to a man with a disability to be his caregiver.
 - After he passed, she married a much older man who was twice divorced and needed help with childcare.



UNFPA Syria

7. Girls with disabilities given **little power & may not understanding** what is happening

- The **opinions of girls with disabilities are usually denied**. In Egypt, there have been **deaf girls getting married and not even knowing** what is happening (i.e. no SL interpreter)
- Adolescent girls **with disabilities enter marriage without being prepared for the challenges of the ‘marriage contract’** and what it entails. Children with disabilities are excluded from many community forums peers have, less developed social network.
- UNFPA Syria said there are harmful perceptions that girls with disabilities are incapable of feeling, deciding and dreaming- so consent is not sought.



What is this about?



People with learning disabilities have the right to marry. They also have the right not to marry.



Sometimes people may try to make you marry someone when you do not want to. This is a **forced marriage**.



With this **research** project we want to:

- find out about people with learning disabilities and forced marriage



- tell managers and staff what is happening

8. Marriages of girls with disabilities lead to worst life outcomes than peers

- Marriage decisions, in theory, are in 'best interest' of a child with a disability and for their own 'protection and security'. In reality, the consequences do not favour girls with disabilities and does not ensure a positive change in her life.
- **Negative consequences of marriage affect a GWD for the rest of her life course and impact her capacity to recover (less education, less livelihood options, more lifelong dependence).**

Negative impacts reported:

- ⇒ **In Nepal and Lebanon, girls with disabilities experienced the highest levels of intimate partner violence.**
- ⇒ **Gendered expectations**, physical hardship and emotional stress from in laws and lack of empathy on impact of disability on HH chores.
- ⇒ **Extreme poverty** as GWD often marry into poorer families where their spouses and in laws may also have disabilities.
- ⇒ **Low sexual, reproductive and maternal health**, multiple miscarriages after domestic violence, forced abortions, still births, and forced rape post-marriage
- ⇒ **Isolation, abandonment and separation**



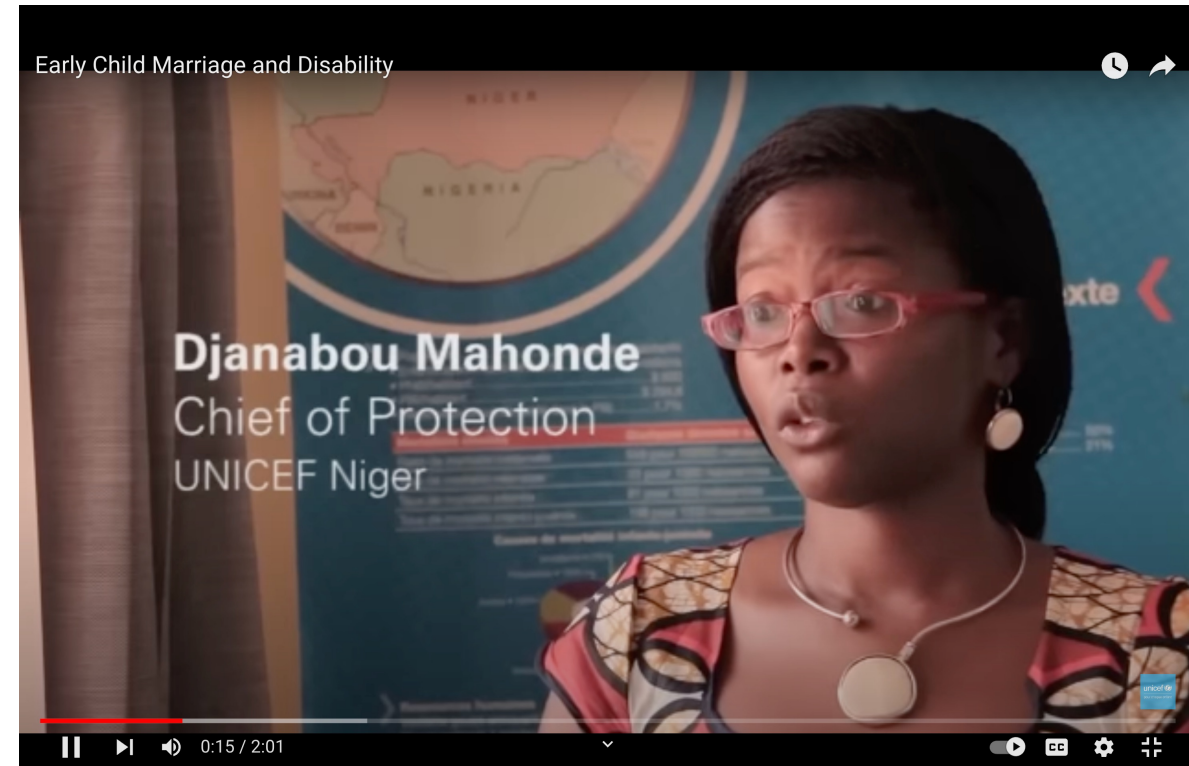
9. Policies do not support the prevention of marriage of children with disabilities

- **The CRPD concluding remarks were reviewed for five countries with highest rates of child marriage in MENA/ASRO (Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, Egypt)**
 - No findings on child marriage, promoted the rights of PWD to marriage /parenthood (e.g. absence of reporting, data, awareness).
 - Niger in CRPD concluding remarks 'important to protect CWD from ECM'
- **Harmful laws that contribute to EM of children with disabilities go unchallenged.**
 - laws restrict girls with disabilities' ability to testify in court



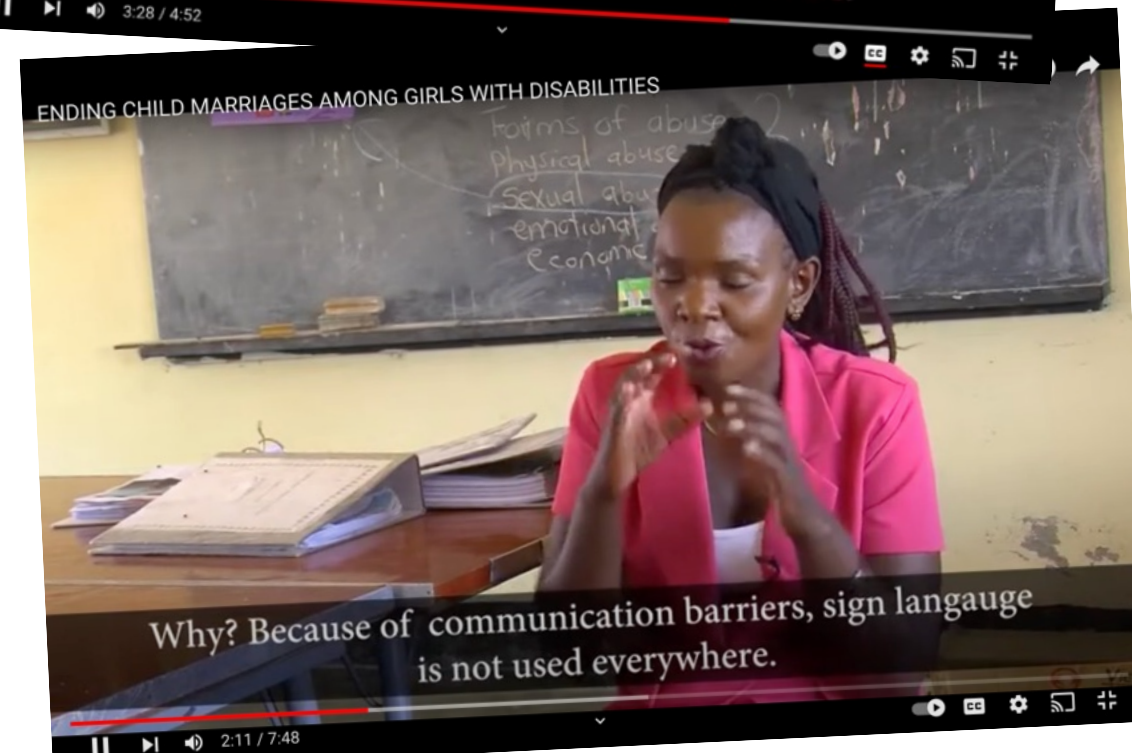
10. Early marriage is a cause of disability for both infant and child mother

- Link between early child marriage and subsequent disability (e.g. fistula issues, HIV, urinary incontinence, osteoporosis). → [UNICEF Niger](#) campaign
- Children born of girl-mothers compete for nutrition in the womb, and infants more likely to be stunted, have low birth weight, have delays and disabilities.
- A study done across 37 LMIC confirmed those married in childhood had a stronger likelihood of disability.



Inclusive Practices

1. **Inclusive communications** on child marriage - ChildLine India and DeafWomenToo India
2. ***Inclusive deaf clubs and case management** - Hivos and Deaf Women Included- Zimbabwe
3. **Inclusive programming UNFPA ASRO to creat alternative life pathways** – Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan
 1. Vocational training
 2. Inclusive GBV, case management referrals, GBV directory in Braille and sign language
 3. Economic empowerment
 4. Inclusive Girl Shine Clubs (Syria)
 5. Org of PWD (OPDs) to better reach GWD (Leb,Sudan)



Question?

How many of you do research in the area of child marriage?



Considerations for Research

- Include youth with disabilities – especially girls with disabilities in research and M&E. They have different perspectives from adults and service providers. Topics could explore:
 - ✓ **What types of social and behavioral messaging are effective towards families of GWD?**
 - ✓ **How to reach girls with disabilities who are the most affected by digital divide?**
 - ✓ **Understanding how boys and men with disabilities can contribute to ending early marriage of girls with disabilities?**
 - ✓ Advantages of mixed clubs (with and without girls with disabilities) and targeted clubs (- deaf girls club)?
 - ✓ Type of support women's OPDs need to engage in ECM work and their perspective (i.e. do they see as problematic)?
 - ✓ Role of religious figures in promoting positive messages about the value and rights of persons with disabilities?
- Save the children in KRI did research with a sample of youth with disabilities- *could be standard practices.



Photo: Analysis workshop with Youth Research Associates, sharing their interpretation of priorities

Recommendations to RAF members

- The problem with ‘intersectionality’ → good for needs assessment, not great for programming as creates lack of a focused goals (i.e. want to address everything, and end up addressing nothing well)

→ **RAF members discuss if want to have girls with disabilities as a group of focus and commit to this in a substantive way**

→ So far, lack of disability lens in majority of RAF documents

→ Global Programme - Phase 3 document mentions disability 13 times & 8 data points for disability disaggregation in results framework



Recommendations for children with disabilities

Outcome 1: Girls voice and agency

- **Inclusive Girls clubs:** a space to bring GWD together, ensure have sign language interpreter who may also be a mentor. Can be mixed groups between girls with and without disabilities.
 - ⇒ helped identify cases of abuse, through trust building, people reported concerns to the clubs.
 - ⇒ In Nepal, 16-year-old Saruna, who is low-vision, is a peer supporter in a youth club on campaigns to end child marriage.
- **Work with women with disabilities (OPDs) on various initiatives such as behavioral change with families, mentorship of clubs,**



Recommendations for children with disabilities

Outcome 2: Household and community attitudes & behaviors

- Organizing widespread, **community-lead campaigns on the rights of children with disabilities**- embed different messaging in consciousness of parents of children with disabilities:

“Educate your daughter with a disability so she can have better marriage prospects”

“Early marriage of girls with disabilities will not improve her life and can start a cycle of poverty and violence instead.”

- SBC campaigns **especially are needed in the community and homes (e.g. home visit, whats app), as many children with disabilities do not go to school or attend community events.**
- Though it is important to understand a family's motives these motives should be challenged by a respected community member perhaps working with a woman with a disability who understand risks of early marriage.



Question?

For those who do service delivery, what is one thing you can do to better reach girls with disabilities?



Recommendations for children with disabilities

Outcome 3: Service delivery

Twin-track approach to disability mainstreaming

- (1) include children with disabilities across ECM activities
- (2) providing targeted interventions to address needs of GWD in ECM programming (e.g. clubs for GWD, partnerships with womens' OPDs, conditional cash transfers to keeping GWD in school, Autism Aid App included SRH, Wasel App in Egypt for deaf people to communicate in emergencies)

⇒ Frontline working training of anyone with close proximity to GWD (e.g. physical therapists, sign language interpreters, teachers).

⇒ Value and budget for accessibility in your work

 UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

54th SESSION

Special Rapporteur

Rights of persons with disabilities



Heba Hagrass (Egypt)

#HRC54

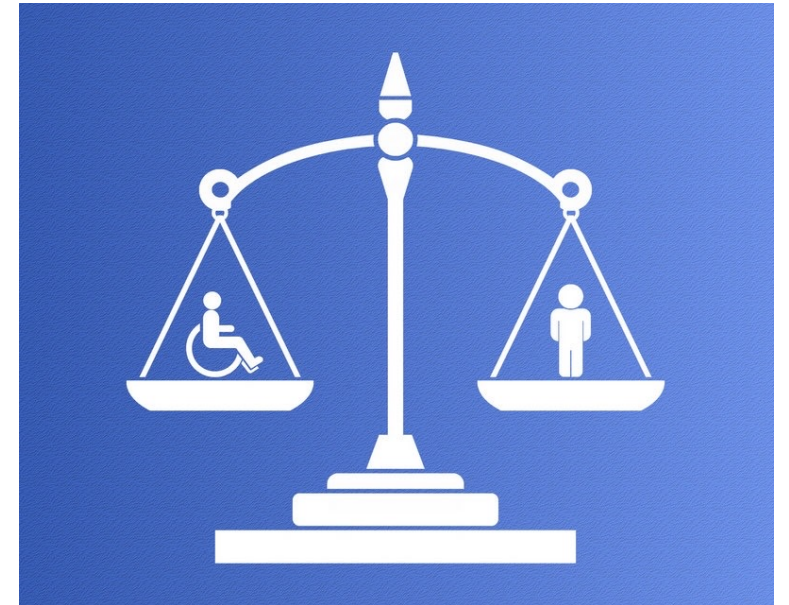
Table 3. Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in interventions in programme areas, disaggregated by age and disability

COUNTRY	2019 RESULTS	2020 RESULTS	2021						
			TARGETS	RESULTS	UNMARRIED	MARRIED	10–14 YEARS	15–19 YEARS	WITH DISABILITIES
Bangladesh	89,974	88,770	80,720	96,592	77,255	3,465	35,705	60,887	6,294
Burkina Faso	310,042	112,123	103,016	44,825	44,825	0	21,964	22,861	257
Ethiopia	261,244	152,782	105,772	49,449	44,835	4,614	31,281	18,168	170
Ghana	20,046	27,274	18,690	19,376	18,328	1,048	7,790	11,586	15

Recommendations for children with disabilities

Outcome 4: Legal context and policy level

- **Need for Inclusive justice systems to address delays in justice for children with disabilities**
 - ⇒ According to Hivos/Deaf Women Included in Zimbabwe, need sign language interpreters as most abuse cases go unreported.
 - ⇒ Amended laws and policies around protection of children and child marriage explicitly must mention children with disabilities.
- **A legal focus needs to go hand in hand with socio-economic solutions**
 - ⇒ A purely legal focus avoids the root causes of poverty. Focus should be on empowerment of CWD to have options other than marriage.



Recommendations for children with disabilities

Outcome 5: Evidence generation

- ⇒ Data needs to be disaggregated (using Washington Group Questions) by disability (8 disability-disagg indicators required in global programme results framework)
- ⇒ Analyze MICS6/7 data on disability and child marriage.
- ⇒ All evaluations and consultancies funded by RAF members to be disability inclusive and include a sample (~10%) of CWD, *budget lines.
- ⇒ Testimonials of women with disabilities married as girls. Debunk phenomenon that GWD don't experience child marriage.



Early marriage despite disability