



ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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INTRODUCTION

Established in 2018, the Regional Action Forum to End Child Marriage (RAF) in Arab States/Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region seeks to eradicate child marriage in alignment with UNICEF and UNFPA's Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

RAF is a collaborative regional platform co-chaired by UNICEF MENA and UNFPA ASRO, that brings together members from more than 40 UN agencies, INGOS, NGOs and academic institutions. Our main objectives encompass coordinating programmatic interventions among regional organizations to tackle different aspects of child marriage - including harmful practices - while sharing knowledge and bolstering the translation of evidence into action.

RAF members aim to collectively advocate against the factors driving child marriage and related marginalization in the MENA region.

RAF focuses on several key areas:

- Empowering girls
- Promoting positive practices within families, communities, and among thought leaders
- Improving service delivery and systems
- Enhancing legal and policy frameworks
- Generating relevant data and evidence to drive sustainable change for the eradication of child marriage



FEBRUARY 2024

EXPLORING LINKAGES BETWEEN CHILD MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN THE MENA REGION: AN ONLINE DISCUSSION

On 6 February 2024, the Regional Action Forum to End Child Marriage in Arab States / MENA (RAF) hosted an online discussion on the linkages between child marriage and FGM with more than 30 of its members and experts to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. The discussion covered global trends as well as in depth insight into specific contexts such as Sudan and Somalia where both FGM and child marriage remain prevalent. The RAF online discussion on FGM and child marriage recording is available [here](#).

Exploring the linkages between child marriage & FGM in the MENA region

RAF members' online discussion

▶

Tuesday, 6 February 2024, the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM

15:00 to 16:00 (Amman time - GMT + 3)

“Engaging with men and boys, as well as religious leaders, is crucial for both FAM and child marriage prevention in Somalia, Awareness campaigns emphasizing that there is no mention of GM in the Quran and discussing its associated health risks with the community may help change certain perspectives and beliefs.” - Nunow Abdirahman, UNFPA Somalia Gender-Based Violence (GBV)/Gender Specialist and Analyst

KEY ADVOCACY CALLS FOR STAKEHOLDERS INVESTING IN THE PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND FGM

1) INVEST IN EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS: Stakeholders looking to invest further in prevention efforts should emphasize the importance of understanding the correlation between FGM and child marriage and the need for evidence-based interventions. Regular monitoring and evaluation are essential to track progress and adjust strategies as needed. It is crucial not to overlook girls who have experienced both FGM and early marriage.

2) ADOPT HOLISTIC APPROACHES THAT ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES & CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE & FGM: It is crucial to adopt holistic approaches that address the root causes and consequences of child marriage and FGM, particularly in complex contexts such as Somalia and Sudan. By combining legislative reforms, community engagement, comprehensive programming and innovative strategies, stakeholders can work towards ending these harmful practices and safeguarding the rights and well-being of girls and women. This is particularly needed in times of conflict and displacement when risks of child marriage and FGM can increase.

3) ENGAGE WITH BOYS, MEN & RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR LASTING CHANGE: Engaging with boys, men and religious leaders for lasting prevention of FGM and child marriage is key, particularly in contexts where patriarchal norms and misconceptions persist. This can be done through innovative and contextually sensitive approaches such as engaging through sports, art or community dialogue.



APRIL 2024

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE ON CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES IN THE MENA REGION: DESK REVIEW AND WEBINAR

1. DESK REVIEW

In April 2024 RAF completed a desk review on the impact of child marriage on children living with disabilities in the MENA region. The desk review study demonstrates that marriage among children with disabilities is present in contexts where child marriage is practiced in MENA. This must be acknowledged and brought into RAF members' current work on policy, advocacy and programming work. The impact of child marriage on children with disabilities shows that it seriously affects their overall well-being and dignity. Child marriage leads to a cycle of violence, particularly for girls living with disabilities.

There is a need for an in-depth understanding of the root causes that promote different types of discrimination and exclusion of children with disabilities from child marriage programming. Phase III of UNFPA-UNICEF's Global Programme to end child marriage has put more focus on disability inclusion, but more needs to be done to mainstream disability throughout child marriage prevention programs. It is also important to ensure that youth with disabilities – and girls in particular – can participate in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

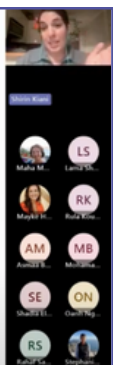
2. WEBINAR

The desk review was presented by Shirin Kiani, Disability and Inclusion Specialist and author of the desk review, during a RAF webinar on April 29 that was attended by more than 40 RAF members.

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%





MAY 2024

CHILD MARRIAGE SOLUTIONS WORKSHOP CASABLANCA, MOROCCO

On May 22-24, 14 RAF INGO, NGO, UN, and academic members took part in the Child Marriage Solutions Workshop (CMSW) in Casablanca, Morocco, where more than 45 UNICEF and UNFPA child protection and gender experts, as well as NGO partners, gathered to discuss the preliminary findings from UNICEF Innocenti's most recent study on child marriage in the Middle East.

UNICEF MENARO, UNFPA ASRO, and UNICEF Innocenti are currently finalizing the multi-country analysis that aims to examine the design, delivery, and impact of child marriage interventions in humanitarian settings in the MENA region.

The purpose of the CMSW, which was co-organized by RAF, was to:

1. Discuss, validate and contextualize research findings;
2. Exchange lessons from programmatic experiences across countries and stakeholders on the prevention of and response to child marriage in humanitarian settings; and
3. Enhance capacity and demand for the strategic use of evidence to guide action to address child marriage in humanitarian settings.

10-POINT SUMMARY FROM CMSW MEETING:

1. Invest in cash assistance for education to support families and prevent child marriage.
2. Expand data-driven initiatives to strengthen CM prevention programming.
3. Engage with governments and external stakeholders (beyond our comfort zones) to address CM in the region through advocacy and collaboration.
4. Focus on the cost of reducing CM risks, using existing evidence (such as cost of CM report) to advocate for government incentives.
5. Improve the M4G framework and ensure better integration in CM prevention.

6. Enhance transparency in sharing evidence/results with local partners.
7. Address social norms through advocacy – with a focus on religious leaders, as well as men and boys while focusing on human rights frameworks.
8. Engage civil society as key partners and build sustainable accountability frameworks for CM prevention.
9. Coordinate efforts with all stakeholders involved in CM prevention , use evidence to adapt programming effectively, and position CM work across all sectors for a more holistic approach.
10. Ensure sustainability of CM prevention work and refine available research findings for better accessibility and use in the region.

RAF KEY MEMBERS' MEETING

RAF members also organized a key RAF members' meeting in Casablanca on May 24 and discussed ways to improve RAF Coordination and Engagement, they included:

1. Investing further in research collaborations to address lasting data and information gaps related to child marriage understanding and prevention in MENA;
2. Furthering joint advocacy initiatives particularly ahead of key events such as the International Day of the Girl Child;
3. Strengthening the presence and role of NGOs and INGOs within the RAF framework.





SEPTEMBER 2024

RAF MEMBER FEATURED IN NEW SRHM PODCAST

RAF member Dr Aisha Hutchinson, Senior lecturer in Social Sciences at King's College, was featured in a recent Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters (SRHM) podcast episode to speak about the research study done in collaboration with the RAF, and entitled “Setting research priorities for prevention and response to child marriage in communities in the Arab region: findings from a multi-stage Delphi study involving practitioners across the region.”

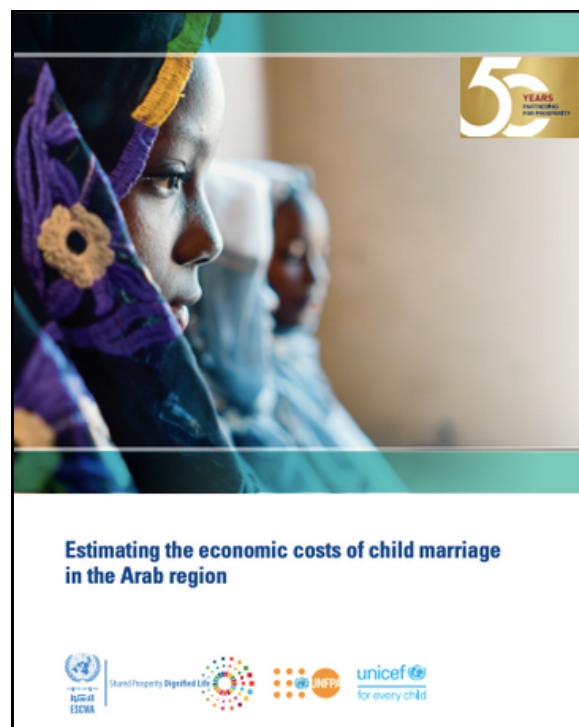


OCTOBER 2024

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD (IDGC) EVENT: “COST OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN MENA” REPORTS VIRTUAL LAUNCH

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the UNFPA Arab States Regional Office, UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, and UN Women Regional Office for Arab States, conducted three studies to estimate the cost of child marriage in the Arab region. In honour of the International Day of the Girl Child (IDGC), the findings from these studies were presented on October 10th of 2024 during an online event and initiated a discussion with stakeholders on the implications and next steps for addressing child marriage in the region. The event featured a panel of RAF experts - including Dr. Shatha Elnakib from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Dr. Dima Dabbous from Equality Now MENA and Zakia Khahol from Basmeh and Zeitooneh in Lebanon - who commented on the significance of the findings for research, advocacy and child marriage prevention in the region.

The Phase II report expanded the scope to include economic costs for 13 Arab States, highlighting the GDP losses and broader social repercussions. It also discussed the multiple ways in which child marriage affects women and girls at the individual level with repercussions on their families and thereby the State. Stakeholders from various sectors, including national and international organizations, civil society, and academia, participated in the discussions.



DECEMBER 2024

LAUNCH OF RAF WEBSITE!



About Us How We Work Engage with RAF Child Marriage Resources Q EN

THE REGIONAL ACTION FORUM TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

A coalition of more than 45 UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, WROs, and academic partners, brought together by the common goal of ending child marriage in Arab states and the wider MENA region.

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