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Mapping responses to Child Marriage in Lebanon: Reflections from practitioners and policymakers

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Terre des hommes

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1. Introduction



1. Introduction

Since 2011 over a million Syrian refugees have arrived in Lebanon, with most recent estimates in 2019 indicating that Lebanon continues to host the highest number of displaced per capita in the world [1]. This has placed a significant strain on social and economic resources, and has required an unprecedented response by the Lebanese Government in every sector of governance, as well as the humanitarian community [1-4]. The predominant location of refugees in host communities and informal tented settlements has particular implications for their care and protection [4, 5]. Syrian refugees in Lebanon continue to live in conditions below humanitarian standards and are becoming more economically vulnerable [6]. The protracted nature of the 'crisis' also brings additional challenges and has increased the risk of refugees resorting to negative coping strategies to survive, such as child labour and child marriage [6, 7].

Child marriage (marriage under 18 years of age) is a form of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), with huge implications for the realisation of the sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHRs) of the girl child [8]. A recent study by UNICEF on child marriage across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) highlights that, while rates of child marriage in the region are in steady decline (and have been below global averages), conflict in the region threatens this progress [9]. The report warns that even national data indicating low levels of child marriage may mask much higher rates within sub-populations, particularly those affected by conflict in the region. The prevalence and nature of child marriage in Lebanon varies significantly by nationality. According to a baseline survey conducted by UNICEF in 2015-2016, 6% of Lebanese women aged 20 to 24 years had married before the age of 18, compared to 12% of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, 25% of Palestinian refugees from Syria, and 40.5% of Syrian refugees [10]. While rates of child marriage have been higher in Syria than Lebanon in recent years, research indicates that current rates of child marriage amongst Syrian refugees in Lebanon are higher than previous rates in Syria before the conflict [11, 12]. A study undertaken by Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) in partnership with John Hopkins University, International Medical Corps (IMC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Kachin

Development group and the Arab Institute for Women (AIM) at the Lebanese America University (LAU), recently found that in the south of Lebanon roughly 1 in 7 Syrian refugee adolescent girls are married before 18 years of age, and 1 in 5 are married by 19 years of age [13, 14]. The same study found that 94.8% of married adolescent girls were not in school.

Despite a lack of robust prevalence data on the impact of humanitarian contexts on child marriage, current evidence available indicates that rates can significantly increase in humanitarian emergencies and prolonged displacement alike [15-20]. This is often because of concerns about protection or because it is used as negative coping strategy in response to poverty, especially in affected populations using dowry or bride price [6, 16]. However, there are many drivers associated with child marriage, as well as many different negative outcomes [21-23]. Child marriage has, therefore, become a priority for humanitarian and United Nation (UN) organisations working with children or in response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Lebanon [24-28]. Due to the common occurrence of child marriage and complexity of drivers and outcomes, there is an increased recognition of the need for coordinated responses to child marriage, and multi-agency and multi-sectorial responses [9, 28]. Key sectors include those involved in child protection, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), education, maternal and infant health, reproductive health, livelihoods, the justice system, personal status law, mental health and youth empowerment [9].

Responses to child marriage have been made by various agencies since Syrian refugees began to arrive in Lebanon [1, 28-30]. Nine years on, it is essential that we take stock, map and review the responses to child marriage in Lebanon to inform the current momentum that is taking place through the UNICEF/UNFPA led Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage, the child marriage strategy that is being developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) with support from UNICEF and the RDFL led coalition to change the minimum age of marriage in Lebanon. Through this study, policy and practice responses to child marriage in Lebanon have been mapped through

a review of relevant literature and 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews on policies and approaches to child marriage. The aim of the interviews was to document the responses made to child marriage in Lebanon, the approaches and policies used, and the main challenges and gaps.

The wider study will bring together data from the professional interviews with data from narrative interviews with married girls and their families, data from focus group discussions with young Syrian refugees (girls and boys), data from focus group discussions with Syrian refugee parents (mothers and fathers), and data from faith-based actors. Findings from this data are available through the following publications.

- Hutchinson, A.J. (2018) **Child Marriage in Jordan: Systematic mapping of the literature**, Terre des Hommes
- Hutchinson, A.J. (2018) **Understanding the social processes underpinning child marriage: The impact of protracted displacement in Jordan**, Terre des Hommes
- Hutchinson, A.J. (2018) **Mapping responses to Child Marriage in Jordan: Reflections from practitioners and policymakers**, Terre des Hommes
- Hutchinson, A.J. (2019) **Understanding the social processes underpinning child marriage: The impact of protracted displacement in Lebanon**, Terre des Hommes
- Hutchinson, A.J. (2019) **Exploring the capacity of faith-based actors in Jordan and Lebanon to prevent child marriage**, Terre des Hommes
- Hutchinson, A.J. (2019) **Child marriage in discussion: Findings from focus groups discussions with Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon**, Terre des Hommes

2. Methodology



2. Methodology

2.1 Aims and objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to map policy and service responses across Lebanon in relation to child marriage, and to reflect on the approaches used and the challenges faced. The term policy is used in the report to mean any written document or unwritten 'organisational knowledge' that outlines an organisational position, plan or action on/ understanding of/approach to/or work in response to child marriage (which might, for example, also be known as early marriage, or marriage of minors, or forced marriage). This includes, amongst others, position papers, strategies, plans of action, tools and assessments.

2.2 Methodology

Specific policies on child marriage were identified through:

- Literature search on child marriage in Lebanon
- Emailing members of the inter-agency protection sub-groups on child protection and SSGBV to ask if they would share their policies and other documents related to child marriage
- Searching the UNHCR portal on the response to the Syrian refugee crisis
- Searching 'No Lost Generation' documents¹
- Requesting access to any publically available policies from those interviewed

The formal policy mapping was complemented through 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews with professionals and policy makers involved in the response to child marriage, mainly amongst the Syrian refugee communities. Contributing organisations included a range of United Nations organisations (UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, UNHCR); International Non-Governmental Organisations (Care, Plan, IRC, NRC, Intersos, MDM); National Non-Governmental Organisations (Abaad, RDFL, Kafa, Amel, Himaya, Najdeh) and Governmental organisations (NCLW, HCC, MoH) (see research tool in Appendix 1).

2.3 Ethics

The policy and practice mapping methodology was included as part of an application for a larger study on child marriage in Jordan and Lebanon, and was approved by the University of Bedfordshire in December 2016.

2.4 Limitations

- Policies published after December 2019 are not included in this mapping
- This mapping does not include every single practice response to child marriage. However, it does give a strong indication of the types of responses being made due to the wide range of practitioners and policy makers interviewed
- Most organisations do not have a specific policy on child marriage. Rather it is incorporated within a more general policy on SGBV or child protection. These general policies have not been reviewed.
- Many relevant documents are for internal access only and are not in the public domain.
- The research has prioritised speaking with a handful of government agencies, UN agencies and large NGOs/INGOs. Smaller NGOs/INGOs, grassroots networks, women's groups and community based groups who play a significant role in the response to child marriage are not well represented in this mapping although they are often part of coalitions and networks led by these larger organisations.

3. Mapping responses to child marriage in Lebanon



¹No Lost Generation initiative is an ambitious commitment to action by humanitarians, donors and policy makers in support of children and youth affected by the Syria and Iraq crises <https://www.nolostgeneration.org/>

3. Mapping responses to child marriage in Lebanon

3.1 How organisations and practitioners are encountering child marriage in Lebanon

According to the literature review and qualitative interviews, organisations that are working in Child Protection (CP), Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Legal Services, Maternal and Child Health (MCH), Reproductive Health Care (RH), Education, women's empowerment, or those working with refugees or adolescent girls more generally in Lebanon, will encounter child marriage to a greater or lesser extent. Some organisations describe a grassroots identification of child marriage from their established services, and others describe a top down prioritisation of child marriage through global and national strategies. Child Protection and SGBV programmes will usually explicitly include a consideration of child marriage and they often work together [24-26]; often part of protection inter-agency working groups or national equivalents². Several respondents describe an agreement in Lebanon that means that child marriage prevention falls under the responsibility of the child protection sector, and responses to a marriage after it has taken place fall under the responsibility of the SGBV sector. Some organisations have both child protection and SGBV programmes, which therefore share responsibilities but may work with girls in very different ways before and after marriage. Some organisations do not have both child protection and SGBV programmes and, therefore, would make referrals to other organisations to provide appropriate support as needed.

Child marriage appears to be less of a priority area for other sectors, such as Education or Health, based on the lack of literature available on child marriage in Lebanon from these sectors and interviews with key stakeholders. Most of the respondents encounter child marriage through their work with Syrian refugees, although they do often work across different communities and some respondents said that they make extra effort to engage national based organisations (esp government) to remind them that

child marriage also affects Lebanese and Palestinian communities. Several respondents said that there is a feeling that child marriage amongst Syrian refugees is impacting on Lebanese community and it is becoming more common amongst Lebanese. It can also cause tensions between communities. While the high rates of child marriage among Syrian refugees have increased the profile of work to end child marriage in Lebanon, there is a long standing body of work to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18 for all girls in Lebanon, which is outlined later in this report. It was suggested by some of the respondents that important SGBV structures are now in place in Lebanon because of the Syrian response and that this will have a positive and long term legacy in Lebanon, especially as NGOs are now thinking about the long term and sustainability of child protection and SGBV services.

The qualitative interviews and policy mapping exercise outlined below indicates that only a few of the agencies working in the sectors named above have specific programmes targeting child marriage (including those working in child protection or SGBV). However, agencies will encounter girls at risk of, or affected by, child marriage through general programme activities such as; youth engagement activities, parenting programmes, life skills courses, programming for psychosocial support (PSS) activities, at 'safe' spaces, child-friendly spaces, through case management referrals and assessments, awareness sessions, health assessments or formal/informal education activities. Many agencies in the sectors listed above include the topic of 'child marriage' in their programme of 'awareness-raising' or community sensitisation, which might be done with individuals, small groups or as part of widespread advocacy messages. Those at risk of, or affected by, child marriage might therefore be identified through these activities as well.

Marriage is a legal institution in Lebanon, which

requires validation by a *Shari'a* Court Judge for Muslims (two different religious courts for Sunni and Shi'a Muslims), and legal registration. The Lebanese Constitution guarantees that the judiciary is founded as an independent entity. The Lebanese constitution also gives the right to the different religious confessions to manage their own personal status affairs and religious laws. Lebanon has 15 separate personal status laws for its 18 recognised religions, which stipulate different ages from which a marriage can occur (see Table 1), but there is no civil code covering issues such as marriage [31]. Those who want a civil marriage must marry abroad and then register their marriage in Lebanon.

While the law requires all marriages to be processed and registered through the religious courts under Personal Status law, Muslim marriages are essentially a contract which are valued by the community whether or not they are officially registered [33]. Muslim marriages are not considered a sacrament or 'religious' in the same way as marriage in a church, and while there is a marriage prayer and text to be said by a religious leader, there is actually no essential 'need' for special rituals, and in theory a marriage (the agreeing of a marriage contract) could be overseen by respected and experienced (male) elders in the community. Marriage is, therefore, a contract between the bride and groom which they both have to enter into knowingly with consent, in the presence of witnesses (usually two male witnesses), with the consent of the guardians of the girl if she has not been married before. While it is usual for the marriage contract to be written down and signed by all the parties present, in theory a verbal contract in the presence of witnesses is also sufficient [33]. As a result, marriages involving Syrian refugees are often done in the community, not through the religious courts using an authorised Sheikh to oversee the marriage contract. These marriages are not registered or legally valid in Lebanon. Therefore Shari'a Court Judges, or agencies like Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), who do legal case work where there is a dispute about forced marriages, divorce, alimony, custody of children and marriage registration, also encounter girls at risk of, or affected by, child marriage.

For Syrian refugees, after a marriage has taken place, UNHCR is often informed to ensure their registration is linked to the correct family group, i.e.

wives will now be linked with their husbands and his family group. On identifying cases of child marriage, through the registration system and through other mechanisms, UNHCR are obliged to complete a best interest determination (BID) and best interest assessment (BIA), as married girls are still considered children, where a case manager or social worker will meet with the girl to discuss her context, needs and risks, and develop a care plan in response. This might include referrals to other agencies such as health services or legal services. UNHCR have invested in supporting volunteers in the community to inform their communities of the legal processes necessary for marriage. UNHCR also support capacity building of professional and organisations responding to child marriage and promote solidarity initiatives to reduce tensions between communities. Therefore, organisations working with Syrian refugees are encountering girls at risk of, or affected by, child marriage, sometimes on a daily basis through various programmes or referral pathways. NRC in the North and South described receiving frequent referrals from UNHCR to facilitate the registration of a marriage which has taken place in the community involving a child, often when the wife is pregnant (because the child cannot be registered until the marriage is registered) [34]. The UNHCR also leads the inter-agency protection working groups which include a focus on child protection and SGBV [24-26].

3.2 Documenting the rise in recognition of child marriage as a major protection concern

A review of the literature on child marriage in Lebanon reveals a politicised engagement with child marriage by organisations responding to the needs of Syrian refugees – see figure 1.

In 2012, a Gender-Based Violence Rapid Assessment initiated by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) identified Intimate partner violence (IPV), early marriage and survival sex as significant forms of violence currently experienced by Syrian women and girls since arriving in Lebanon. Adolescent girls stated that early marriages have increased, most frequently framed as efforts by families to "protect" girls from being raped, or to ensure that they are "under the protection of a man." [35]. In 2013, a study by Oxfam and the ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality conducted a gender situation and vulnerability assessment among Syrian refugees

²see UNHCR's operations portal for details of the working groups in Lebanon <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>

Table 1: Marriageable age by confession and sex (taken from CEDAW Third periodic report of States Parties [32])

Denomination	Recognised Marriageable age		Age at which a marriage can be licensed		Authority granting the license
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Sunni	18	17	17	9 (i)	Judge
Shi'a	Puberty	Puberty	15	9 (i)	Judge
Druze	18	17	16	15	Judge or Sheikh
Catholic denominations	16 (ii)	14 (ii)			
Greek Orthodox	18	18	17	15	Priest
Armenian Orthodox	18	14	16	14	Archbishop
Syrian Orthodox	18	14			
Evangelical	18	16	16 (iii)	14 (iii)	Spiritual court
Assyrian Church of the East	18	15	Unspecified; if necessary, when health & circumstances qualify		Bishop
Jewish	18	12.5	13	<12.5	By the authority of the father or with consent of the girl and agreement of the mother or a brother, if she is an orphan

(i) Although the provision exists, it is not in force, since it is no longer customary to permit marriage of girls at the age stated; (ii) An older age may be sanctioned, as it is stated in article 2 of Law 800 (the new law) of the Catholic denominations that Church law may set a higher age to permit celebration of the marriage; (iii) Article 14 of the new personal status law of the Evangelical communities in Syria and Lebanon.

and Palestinian refugees from Syria now living in Lebanon, to understand changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon. They found that, although early marriage of daughters was common practice in Syria before the conflict began, it was reportedly also being increasingly resorted to as a new coping strategy, either as a way of protecting young girls or easing pressures on family finances [36]. This was supported by evidence from the Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon which identified child marriage as a non-food related coping strategy [37]. In 2013, a study was also published by Charles and Denham on the scale of SGBV among Syrian refugees, which also found that child marriage was one of the main forms of violence experienced by girls, drawing on evidence from the ABAAD and Oxfam study [38]. It was also in 2013 that the UNICEF Lebanon country report refers to community mobilisation with religious leaders to reduce child marriage, and a number of communication pieces were circulated widely across the global media on child marriage [30].

In 2014, IRC published a major study detailing the concerns of Syrian women and girls across MENA. This study identified child marriage as one of the three major concerns raised [39]. The findings from this study led directly to the development of the adolescent girl curriculum as part of their Women's protection and Empowerment Program (WPE). In the same year the American University in Beirut, in collaboration with the Women's Refugee Commission, Johns Hopkins and Save the Children, undertook a study to understand the specific experiences of very young adolescents, those 10–14 years of age, in the context of the protracting Syrian crisis [40]. On-going protection risks for girls were felt to be higher due to the crisis and displacement, resulting in an increased risk to child marriage and limitations in mobility for adolescent girls as a form of protection. In 2014, child marriage is described as a key issue for UNICEF Lebanon and they continue to support activities to prevent child marriage through awareness-raising and funding of a video made by ABAAD called 'Marriage is not a game' ³[41].

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUanQOYrOTw>

Following concern at the level of child marriage amongst Syrian refugees, in 2015 the Political Science Institute at Saint Joseph University, Lebanon, compared data taken from Electoral Lists for Lebanese citizen with the UNHCR database for Syrian refugees and a field survey done by political science students in the North, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon, Beirut and the South of Lebanon [42]. They found that 13% of Lebanese married before turning 18, compared to 23% of Syrian refugees. Although the Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon found that child marriage had been less frequently used as a coping strategy by households [43], UNICEF continued to fund community sensitisation programmes on child marriage through 2015, while recognising that the provision of low-cost services had so far proven insufficient in preventing an increase in the negative coping strategies, such as child marriage, practiced by Syrian refugee caregivers [44].

In 2015, ABAAD and the Arab Institute for Human Rights (supported by MoSA), held a regional seminar on "Child Marriage during democratic transition and armed conflict" [45]. The seminar included presentations by experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen and Palestine on Child Marriage and its cultural and health consequences. It was concluded by the adoption of the "Beirut Declaration on Ending Child Marriage" by MoSA and a range of other organisations. Following this seminar, the Higher Council for Childhood (HCC) in cooperation with ABAAD, Arab Institute for Human Rights and the National Commission for Women's Affairs (NCWA) organised a round table on child marriage with the support of UNICEF, and with the participation of several ministries, NGOs, INGO, UN and experts in Beirut in May 2016. The objective of this round table was to bring the main actors working on child marriage around the table to agree on mechanisms of coordination and to develop a common framework to work together on. Discussions included the development of a national strategy on child marriage led by HCC.

In 2016, a baseline study undertaken by UNICEF found that 6% of Lebanese women aged 20 to 24 years had married before the age of 18, compared to 12% of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, 25% of Palestinian refugees from Syria, and 40.5% of Syrian refugees [10]. A household study by UNFPA in Bekaa, was also used to show how child marriage among

Syrians in Lebanon (mainly refugees) was higher now than when they were living in Syria before the conflict broke out [11]. Also in 2016, as part of a wider study to understand the impact of conflict on child marriage by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), focus groups were held with Syrians in the Al Marj Settlement in Lebanon [20]. The Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in 2016, found that child marriage was a significant reason for not attending school [46]. The culmination of this evidence, and the momentum for a response to child marriage already underway, led UNICEF Lebanon to partner with the Higher Council for Childhood (HCC), National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), ABAAD and the Arab Institute for Human Rights Lebanon, to organise a National Consultation on Child Marriage in Lebanon in the form of a day's workshop. The meeting was the first step in developing a National Strategy to End Child Marriage. Alongside this, members of the inter-agency protection groups agreed on a protocol for Providing Legal Assistance for Marriage Registration in case of Early Marriage. IRC also launched the pilot of a life skills package specifically for married girls in Bekaa in 2016 [47].

Following the National Consultation on Child Marriage in Lebanon in 2017, Terms of References (TORs) were advertised by UNICEF for a Senior Consultant to develop a national strategy and action to prevent and mitigate child marriage in Lebanon. This consultant would be working alongside the Lebanese Higher Council for Childhood (HCC), under the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), to support the development of a national strategy to end child marriage. The consultant was hired in October 2018, and the national strategy to end child marriage is due to be published in July 2020.

The most recent work to progress our understanding and response to child marriage in Lebanon, includes a study by the ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality and Queen's University who employed an innovative data collection tool, Cognitive Edge's SenseMaker®, to understand the experiences of Syrian girls in Lebanon [48-50]. The study highlights the gendered differences in the views of respondents, such as the way male and female respondents interpret their narratives about child marriage through emphasising different underlying factors contributing to this practice. Additionally, it was found that some Syrian girls in Lebanon choose to marry early as a way

out of unfavourable living conditions. In collaboration with the Child, Early and Forced Marriage Working Group and Gender-based Violence Working Group in Lebanon, a prevalence study of child marriage in South Lebanon was launched by Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) in partnership with John Hopkins University, International Medical Corps (IMC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Kachin Development group and the Arab Institute for Women (AIM) at the Lebanese America University (LAU). Initial findings were presented at a panel discussion on child marriage in emergency contexts at LAU in May 2019, and provide robust prevalence data in the South which had previously been missing, with much of the previous research on child marriage in Lebanon being focused in the Bekaa region.

UNICEF Lebanon has also recently carried out a study on the drivers and outcomes of child marriage from a social behaviour perspective, to inform social behavioural change interventions outlined at a UNICEF/MoSA led workshop in Lebanon in December 2018. A baseline KAP survey in 2017, found that 73% of respondents said that marriage should happen after a person turns 18 years of age, indicating that many people know the negative consequences of child marriage [51]. Strategies and approaches for going beyond short-term awareness-raising activities are therefore being developed, taking into account influencers in a community, really understanding the different reasons why girls marry, community sanctions (positive and negative) in relation to child marriage, models of positive deviance, role models and sharing the experiences of girls. UNICEF Lebanon are also developing a range of PSS interventions which can be used by a range of sectors in response to child marriage, and will be rolled out throughout 2020. Child marriage clearly remains a priority for UNICEF, and is a significant area in their mandate globally and locally, especially in emergencies [25]. Child marriage is also a core mandate of UNFPA and UNHCR [24, 52]. All three of these UN agencies also play a significant role in high level advocacy, ensuring that child marriage is a priority for all of the key stakeholders involved and an area of interest across all sectors, and are developing and rolling out tools for responding to child marriage. UNICEF and UNFPA are also working together at a regional level through the Regional Accountability Framework (RAF) of Action on Ending Child Marriage 2018-2021 in the Middle East and North Africa/Arab States [53]. The

purpose of this Regional Accountability Framework of Action on Ending Child Marriage is a coordination, knowledge sharing and accountability mechanism with a focus on the humanitarian context.

Over recent years, several national based organisations have taken the lead on advocating for legal changes that would prevent child marriage and strengthen the judicial response to those affected by child marriage. The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL), for example, initiated and has taken the lead of a national coalition to protect children from early marriage, which was launched during the 16 days of activism in 2017 and has over 50 members [54, 55]. The main aim of the coalition is to coordinate high level advocacy, campaigns and lobbying to change the law to ensure that marriage cannot be entered into under 18 years of age for all girls across Lebanon without any exceptions. The coalition encourages all members to make ending child marriage a top priority in their organisations, and to coordinate a coherent body to work to do this. Following sustained lobbying to gain support from parliamentarians to support, RDFL submitted a law to the Lebanese parliament to protect children from child marriage on the 28th of March 2017. RDFL are now following up this submission with campaigns and an advanced advocacy strategy to keep the issue alive, and to continue influencing while the law makes its way through governmental systems (although this has been severely delayed due to delay in elections and the appointment of a functioning parliament). In 2018, in partnership with Save the Children in Lebanon and UN Women, RDFL carried out an opinion poll on the attitude of Lebanese society towards child marriage. The poll found that 97% of the Lebanese people believe that girls must not get married before 18 years of age. Up to 79% also think that girls under 18 are not ready to assume the huge burdens that come with marriage, not least raising children. And 64% of the Lebanese support the passing of a law stipulating 18 years as the minimum age for the marriage of girls and boys in Lebanon [56]. The results have been used as a basis to sensitise the public as well as political parties on child marriage. RDFL continue to meet with parliamentarians and other influential stakeholders. Other examples of on-going lobbying and advocacy from RDFL include a campaign called '*not before 18*' [57], the Young3arous campaign [58] and the organisation of various conferences and consultations meetings to gain support from

parliamentarians and other organisations (such as the national consultation conference on child marriage in Lebanon on Friday 7th December 2018).

Over recent years, four laws seeking to change the minimum age of marriage to 18 for all girls in Lebanon have been submitted to parliament, including the draft law from RDFL, a draft law from the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), a draft law from a member of parliament, and a draft law from a human rights ministry. While each of these laws set out 18 as the minimum age for marriage, they differ in their allowance of exceptions under this age and the mechanisms through which the new law would be enacted. Three of these laws are currently in parliamentary committees for debate, and it is likely they will attempt to merge these proposed laws and develop a draft law to go through parliament if there is enough support at this stage. All of these agencies are currently waiting to see how the committees will move forward, and are continuing to flood society and government with campaigns and advocacy messages on child marriage.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) have been working to amend the law for the minimum age of marriage from 2000, and has instigated a number of awareness campaigns, has been working with different legal structures and judges on negative effects of child marriage (in Arabic), meets with parliamentarians to talk about child marriage, and has brought together all legislation aiming to change the marriage laws. NCLW started a draft law in 2011, which was proposed in 2013 but was rejected. In 2014, as part of their on-going campaign against child marriage and to build support for a change in the law, NCLW commissioned a short documentary for Women's International Day with The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at LAU⁴. Following revisions, another draft law was submitted in 2017. Since this resubmission, NCLW have been organising conferences, meetings and workshops on child marriage, trying to get parliamentarians to take the issue seriously. In 2017, they also released another short video to raise awareness of child marriage⁵ and in 2018 NCLW contributed to the RDFL

Not Before 18 Campaign⁶. However, NCLW report receiving resistance to the legal changes proposed because they are felt to contradict article 9 of the constitution, which stipulates that the freedom of belief is absolute and that State shall respect all religions and denominations, ensure free exercise of religious rites, and respect religious interests and personal status laws. As marriage is under religious law, parliamentary authority to change these laws is considered to be limited. NCLW aim to enhance the status of women in Lebanon by supporting gender mainstreaming and implementing international instruments and conventions, creating a knowledge based, fostering networks and facilitating knowledge through their library. Continued work to end child marriage in Lebanon is considered an important part of this mandate.

While RDFL has been leading the national coalition to protect children from early marriage, other members of the coalition have also taken an active role in raising awareness and contributing to increasing the pressure on the decision makers, with the aim of passing the law that sets the minimum age of marriage to 18 years old. One example is The League for Lebanese Women's Rights – LLWR, who launched a national campaign in 2018 entitled '*Do Not Steal My Childhood and My Life by Early Marriage*' [55]. ABAAD has been doing specific work to engage with and sensitise religious leaders on child marriage [59], and KAFA has been working on a civil law which will impact on women's status and ways of responding to SGBV, as well as doing direct campaigns to prevent child marriage such as 'raise the age'. Additionally, following the development in 2016 of a guide on child marriage produced by KAFA, with UNFPA support, in 2017 KAFA ran a series of one-day trainings targeting Humanitarian Actors on Early Marriage. Himaya have also been lobbying to change law 422/2002 (child protection), to make child marriage a form of child abuse. Himaya are currently in the process of presenting the amendment so that juvenile judges can, in future, intervene if the religious law on age of marriage doesn't change. They are focusing their attention on law 422, so not to duplicate the focus on legal age of marriage being led by RDFL and NCLW.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obQrrOS87q0>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBFLOReMZek>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZSrB5beJpo>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6q-FK8RWWW>

While there are provisions under law 293 to approach a juvenile judge in cases of domestic violence or forced marriage, there is no long-term plan for girls under law 293, making it of limited use in relation to child marriage.

Figure 1: Timeline mapping rise in recognition of child marriage as a major protection concern

2012	
	- A Gender-based Violence Rapid Assessment of Syrian Refugee Populations in Lebanon by IRC August 2012. Early marriage identified by adult women and adolescent girls as occurring across refugee communities
2013	
- A joint research report was published by ABAAD-Resource Centre for Gender Equality and Oxfam GB on changing gender roles among refugees in Lebanon. They found that early marriage is being increasingly resorted to as a new coping strategy	- UNICEF Lebanon 2013 annual report recognises Child marriage as a key risk for Syrian refugee children, and undertook community sensitisation and communications work
- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees in 2013 found that 5.8% of households had used child marriage as a non-food related coping strategy	
2014	
In 2013–4, the American University in Beirut in collaboration with the Women's Refugee Commission, Johns Hopkins and Save the Children, sought to understand the specific experiences of very young adolescents, those 10–14 years of age, in Beka'a Valley. (Dejong et al 2017). Child marriage and limitations in their mobility are presented by families as coping strategies in response to protection concerns.	- In 2014 World Vision spoke to 250 children and parents across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon who said that child marriage was largely being used as a negative coping strategy
- Continuing UNICEF area of intervention (i.e. supporting awareness sessions and community sensitisation)	- UNHCR (2014) Women Alone report found that none of the respondents would consider child marriage
- ABAAD video 'Marriage is not a game'	- IRC (2014) published research on a review of their work with Syrian refugee women and girls, and found that CM was one of the three biggest concerns faced by girls
2015	
- Survey to identify GBV amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon by Spencer et al (2015) found evidence of increase of child marriage	- An advocacy report was published by CARE in 2015 on CM in Syrian refugee communities across the MENA region highlighting the (false) protection that families believe this provides their daughters with.
- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees in 2015 found that 1% of households had used child marriage as a non-food related coping strategy, but this hid significant regional differences such as 9% in Akkar	- The Political Science Institute at Saint Joseph University held a conference in June 2015 to present the results of a quantitative prevalence study about Child Marriage in Lebanon. They found that 13% of Lebanese women married before 18 years of age, and 23% of Syrian women.
- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees in 2015 also found that child marriage was listed as a significant reason for school drop out	- Two key pillars of the UNICEF global Gender Action Plan implemented in Lebanon: gender-based violence in emergencies (GBVIE) and child marriage (UNICEF 2015)
2016	
- National consultation on child marriage organised by UNICEF, Higher Council for Childhood (HCC), National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), ABAAD and the Arab Institute for Human Rights Lebanon.	- UNICEF household survey found 40.5% of all 20-24 year old Syrian refugee women had married before 18 years
- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees 2016 found that 7% of 15-17 years olds said they were not in school because they were married and that 1% of households had used child marriage as a non-food related coping strategy.	- WRC published 'Changing norms of child marriage in conflict' in 2016 which included discussions from focus groups in Beka'a, Lebanon.
	- IRC starts new programme in Beka'a involving a 'life skills' package for those affected by child marriage
2017	
- Terms of references for a senior consultant to develop a national strategy and action to prevent and mitigate child marriage in Lebanon released in July 2017 by UNICEF	- RDFL submit draft law to increase minimum age of marriage to 18 for all person across Lebanon with no exceptions and launch national coalition to protect children from early marriage
- NCLW submit draft law to increase minimum age of marriage	
2018	
- Child marriage prevalence study undertaken in South Lebanon by WRC show that roughly 1 in 7 Syrian refugee girls are married before age 18	- UNICEF and UNFPA regional offices publish Lebanon country report on child marriage as part of the Regional Accountability Framework of Action on Ending Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)/Arab States region (RAF)
- Gender Justice and the Law review published for Lebanon as part of CEDAW monitoring	- Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian refugees state that 3 in 10 girls between 15 and 19 are currently married with an increase of 7% from 2017
- RDFL launch public opinion survey on child marriage and a campaign 'not before 18'	
- Plan International adolescent girls and boys needs assessment: Focus on child labour and child marriage published in 2018	

3.3 Policy level responses to child marriage

Most respondents involved in programmatic responses to child marriage said that, while they do not have a separate or specific policy/strategy on child marriage, it is (explicitly or implicitly) included in their overall policy, guidance and manuals for responding to child safety, child protection/safeguarding or sexual and gender-based violence i.e. the Inter-agency standard operating procedures (SOPs) for SGBV prevention and response in Lebanon [60]. There are also a standardise set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for child protection concerns and incidents which would be used to structure responses to child marriage by organisations such as UNHCR and other humanitarian organisations [61]. ABAAD has also been working with MoSA to develop SOPs for SGBV in Arabic, and there are possibilities within these SOPs to include a specific section on child marriage. Respondents also frequently spoke about drawing on policies which reflect standards and human rights outlined in international conventions such as UNCRC and CEDAW, and other global guidelines of policies regarding violence against women and safeguarding children's rights describing how international pressures and priorities shape national policies [62, 63]. Conversely, several respondents said that their organisations consult the community to develop responses to child marriage, rather than develop top down policies for guidance, meaning that strategies can change based on community consultation and engagement. Other respondents said that they predominantly use partner reports, partners evaluation and field observations to shape their policies and strategies in relation to child marriage. See figure 2 for summary of direct and indirect policies influencing responses to child marriage in Lebanon.

When considering the policies that underpins their work in response to child marriage, almost all respondents referred to the national strategy and action plan to prevent and mitigate child marriage in Lebanon, which is being developed by the Higher Council of Childhood (part of MoSA) with the support of a consultant and UNICEF and is due to be finalised and published in the summer of 2020. The strategy will be in Arabic and will be owned and led by the government, providing a clear national mandate and legal framework for responses to child marriage. The national action plan is expected to include multi-sectorial responses, including prevention and risk

mitigation across health, education and livelihoods sectors. A national strategy on SGBV and child protection has already been developed by MoSA, and this outlines case management and Psychosocial Support (PSS) responses, and the role of Social Development Centres (SDCs). One respondent said that they hoped the child marriage action plan would also include a strategy to prevent child marriage, rather than just focusing on identifying cases after the marriage has taken place and referring to specialist agencies. Several respondents said that their agency was waiting for this strategy to be circulated, so that they could use this strategy on child marriage within their own organisation to avoid duplication of efforts, and to map their own responses within the national strategy. Organisations currently use a range of evidence to shape their responses to, and priorities related to, child marriage within the broader framework of SGBV, including data from the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) to shape [64].

Many respondents spoke about a gap in policy and guidance on child marriage for and from the educational sector, and health sector. Although no one knew if there was a specific policy or law which said that married girls could not go to school they said it would never be encouraged or supported, and that pregnant girls were not allowed to attend school. This is supported by the WRC prevalence study in South Lebanon which found that 94.8% of married girls were not in school [14]. Plan also found the same in their needs assessment [27]. According to several respondents, The Ministry of Health don't currently have a policy on child marriage, or adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH), and don't require the organisations they work with to have a policy either, especially as there is no minimum age of marriage across Lebanon. There are, however, national policies on the clinical management of rape and gender equality, which they use in their work in the Public Health Centres (PHCs), which crosses over with child marriage.

Several respondents referred to internal documents which they use to structure their responses to child marriage such as UNHCR internal guidance on registration activities in relation to early marriage. However, these internal documents are very often not shared with those outside of an organisation. Some respondents assumed that other organisations

Figure 2: Policies and high level guidance and strategies related to child marriage in Lebanon

Direct	In-direct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft working paper on Providing Legal Assistance for Marriage Registration in case of Early Marriage developed in 2016 - Registration of a child marriage with UNHCR results in a best interest assessment and determination - Global UNHCR Resettlement Assessment Tool: Married Children - Internal national UNHCR policy on child marriage registration - Child marriage is recognised as a form of GVB that is used as a survival strategy (negative coping strategy) that impacts on health and education features in the Lebanon crisis response plan 2017-2020 - Child marriage features as a key area of work in yearly work plans of Child Protection sub working group and GBV sub working group, and is incorporated into inter-agency GBV and child protections strategies and plans - Guidance for case management with Adolescent Girls at risk of being married or those who have been married by the SGBV task force - The Regional Accountability Framework of Action to End Child Marriage in Arab States/ Middle East and North Africa (RAF) was established in 2018 by a large number of partners, led by UNCIEF and UNFPA - 16 days of activism from 25th November – 10h December 2019 focused on child marriage in Lebanon - Lebanon's National Action Plan for Human Rights (2014- 2019) includes provisions to carry out in- depth studies on violence against children, refugee children, and child marriage - Lebanon National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (women, peace and security): The Path to a Fair and Inclusive Society Through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda 2019-2022 includes responses to child marriage - IRC and UNICEF multi-sectorial child marriage prevention and response toolkit (to be finalised) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No generation lost initiative launched in 2013 to help Syrian children gain access to good-quality education, find protection from exploitation, abuse and violence and access psychological care - MoSA National Plan to Safeguard Children and Women in Lebanon including further strengthening of gender main streaming in Social Development Centres (SDCs) and Public Health Clinics (PHCs) - Case management systems, referral systems and national tracking systems for child protection and SGBV have been strengthened through policy and practice developments - Development of SOPS for GBV by MoSA - National health policies on clinical management of rape and gender inequality - National Gender Observatory, and Gender Justice and Law monitoring - In August 2017, Parliament members voted to repeal article 522 of the Lebanese penal code making it illegal for rapists to marry their victims - National strategy for women in Lebanon 2011-2021

would have internal tools or assessments they used but had no evidence that this was the case. While multi-agency working groups were described as useful practical platforms for coordination, to share tools and examples of best practice, there were some substantial limitations about what could be shared and the time delay in which it could be shared (as getting authorisation, or pieces of work ready, for external sharing can be time consuming).

In 2016, members of the inter-agency protection groups agreed on a draft protocol for Providing Legal Assistance for Marriage Registration in case of Early Marriage, and this was rolled out to all organisations providing legal assistance for marriage registration for those under 18 years of age. The document aims to ensure that marriage registration is effectively used as a protection tool for children when early marriage has taken place (i.e. does not create harm), and to recommend non-harmful practices for referrals, counselling and provision of information to early married children and families. Critically, it states that the principles of 'Best Interest of the Child' should always inform any decision taken regarding marriage registration. The document defines a child as anyone under 18 years of age and is a note for legal, child protection and SGBV actors (i.e. social workers/case workers, legal/paralegal workers and supervisors). A protection assessment is required before the marriage is registered, this assessment must be undertaken within 1 month and pregnant girls are prioritised. This protocol is particularly important for organisation such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) who run a large Information, counselling and legal assistance programme across Lebanon, and whom frequently receive requests to register child marriages which have taken place in the community [34, 65]. However, several respondents spoke about the challenges of operationalising this policy in practice and noted significant regional variation in how this is done (i.e. in some regions a child protection professional is present at each stage, while other regions they are not). As there is no specific referral pathways related to the policy, organisations use general protection pathways which can be different across Lebanon (i.e. in some regions there is only one protection agency to refer to, while in other regions there is a choice). Respondents also spoke about the range of responses they receive when requesting a protection assessment in order to know whether to progress with marriage registration, which includes

sometimes just getting a line back which says '*she is happy with her husband*'. Respondents following the legal procedures said that there is a lack of guidance regarding the actual protection assessment and what it entails as this is not communicated with them, and raised concerns about how 'safe' the registration process is for girls when it is run by those who are not child protection specialists.

In 2019, the interagency SGBV task force developed guidance for case management with adolescent girls at risk of being married or those who have been married [66]. The guidance first defines child marriage, and then outlines the role of case workers to equip frontline workers and their supervisors with knowledge, basic skills and tools that they can apply while working with adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, as well as those who have already been subjected to child marriage. For girls who are not yet married, but whose parents are in the process of negotiating her marriage or actively planning it, with consent, the advised response is to 1) understand how the girl feels about the marriage; 2) provide information; 3) determine whether there is a supportive family member or other trusted adult in her life; 4) if safe, with consent, engage with supportive persons and provide information to parents; 5) risk mitigation. For girls who are already married, with consent, 1) assess her needs; 2) provide information about the consequences of early marriage; 3) Provide information about the services available and make referrals; 4) carry out safety planning.

IRC and UNICEF are currently developing a multi-sectorial child marriage prevention and response toolkit for use by service providers in SGBV, Child Protection, Education, Youth and Health. The inception report published in 2019 [28] states that the toolkit will include:

'A) Outreach strategy: provides clear guidance on 1) how to reach invisible girls (girls between 15-18 years old, engaged girls, pregnant girls, girls who don't go to school, girls with disability etc.) and 2) how to engage the main decision makers in the lives of girls. Outreach visits should be conducted with parents of single, engaged and divorced girls and husbands and mothers-in-law of married girls in order to introduce the team, the organization and the purpose of the activities to them and start building trust with them. This would address any

potential resistance from parents, mothers-in-law and husbands.

B) Prevention Life Skills Curriculum: aims to equip adolescent girls between 11 and 18 years old with knowledge and skills to enable them to take part of decisions related to marriage, prevent or delay child marriage, and build a support network they can resort to when facing pressures to get married, or have questions related to marriage.

C) Response Life Skills Curriculum: aims at equipping married and engaged adolescent girls with vital information and skills for their physical and psychosocial wellbeing.

D) One off awareness sessions with main decision makers in the lives of girls: aims at providing mothers, fathers, mothers-in-law and husbands with skills and knowledge to support their daughters/daughters-in-law/wives. Topics would include 1) phases of adolescence, 2) challenges girls face, 3) dealing with emotions and stress, 4) healthy relationships and 5) suggested bonding activities between girls and their mothers/mothers-in-law. More specifically, the toolkit will suggest how husbands can be engaged in gender discussions and/or male engagement strategies in an effort to shift attitudes to create a safer environment for girls in the long run with their surrounding and offspring. In addition, there will be guidance on how to engage 'agents of change' who show positive deviance examples in their communities; mainly mothers who would not marry their daughters off before they are ready to. This will be planned as part of a day event, awareness session, or meetings in the community where mothers and fathers can influence other members, and specifically other mothers and fathers in the community.

E) Guidance on engaging community leaders to identify allies in prevention and response to child marriage, as well as guidance on how school principals, teachers, religious leaders and other community leaders could provide mediation between the parents and the girls, while adopting a 'Do No Harm' approach.

F) Guidance on integrating Child Marriage interventions within each sector that would provide an introduction on how child marriage is linked to each sector's priorities, considerations on how to mainstream and integrate child marriage prevention and response within existing interventions, guidance on how to reach the most vulnerable girls within each sector's target group, how to engage parents and main decision makers in the lives of girls, and how to identify key stakeholders and mobilize them in addressing child marriage.

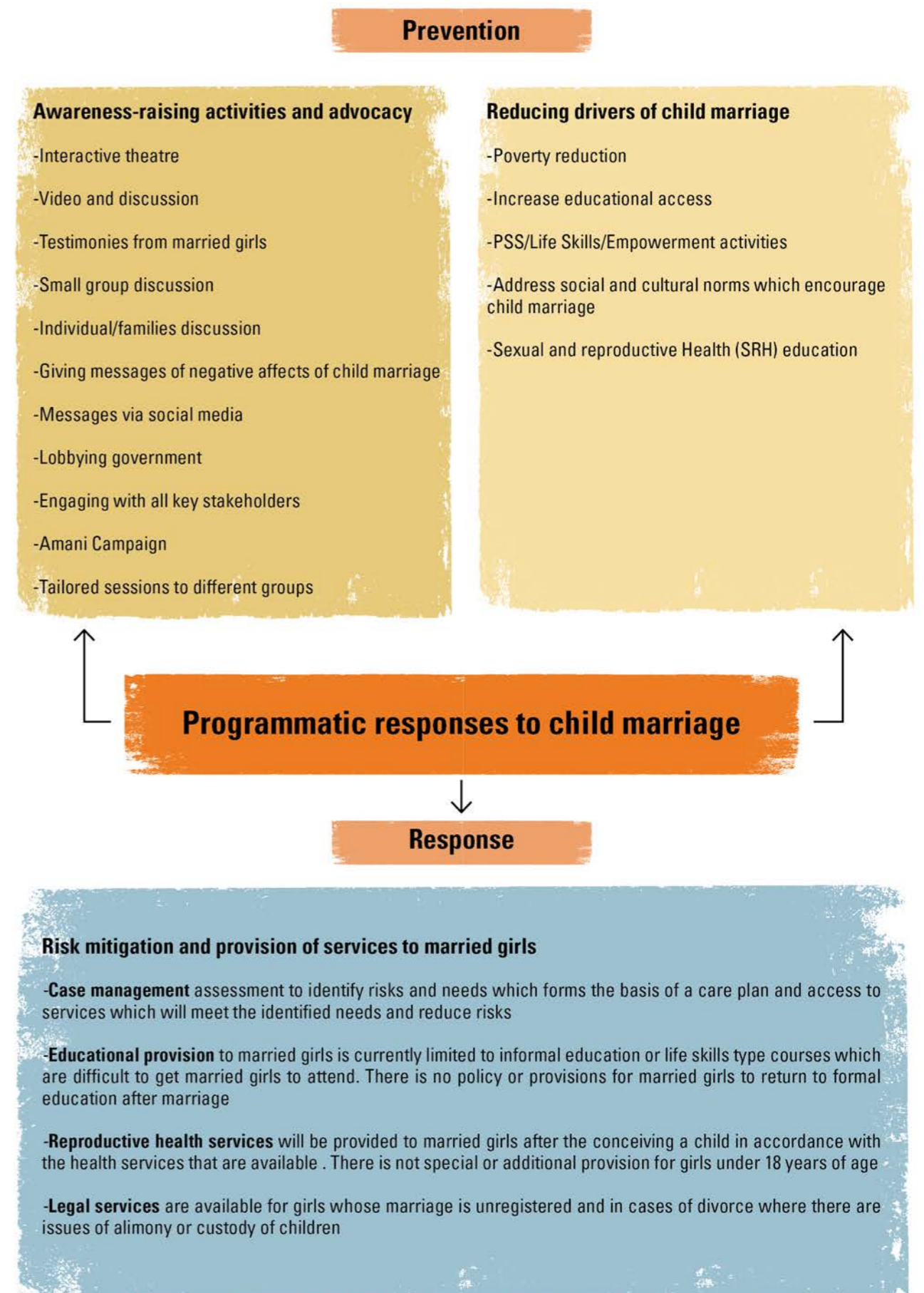
G) Monitoring and Evaluation tools specific to child marriage that collect quantitative data (i.e. number of married girls reached, number of married girls who accessed services) and qualitative data (i.e. reduced stigma, shift in attitudes, stories of change, quotes from girls and parents). This would enable sectors to measure the effectiveness of integrating child marriage prevention and response components in their programming to: 1) reach more invisible vulnerable girls, 2) increase their access to life-saving services, 3) increase in knowledge and skills to prevent and delay marriage that girls gain through life skills and awareness sessions, 4) maintaining physical and emotional wellbeing and 5) increase in support networks for married girls or girls at risk of marriage.

H) Impact evaluation to be conducted in a 6 months/a year after the integration of child marriage prevention and response components in their programming to measure its longer term impact on the community.[28] p16-17

3.4 Practice level responses to child marriage

The inception report for the toolkit being designed by IRC and UNICEF to prevent and respond to child marriage, outlines several strategies currently used in Lebanon identified through their desk review, key informant interviews and focus groups, including outreach strategies (such as those used by the 'I'm here' approach [67, 68], and the Women's Protection and Empowerment Outreach strategy [28, 47, 69]) and prevention and response strategies (such as empowering girls with information, skills and support networks; sensitisation and community engagement; building the capacity of services providers; fostering and enabling legal and policy frameworks) [28]. A

Figure 3: Practice responses to child marriage in Lebanon



wide range of practice level responses were found, both in relation to preventing child marriage as well as responding to girls who are already married, through this study as shown by figure 3.

All professionals interviewed for this research describe dual objectives for preventing child marriage, as well as caring for those who are married, mitigating as many risks as possible. However, most programmes tend to invest more in either one of these objectives, such as either awareness-raising and community sensitisation (to prevent), or case management (to care). In Lebanon there is also a significant emphasis on changing marriage laws to set a minimum of 18 to marry for all girls across Lebanon. Some respondents recognised that even if they couldn't prevent child marriage, then working with families to delay marriage for as long as possible was also important, stating that 'we can't stop the early marriage issue, but at least we can make it for a less percentage and trying to delay it to a best time'. IRC identified services to married girls as a big gap, which resulted in them developing a programme of life skills for married girls and outreach activities [47]. Practice response to child marriage come under many different types of programming including child protection, SGBV, maternal and child health care (MCH), sexual and reproductive health (SRH), psychosocial support/mental health, education and vocational training, social assistance and livelihoods or gender equality/women's empowerment programmes - some with a focus on children, others on adolescents and others on women. Most respondents spoke about responding to child marriage in various ways across these different programmes within their organisation, without having a strategic or holistic or specific programming model on child marriage combining the different programmes.

3.4.1 Prevention

Two main types of programmes are used to prevent child marriage in Lebanon. The first is through various awareness-raising, community sensitisation and advocacy activities, which largely seek to inform girls and their families of the negative consequences of child marriage, with the aim of ensuring they do not accept proposals before 18 years of age. The second is through working to reduce the drivers of child marriage, for example, the lack of laws to prevent child marriage, poverty, poor access to education, supportive social norms or low/unequal aspirations

for girls.

Awareness-raising, community sensitisation and advocacy

One of the main methods used to prevent child marriage is to inform girls and their families about the negative consequences of child marriage, and to challenge the social norms and values held at a community level that encourage child marriage, as well as advocate for better legal protections nationally. This is largely in response to the cultural underpinnings and social acceptability of child marriage found in some Syrian (and Lebanese and Palestinian) families. Awareness seems either to focus on whole community sensitisation particularly targeting community 'leaders/influences', or more individualised engagement with small groups of children and parents. Some respondents said that they aim to provide information, while others spoke about advocating for social change or behavioural change through these sensitisation activities, especially at a grassroots level.

This 'awareness' raising happens in many different ways at different levels. For example, every year from the 25th November, 16 days of activism are organised to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world⁸. In Lebanon, there was an additional focus in 2019 on child marriage, which included standardised messages on child marriage to be given in different forms (i.e. small group work, or larger scale community events, or other forms of messaging) to different groups (i.e. girls, boys, families, community members, staff members, students) [70]. This was coordinated and developed by the inter-agency sub-groups on child protection and SGBV. It also included messages about child marriage on billboards and on TV through documentaries and short movies, as well as lighting up key buildings in Lebanon.

Other forms of awareness-raising and community sensitisation that are used by different agencies in Lebanon include:

- Interactive theatre
- Videos of girls talking about their own experiences of child marriage followed by discussions
- Small group awareness raising through provision of information, discussions and activities
- Awareness sessions as part of 'courses' or youth focused activities such as life skills programmes, or

empowerment programmes

- Peer to peer awareness-raising (which were described as a new and 'popular'/'effective' approach)
- Awareness raised by community-based child protection committees
- Tailored sessions to different groups (i.e. girls, boys, mothers, fathers, those with disabilities)
- Messages based on 'real' protection issues and concerns and examples
- Standardised messages on Child Protection or SGBV which include child marriage
- Awareness raising with individual girls and families through case management work
- Broad stakeholder engagement including with religious leaders, health and education professionals, government ministers, community leaders and other people in positions of power or influence
- Social media messages often using pictures and captions
- Within parenting courses/sessions
- Campaigns
- Blogs/case studies/short stories
- Intergenerational stories to share experiences
- Focus on engaging men and boys
- Movies and documentaries⁹

Respondents often spoke about awareness raising in different ways with girls, boys, parents, often separating groups based on gender, sometimes giving just basic awareness or responding to specific requests for information. Several respondents also said that they invite doctors to talk about the medical and psychological impact of child marriage, as it is felt they have stronger legitimacy and influence in communities. Some of the advocacy work from Lebanon has gone global, such as social experiment video done by KAFA¹⁰, and a film at Caines film festival by a Lebanese female film director which screens issues related to child marriage and statelessness. The movie was supported by KAFA and shows that negative coping strategies are also used in Lebanese society. Research was also described as an important advocacy and awareness-raising tool, including the process of research for organisations responding to child marriage as well as the evidenced-based

messages and methods that are produced.

Reducing the drivers of child marriage

Most respondents felt awareness sessions on their own were not sufficient and were concerned with how effective they were. Other prevention activities tend to be focused on reducing the key drivers of child marriage, such as being out of school and inactive at home, poverty and gender inequality. Although one respondent reflected that the drivers of child marriage had shifted over the last 8 years of displacement, and that drivers are also different for under-privileged families in Lebanon. However, most of intervention that might reduce the drivers of child marriage do not have a specific focus on child marriage, nor do they contain monitoring and evaluation indicators linked to child marriage (other than maybe list the number of 'cases' they encounter or have worked with), and they may be considered value added type activities where child marriage is one of many protection risks that could be prevented, for example, through provision of cash assistance.

Changing the marriage laws in Lebanon

As outlined above, there is a significant body of work by international and national actors aimed at changing religious, civil and penal laws that would make any marriage under 18 illegal and a form of child abuse or SGBV.

Access to education

Research shows that getting girls into school, and keeping them in school, can prevent child marriage [11, 27, 38, 40, 50, 71]. Syrian refugees are able to access the state education system in Lebanon (gives details about access and needs) while education for Palestinian refugees is organised through UNRWA. Education partners in Lebanon are meeting on a monthly basis in Mount Lebanon, Tyre, Zahle, Tripoli and Qobayat to coordinate education activities as part of the Syria Refugee Response. The education partners work in support of the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) programme of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and under the umbrella of MEHE's non-formal education framework¹¹. The overall LCRP Education Sector

⁸ <https://16dayscampaign.org/>

⁹ Refer to child marriage movie called 'Nour' <http://theconversation.com/ending-child-marriage-in-lebanon-films-like-nour-can-make-a-difference-92458>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7IPgOEwbYw>

¹¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/working-group/17?sv=4&geo=71>

Response Strategy recognises that the risk of child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and other negative coping mechanism remains high, and is looking to strengthen collaboration with other sectors to jointly achieve goals on SGBV risk reduction [72]. Support to boost the capacity of the public education system is much needed to ensure it adheres to the global norms and standards established by Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards. In addition, the group collaborates with those working in child protection who provide informal education spaces, and child friendly spaces both in and out of schools.

There are a number of programmes which aim to get Syrian children into some form of formal or informal education, and keep them in these systems for as long as possible. Global and regional evidence strongly suggests that girls who are active in education are less likely to accept marriage proposals, making education one of the biggest protective factors in relation to child marriage. Girls who are considered inactive at home are at a much higher risk of accepting a marriage proposal after they turn 15 years of age (and sometimes before). However, while getting, and keeping, girls in school is a key priority for agencies working with Syrian refugees, the link between education and preventing child marriage is not well established or acknowledged in the education sector.

PSS activities, life skills and empowerment programmes

There are a wide range of PSS activities, life skills and empowerment programmes which could be considered as preventing child marriage by empowering girls and their families, by providing alternative activities for girls who are 'inactive' at home and supporting girls to achieve their aspirations. Examples include, the 'Citadel of Protection' by KAFA, 'Basic Life Skills Curriculum' by ABAAD and Plan International, 'My Safety, My Wellbeing' and psychosocial support for girls at risk of marriage by Himaya, the 'I'm strong' curriculum by DRC and the 'Emotional Wellbeing Curriculum' by used by UNICEF [28]. Many SGBV or child protection focused PSS activities, life skills and empowerment programmes with young people (or women), will make reference to child marriage as part of their broader programme. Although these activities will not usually have child marriage as the sole or specific focus, nor have preventing child marriage as a target outcome

which is measured by indicators and data (i.e. the SGBV activities run by IRC through their Women's Protection and Empowerment Program (WPE) and their special curriculum for 13-17 year old girls [39], or the Care Lebanon project funded by Ford Foundation using positive deviance model in north (Tripoli) which aims to absorb girls who normally drop out of school after primary school and gives homework support and positive role models).

Some providers offer a full range of services to adolescent girls, but most don't have this tailored service. Some respondents said that their agencies believe that it is less stigmatising and more comprehensive, and easier for girls to access their safe spaces, if they don't talk about child marriage specifically. These services are often provided through 'safe' spaces and mobile safe spaces or 'youth' spaces, and often provide some form of informal education and training/work opportunities. In addition, they tend to have programmes/sessions for both children and their parents. Organisations often use standardised PSS or informal education curriculums such as those listed above, and others such as the 'play for equality' or 'she deals' curriculum.

In Beka'a ,The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) are using the 'I'm here, I'm Stronger' approach to develop their PSS and life skills programmes for specifically preventing and responding to child marriage [68]. The "I'm Here" approach is a comprehensive outreach and girl-centred design approach, developed and tested by WRC [67], and has been further contextualised and adapted to the Lebanese context by the DRC. Since 2014, the approach has evolved through monitoring, evaluation, analysis and field based research and now also includes the 'I'm stronger' approach. The 'I'm here' approach builds tailored curriculum for girls based on a door to door outreach methodology, to identify at risk girls and married girls, and the needs they have, and then includes them in designing the programme cycle content which is specific to each group. The 'I'm stronger' addition ensures effective engagement with decision makers in the girls' lives, to prevent and/or respond to early marriage. It includes outreaching to the girl participant's female and male caregivers, and brothers or underage husbands, as well as main service providers in the area of implementation. Decision-makers are, therefore, also invited to attend tailored sessions to express their views, debate different opinions, learn new tools in

dealing with adolescent girls in their lives, and they are encouraged to adopt new behaviours that elevate the girls' wellbeing and health [68].

Poverty

Some respondents said that their organisations try to give social and financial support to prevent child marriage, and help girls find work or access education. The Livelihoods Working Group Lebanon states that the livelihood sector will deliver, in full accordance with Lebanese labour laws and regulations, rapid-impact job creation initiatives targeting vulnerable groups, MSMEs, small farmers, and invest in the skills of young people and adolescents based on the Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) approach. Partners are investing in labour-intensive sectors to create jobs, enhance skills, stimulate local markets and improve local economic growth¹². There are a number of economic empowerment programmes, sustainable livelihood programmes, and provision of cash assistance which all contribute to the alleviation of poverty (usually in the short term). For example, a wide range of organisations provide such assistance, some of which is conditional on educational attendance, and others which give cash assistance without conditions. However, most cash assistance programmes do not target explicitly to prevent child marriage, and do not include this in their monitoring and evaluation indicators. One of the key activities for the Livelihood Working Group work plan for 2020, is to explore & 'promote' the provision of livelihood services specifically for GBV survivors and women-at-risk and persons with disability [73].

Cultural acceptability

Behavioural and social interventions are considered key to reducing the cultural and social acceptability of child marriage within communities, much of which is largely based on different communications tools. Several organisations are currently working to develop specific Communication for Behavioural Impact (COMBI) plans and tools to prevent child marriage such as UNICEF (as described above). At a regional level UNFPA are currently testing and finalising their COMBI tool, which uses up to 15 communication keys to engage with the main decision-maker in a household (usually the male head of household), depending on the attitudes held, the family context and the reasons

why the decision-maker would consider marriage for a girl under 18 year of age. These communication keys are complemented by a mix of wider communication actions at a community level, to put child marriage on the public agenda, and flood the community with messages aimed at preventing child marriage through social media, radio, television, in newspapers, during community meetings and through child protection ambassadors or community mobilisers. The explicit aim of the COMBI is to prevent child marriage at the family and community level, and the impact will be measured over three years, predominantly measuring exposure to and comprehension of messages, as well as whether proposals of marriage to girls under 18 years of age are accepted or declined by the targeted decision-makers.

Preventing child marriage has been a priority for several UN agencies and many other organisations in Lebanon for several years, especially in relation to Syrian refugees. However, a number of participants highlighted that, despite the number of prevention and response programmes that have been in place over the years, it appears that the rates of child marriage have continued to rise (or at the very least have stayed the same). Therefore, it is unclear whether all or any of the current responses to child marriage are effective in preventing child marriage, and why they may or may not be effective? There are a lack of indicators and monitoring tools, and a lack of evaluations that focus on measuring the rates of child marriage (or other proxy indicators) in response to a particular intervention. This may be because there is a lack of programmes that specifically target child marriage, as child marriage is usually just one of many protection risks or needs that are being responded to through awareness raising campaigns, case management, PSS activities or life skills programmes. It is also because a lot of the responses to child marriage occur after the marriage has taken place, which means that other well-being or risk reduction measures are used rather than ones linked to their child marriage. A big question remains for participants about 'what works' to prevent and reduce the rates of child marriage in Lebanon, and how this can be monitored and recorded?

Respondents were also unsure about whether the

¹² <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/working-group/21?sv=4&geo=71>

focus of intervention should be on changing attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage across communities and families, or whether focus should actually be on the drivers of child marriage such as poverty and poor access to education (which do not necessarily mean even talking about child marriage to families). A couple of respondents raised concerns about the focus on changing attitudes and behaviours because of the difficult conditions that Syrians find themselves in, believing it is unfair to expect individual families to change their behaviours without being supported by structural change and interventions, which seek to reduce the drivers of child marriage. Some respondents suggested that engaging with families directly about child marriage is very sensitive, and it can be difficult to prevent child marriage by just focusing on change at a family level (because of lack of choices and alternatives, because of difficult conditions, and because of cultural acceptability). Some respondents also felt that they could not 'force' or 'push' families in their decision-making; rather they could only give them information and let them decide.

Several respondents also questioned the suitability of general awareness campaigns which seek to inform people of the negative outcomes of child marriage, partly due to lack of evidence in relation to their impact and also because of the difficult conditions that people face, which mean that any decision they make contains elements of potential risk. A focus on the negative consequences can also prevail over a focus on the rights of a girl and how these are violated by child marriage. It was felt that, while case management approaches are largely used to shape and structure the response to married girls, more concrete and focused prevention strategies are needed. Some organisations, for example, plan to move away from awareness sessions led by staff, to community-led and peer to peer sessions.

Most responses to child marriage were facilitated through more general programmes aimed at Child Protection or SGBV concerns. This was reflected by many of the participants providing Child Protection and SGBV services, and most suggested that perhaps interventions which explicitly focused on child marriage were needed to complement this more general work. This would also result in more attention on prevention services rather than response, as once a girl is married then it is not appropriate or possible to change or 'undo' this status – work then is about

mitigating the risks.

3.4.2 Provision of services to married girls and risk mitigation

Literature examining child marriage in Lebanon recognises that as well as preventing child marriage, responses to child marriage must also include services to girls who have married before they turn 18 years of age and others affected by child marriage. These services predominantly ensure that the needs associated with child marriage are met, and risks avoided or mitigated. The following services are usually available for married girls through a range of different organisations (governmental and non-governmental).

Care management

Case management is the main approach or service through which girls who are married under 18 years of age are assessed in relation to their needs and risks of harm, and through which a range of services are provided. While a whole range of agencies provide services through case management, different case management systems tend to have a different starting focus (i.e. child protection or SGBV or legal focus). These different focuses provide slightly different lens, or frameworks for response, with those specialising in child protection only ever working with children as their main 'beneficiary'.

While it can be difficult to identify girls at risk of child marriage, or to engage with girls and their families before a marriage takes place, married girls are fairly easy to identify, mainly when they seek to change their registration details with UNHCR, or after they become pregnant or drop out of school. Also, due to the networking and referrals exchanged between organisations working with Syrians refugees through Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), if an organisation identifies a case of child marriage but does not have the capacity or mandate to respond, a referral will be made to a child protection or SGBV case management service. Once UNHCR receives a request for a married girl's registration to be placed with her husband and his family, rather than her own family, they are obliged to undertake a best interest assessment (or refer to another agency to do this) and potentially also refer for a child protection specialist case management assessment to be undertaken. A case management assessment will usually involve a home visit to the girl and her

husband, and any family they are living with. During this home visit the case manager will establish why and how the marriage occurred, and identify any specific needs or risks arising from the marriage or her new context. This includes asking about legal documentation, food security, material provision, educational access, family planning, reproductive health, other health concerns, mental health, nature of the relationship with her husband and his family, any forms of violence present, communication with her own family, mobility, household responsibilities and support networks. The aim of this assessment is to identify areas of significant need and to mitigate, as much as possible, the negative outcomes associated with child marriage. Referrals for a wide range of services are possible including maternal health care, informal education activities, parenting classes, support groups, PSS activities, cash assistance, legal services or couples counselling, although all of these referrals require the permission of the girl and her husband. For high risk cases that include actual or probable sexual, physical or extreme emotional violence and abuse, then other agencies such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and the UNHCR would be brought in to develop an emergency action plan to keep the girl safe.

Case managers will oversee different services to meet needs of married girls and access life skills and PSS and livelihoods and health and education and legal services. However, most of these services are generic and not tailored to married girls.

Shelters

ABAAD in collaboration with UNHCR, UNICEF and the Danish Refugee Council has opened three Safe Shelters, in three different areas within Lebanon, where there are large concentrations of Syrian refugees. These houses provide a secure and confidential place for Syrian refugee women who are survivors of, or are at high risk of, being exposed to SGBV, and their children. In addition to providing housing for up to 60 days, the centres also provide – in one venue – case management and crisis counselling, psychosocial and legal support, forensic and medical care and referrals for provision of social services (economic opportunities, longer-term shelter, medical services, etc) [29].

Education

Most married girls are not in full time or formal education and there is no specific educational provision for married girls [14, 27, 28]. Although there is no official policy excluding married girls, all of the respondents said that married girls do not attend school. This is because schools would not allow married girls to attend alongside unmarried girls, and because once a girl is married then her priority is to the home and her husband. Married girls may occasionally attend informal education sessions, or life skills training or vocation training, but this is usually not deemed socially appropriate, and organisations find it difficult to keep married girls engaged in these activities. IRC have developed a life skills package specifically for married girls which includes forms of informal education [47].

Health services

Age at first marriage is a key predictor of fertility and years of childbearing, with those married at an early age having more children due to a longer period of childbearing across their life time [74, 75]. A high proportion of married girls become pregnant within the first year of marriage, thereby requiring antenatal, maternal and post-natal care. Research suggests a significant lack of SRH services and very high needs in Lebanon, along with many barriers in place to girls and married girls actually accessing the services available [27, 76-78]. Data from the Vital data Observatory 2017, from the Primary Health Care Network, shows that 9% of all deliveries in Lebanon are to girls under 20 years of age [79]. Refugees are not able to access the Lebanese health care system free of charge, and therefore reproductive and maternal services are usually accessed through a humanitarian provider such as Medicine Sans Frontier (MSF), MDM or International Medical Corps (IMC). Through these services they may give information about child marriage to girls and their families, or provide maternal health care to young girls. The Health Working Group for the Syria Refugee Response in Lebanon is the coordination group for all agencies providing assistance to Syrian refugees in the field of Health. The group meets to discuss ongoing and planned projects, and share key information on implementation and operational developments¹³.

¹³ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/working-group/19?sv=4&geo=71>

Minimum standards and best practices for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) are outlined in the Inter-agency field manual on reproductive health in humanitarian settings [80, 81]. Health professionals clearly have a key role in responding to the reproductive health needs of married girls, which are also linked to other needs (such as nutrition, being free from violence, RH education, etc) and it is currently unclear if and how far the health sector is responding to this key role [82].

There are 230 Public Health Care Centres (PHCs) across Lebanon, some of which are run by the Ministry of Health directly, others if which are run by a range of national and international non-governmental organisations (for example, MDM support 5 of them in Beka'a) – particularly those who provide services to refugees. However, services operated by other organisations follow guidance issued by the Ministry of Health and offer standard minimum services. Responding to child marriage has not been a requirement of the Ministry of Health, and so different organisations have different responses through the PHCs. Several organisations have a substantial programme of capacity building across the health sector in Lebanon, and see this as an opportunity to develop health based responses to child marriage.

Legal services

All marriages need to be legally registered in Lebanon through authorised processes set out by the religious courts, however, it is common for marriages to be undertaken by unregistered Syrian Sheikhs in the community who are not legally authorised to do so [33, 34]. Without a marriage registration certificate women are not able to legally change their marital status, be included with their husband in the family book or change UNHCR registration. Without a marriage certificate mothers are not able to register the birth of their children, and then access health care and education for them, or get travel documents. Without a registered marriage, women are not able to go through the courts to uphold their rights in instances of divorce. Therefore, unregistered marriages are considered a high risk factor, and a specific vulnerability that those married under 18 will face. If a couple approaches the UNHCR to change their registration status after marriage, but the marriage is not registered, UNHCR will either directly, or through partner agencies (such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)), support the formal registration of the

marriage though specific legal case work if it felt to be in the best interest of the child [34]. Legal case work will usually run alongside child protection or SGBV case management.

PSS and Life skills curriculum

Since 2016, IRC have been running a Life Skills Package for Early Marriage that provides vital information and life skills to Syrian and Lebanese girls who are married or engaged in Beka'a Valley [47]. The programme aims to increase their physical and psychosocial wellbeing and as well as their resilience in relation to different forms of SGBV. The programme also includes a Rapid Response intervention, which is a shortened version of the Life Skills Package, to enable girls who cannot participate in the whole programme to take part in shorter individual sessions. As the programme focuses on meeting the needs of married girls, it does not include a prevention component, but can connect engaged girls who wish to break their engagement with other programme teams [47]. However, when engaged girls wish to break the engagement and ask for their support to do so, they connect them with other programme teams and experts, that focus on case management and can better support the girls in this process. IRC found that prior to the tailored package being available, married or engaged adolescent girls constituted around 9% only of the total number of girls attending existing activities under the IRCs women's Protection and Empowerment programme, after rolling this new programme they now constitute 17% [28].

The DRC '*I'm here, I'm Stronger*' approach described can also be used with groups of married or engaged girls.

During many of the interviews with respondents, after describing a range of activities which might be considered a response to child marriage (such as PSS activities, life skills programmes, youth empowerment, case management, etc), respondents would often then say '*but we don't work with child marriage specifically or directly*'. This was because most programmes don't solely focus on preventing child marriage or providing care for affected girls, rather it is one of many protection or SGBV concerns that they work with. Nor are these programmes usually evaluated based on their role in preventing child marriage.

There seems to be a lack of understanding about what is considered a child marriage 'intervention', especially in relation to services that work with married girls to mitigate long term risks. This was not considered by many of the respondents as a 'child marriage response' per se because the focus is on minimising risks rather than preventing the marriage. Is a child marriage intervention then about going to families and persuading them to not marry their daughter and other awareness-raising activities? Or giving girls and their family's information and letting them choose? Or working on the drivers to prevent child marriage?

The response to child marriage could feel disjointed and siloed because of the distinction between activities across different sectors and programmes which aim to prevent child marriage, and those aimed at girls affected by child marriage, as well as the work done with a whole range of other actors. It is likely then that there are many agencies involved in livelihoods projects or preventing school dropout, for example, who would not consider their work as a 'child marriage intervention' because the work does not include it as a specific focus. Better clarification about the role that different kinds of responses play would help to connect agencies and practitioners to develop complementary and value-added work plans. It might also increase the morale of those who feel that the problem of child marriage is too big for them to tackle alone, or those that only work with girls affected by child marriage and not in areas of prevention (i.e. case management or those facilitating marriage registration).

This policy and practice mapping found a lack of best practice examples, predominantly because most responses do not contain indicators or evaluations which relate specifically to child marriage, or monitor whether child marriages are being prevented or the risks associated with child marriage are being avoided. Also very few examples of best practice have been published, with the notable exception of the IRC life skills package for early marriage and the DRC '*I'm here, I'm Stronger*' approach [47, 68]. While there are many examples of creative programmes which seek to empower girls, facilitate helpful awareness-raising sessions, provide families with much needed cash assistance or facilitate educational access, it is difficult to determine the specific impact of these on child marriage.

Capacity building

Several respondents (mainly those working for UN agencies or large INGOs) spoke about their role in building capacity of local services providers, to tailor their services to the needs of girls and married girls such as gender mainstreaming or taking a child centred approach. UNICEF, for example, have prioritised system level strengthening in relation to case management, child protection and SGBV systems, SOPs and referral pathways, as well as national action plans and guidance. Significant resources have been used to strengthen the response made by the national Social Development Centres (SDCs) and Public Health Centres (PHCs) such as inter-agency. This has included strengthening infrastructure and provisions as well as staff capacities, training and education.

3.5 Approaches used to respond to child marriage

Participants in this study spoke about using a broad range of conceptual frameworks and principles which underpin a whole range of approaches to preventing and responding to child marriage which are outlined in figure 4

Several respondents describe using different approaches to child marriage over the years. ABAAD spoke about moving from a focus on community awareness, to knowledge production, and then to advocacy in relation to their responses to child marriage. Others talked about moving from a general conceptualisation of equality and empowerment in relation to child marriage, to a right based focus, and then to using conceptualisations of violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) to understand child marriage. RDFL also said that their initial approach to child marriage was to directly support affected girls and engage in community awareness raising. However, over the past 5 years they have shifted their main approach to that of structural change through the law, and have recently realised the need for specific advocacy at a governmental level to make significant changes.

Respondents described different approaches depending on whether they have a prevention/protection/risk mitigation/advocacy focus, recognising the need for a range of approaches to effectively underpin their responses (i.e. social change and law change, and

Figure 4: Conceptual frameworks, principles and approaches underpinning responses to child marriage

Conceptual frameworks and principles	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ecological frameworks/systems approaches - Risk and protective factors - Gender justice within a broader framework of Access to Justice - Resilience - Empowerment - Judicial review and law change - Knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) analysis - Sustainability - Child's best interest - Rights-based frameworks - Sexual and Gender-based Violence lens (including VAW/VAC frameworks) - Understandings of masculinities and femininities - Vulnerability - Life cycle frameworks - Gender inequalities and power relationships - Feminist discourses - Conceptions of inter-sectionality - Theories of social change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protective environment - Judicial review and law change - Multi-level and multi-sectorial responses - Project management cycle - Multi-level advocacy - Community mobilisation and community-based work (i.e. peer to peer strategies. Train community leaders and religious leaders and doctors etc) - Communication for Behavioural Impact (COMBI) - Harm mitigation through a holistic case management approach - Family focus vs child focus - Empowerment-based and strengths-based approaches - Gender mainstreaming - Child centred - Capacity strengthening - Providing alternatives to marriage - Building trust with key stakeholders - Participatory and community-led approaches - Evidence-based approaches - Intervention through partners rather than direct implementation - Needs led programmes - Public health models

prevention and response) to take account of holistic/multi-level/multi-systems/ecological systems.

Several national non-governmental organisations, spoke about being very much community lead and being based in communities for a long time, not imposing projects but building them with the community and engaging them in the planning and development phase. Some have had centres in communities since the 1980s and 1990s and have built trust in the community, even amongst Syrian communities, which they believe is essential when responding to child marriage. These respondents felt that their professionals were familiar with the community norms, values and traditions of the areas they work in, especially those that underpin child marriage. Staff in community centres are very often from the community, which mean they face the same issues as people from the community – which they felt makes them less judgemental and more approachable. Some organisations use child protection committees to engage with issues like child marriage, and they support community members to choose their own protection activities and focus.

There was a lack of consensus amongst respondents on whether child marriage should be tackled through specific child marriage focused programmes, or whether it should continue to be included within wider programmes linked to many other child protection or SGBV concerns. Many organisations are starting to mainstream a protection and prevention lens into everything they do, normally as part of SGBV or child protection mainstreaming, which would include child marriage to a greater or lesser extent. The main limitation of generic child protection or SGBV approaches that tackle the drivers of child marriage (such as cash assistance or preventing school drop-out), is that these programmes lack specific monitoring and evaluation tools in relation to child marriage, which makes it difficult to determine its impact on preventing child marriage, or reducing the risks for those affected by child marriage. Most respondents suggested that some specialisation is needed, or the provision of additional guidance, or a 'child marriage lens' which could be incorporated into generic programmes such as those preventing school dropout or providing cash assistance. However, it can be difficult to monitor the long term impact of such programmes on child marriage, as girls remain at risk of child marriage for a relatively long period of

time (4-5 years). This appears to be a global problem; a review completed by the Human Rights Centre at the University of California and Save the Children, to identify the state of the global evidence on child marriage prevention and response interventions, found forty-three development focused interventions were included in the review but no humanitarian interventions [18]. Mainstreaming child marriage within child protection and SGBV, and other sectors, was felt to be important once we know more about what works to prevent child marriage and there is a significant body of evidence on child marriage specifically and programme level expertise. It was often suggested that child marriage should not be part of a general SGBV package without understanding the objectives of the work for child marriage, and specific measurement needed to monitored effectiveness. It was also felt by one respondent that prevention was easier to mainstream within broader child protection and SGBV programmes than responses to child marriage.

Although it has been argued that responses to Syrian refugees need to take into account models of social development rather than just emergency responses, the context of prolonged displacement means that neither emergency-based responses, nor development-based responses are appropriate. The majority of refugees are neither new to Lebanon, nor in need of emergency provisions or lifesaving treatment in the same way as at the start of the crisis, but they remain refugees, living in uncertainty and insecurity - meaning that 'development' focused activities are also not entirely appropriate. Refugees are unable to make long term plans for living in Lebanon, nor invest in business or infrastructure which might contribute to a long term increase in their economic or social well-being. This also impacts the approaches used to respond to child marriage, especially in relation to prevention strategies that seek to provide alternatives to marriage for adolescent girls. For example, investing in a girl's future may be deemed as less of a household priority when no one knows what their future holds. It might also be difficult to mobilise sufficient 'development' resources in a humanitarian context to prevent a child marriage for 3 or 4 years, which might be necessary for girls at risk of marriage at 14 or 15 years of age. Indeed, adolescent girls remain at risk of child marriage for a long period of time (from approximately 13 – 17 years of age,) and we don't know if parents and girls who

commit to avoiding child marriage when they are 14 or 15 years, still remain committed when they are 16 or 17 years of age.

We also don't know who is best placed to do what, and when, in response to child marriage. As already highlighted, girls are at risk of child marriage for a long time (probably from 13-17 years of age), and we don't know whether a one-off awareness session to the girl and her family has a long term impact, and what the best age is to start giving these messages, how many are needed, in what format and for how long. We also don't know who is best placed to engage with families directly about their attitudes and practices in relation to child marriage, and whether peer to peer strategies or awareness sessions in a life skills course are more effective than social media strategies or large scale community events. Are the words and values of civil society members or community members from within communities more valid than those from INGOs? Who has legitimacy to talk about these issues?

A number of participants raised concerns about the high expectations that are placed on Syrian families and girls to change their attitudes and behaviours in contexts of great difficulties and suffering in a short period of time. They felt it was unfair to ask families to change attitudes and behaviours without being supported through structural changes which reduce some of the most keenly felt drivers, such as poverty or overcrowding, or poor educational access or concerns about safety and the future. Some participants felt that their organisation was stronger in providing responses focused on prevention, while others felt that they were stronger in providing care and case management services to affected girls. It was suggested that civil society actors might be more effective at prevention activities through engagement with the communities, and that UN agencies, for example, might be better placed at strengthening governmental capacity to respond at a strategic level.

3.6 Main challenges and gaps

Through conversations with research participants about their work with child marriage, and developing responses to child marriage at both a policy and programme level, it became clear that practitioners and policymakers face a number of challenges which are summarised below in figure 5.

In summary, child marriage is difficult to respond to because of its cultural/social acceptability, legal acceptability, and general lack of appreciation of the harms associated with it because of the lack of alternatives for adolescent girls and high rates of poverty, because of poor access to educational services and because it is unclear which approaches are effective in responding to child marriage. Several respondents describe child marriage as being the result of layers of drivers which are impossible to separate out. In fact, child marriage might be particularly attractive to girls and families because it is a socially and legally acceptable coping strategies that might relieve many pressures at one time (such as overcrowding, the need to escort adolescent girls in public, gives girls a future and is one less meal to provide for). Child marriage might be considered as a single strategy which acts as a response to many problems. While many of the respondents recognised the many different drivers underpinning child marriage, the implications of this for responses to child marriage were described as significant challenges. The approaches described usually corresponded to one of the known drivers rather than complex interplay between them.

There was a lack of consensus from respondents regarding the 'best' way of responding to child marriage, with usually a whole range of different activities being named, that happened across different programmes and sectors. Child marriage prevention was described as the responsibility of child protection agencies, while responses after the marriage has taken place were described as the responsibility of the SGBV sector, usually mainstreamed with a whole set of responses to SGBV rather than child marriage specifically. Several challenges were raised in relation to this and it is unclear how effective general SGBV responses are for child marriage specifically for several reasons; 1) Legality of child marriage, 2) Child focused rather than adult focused, 3) It's use as a coping strategy in response to very difficult circumstances for those affected by the Syrian crisis and 4) Potential to increase harm by ending the marriage. These dynamics mean that child marriage may require quite different responses to other forms of SGBV.

The legal acceptability of child marriage was frequently mentioned by respondents who said that

while increasing the minimum age of marriage to 18 would not respond to all the many driver of child marriage it would have some impact on reducing child marriage and would support continued change to the dominant social norms regarding age of marriage and the nature of marriage itself. In conversations about the legal age of marriage, religion and religious leaders was always raised as a barrier to change with many challenging the authority that religious groups have over marriage as a religious institution and act. Several respondents also spoke about the complexity of marriage registration for Syrian refugees and the many many barrier to achieving full registration due to high court fees, need for blood tests and many other documents, a letter from the Muktar and registration at the foreign registry [65]. Those whose UNHCR registration or ID is not valid are also unable to register their marriages, as well as those unable to travel across regions in Lebanon due to frequent security checkpoints. NRC report that between February 2015 and February 2016 out of 1,702 refugees that obtained a marriage contract in Lebanon, only 317 were able to acquire an official marriage contract issued from an authorised Sheikh. Out of those who were able to acquire an official marriage contract 206, obtained a marriage certificate at the Mukthar, and out of those only 61 were able to continue marriage registration at the Nofous. Only 15 were able to finalise the marriage registration at the Foreigners' Register [65].

Many of the difficulties highlighted reflect the nature of child marriage in humanitarian contexts. On the one hand, child marriage is considered by some community members as simply a 'marriage', a highly valued social process largely shaped by family norms and values. On the other hand, it is seen as a possible strategy to relieve suffering and concern in difficult circumstances. These difficulties also reflect the challenges that adolescent girls face due to their age and their gender, including gender inequalities in a patriarchal social structure, and social norms about how girls should behave and their role in their families. While some participants consider child marriage as a relatively straight forward protection concern, because it is a 'public' socially acceptable practice (as opposed to child sexual abuse, for example), it is clear that the challenges practitioners face must be taken into consideration during future policy and practice initiatives. Some organisations already have 5 or more years of experience of working to prevent child marriage amongst Syrian refugees in Lebanon,

and this experience must be further interrogated and built on.

Figure 5: Challenges and gaps identified by research participants about their intervention and developing responses to child marriage at both a policy and programme level in Lebanon

Challenges

- Married women have limited mobility which reduces their likelihood to access programmes and services after marriage. Even programmes that are specifically set up for married girls still struggle to access these girls
- Limited aspirations for girls
- No civil marriage laws. Marriage laws are under religious Personal Status laws which are difficult to change due to political and religious affiliations and alliances
- High numbers of child marriages are not registered which increases the vulnerability of married girls and causes ethical dilemmas for agencies who support registration following a best interest or protection assessment. Also concern that raising the minimum age of marriage with further increase unregistered marriages
- Social-economic conditions for Syrian refugees are insecure, precarious and challenging
- Legal protection for married girls is complicated because it is unclear whether she is protected under laws for children or women, and how her sexuality is viewed if under 15 years (which is the legal minimum age for sexual intercourse; marital rape is not legally recognised). There is an overall lack of protective laws for adolescent girls (married and unmarried)
- Working in the context of prolonged displacement is complicated because it is neither sufficiently well conceptualised or operationalised by humanitarian or development actors
- It will take time to reduce child marriage, and it takes time to develop programmes and measure changes over time which is not conducive with humanitarian short funding cycles
- Ensuring efficient and effective multi-sectorial coordination and knowledge exchange is challenging because there are several different mechanisms for coordination and they tend to attract different type of organisations which makes them less effective. Some organisations are competing with each other for funding. Multi-agency work between different types of organisation (i.e. UN, Non-governmental, governmental, grassroots) is challenging due to different priorities, agendas and timescales. Sharing and coordination often based on personal relationships. These challenges make multi-level, multi-sector holistic and comprehensive responses difficult
- The legal context which allows marriage from 9 years in some religious confession which makes it difficult for practitioners to prevent child marriage or say it is 'wrong' because it is legally permissible and is not a crime.
- Lebanon is a very diverse country with lots of different social norms and 'best' ways of living
- Resistance from some religious leaders and authorities to increase the minimum age of child marriage and to discourage/prevent child marriage. This has resulted in some organisations prioritising engagement with religious leaders and other faith based actors, while other organisations actively choose not to work with these groups. Working with religious leaders to prevent child marriage is sensitive and complex work. Juvenile judges reluctant to enter religious territory when it comes to child marriage

Challenges

- Child marriage is a highly politicised issue in Lebanon which can result in some organisations and professions coming into conflict. It is also challenging to provide livelihoods support to prevent child marriage because most Syrian refugees are not legally able to work, and cash assistance programmes are not sustainable
- Framing of child marriage as largely a 'Syrian' problem: Which can result in child marriage being considered as purely a 'cultural' practice rather than as a result of displacement and crisis, and also takes attention away from child marriage that occurs in other groups and minimises the significant work being done by many Lebanese grassroots organisations to change marriage laws for all in Lebanon
- Gaining trust within communities is essential for responding to child marriage and sensitising a community, however many communities are not ready to talk about child marriage openly and comprehensively because they are facing too many economic and social concerns. Concern that talking too much about child marriage will decrease trust unless it is coming from the community as an issue to tackle. Marriage is an important institution but child marriage is considered sensitive to talk about.
- Continued homogenisation and lack of clarity regarding the drivers of child marriage with respondents emphasising very different drivers and minimising the influence of others, and no analysis regarding the intersectionality and cumulative effect of drivers
- Unhelpful generalisations that are made about child marriage across the Syrian community such as it is a Syrian cultural practice or it is only practiced by rural uneducated people
- Identifying affective approaches to prevent and respond to child marriage: It was not clear to participants which approaches were effective in responding to child marriage, and how these approaches can be monitored and evaluated. I.e. are specialised or general programmes more effective, awareness message or preventing the drivers of child marriage?
- Concerns about the effectiveness and impact of different awareness-raising or communities sensitisation activities, especially short one off activities
- Ethical dilemmas which arise through prevention and protection interventions, such as whether to provide cash to married girls or whether to challenge child marriage as a 'cultural' practice or whether to register a child marriage. Recognition that there is a lot of potential to cause harm through poor child marriage interventions.
- Unclear whether need one overall strategy for responding to child marriage and one common approach or whether need to be more responsive to the context and the situation of individual families. Concern that without a central mandate then lots of different organisations will be doing lot of different things that are unconnected and less effective
- Conceptions of consent are difficult to challenge as most girls will give their consent to marriage without the nature of this consent being examined or investigated. Current processes of confirming consent are not safe for girls.

Challenges

- A recent heavy reliance on social media focused advocacy risk marginalising and excluding uneducated and less affluent
- Concern around how viable it actually is for organisations, professionals and religious leaders to change peoples minds once a proposal has been accepted
- Difficulties in responding because of the social acceptability of child marriage: Participants said that families will find ways to facilitate marriage if they believe this is best and the humanitarian community has less experience in responding to 'cultural' or socially acceptable practices which makes responses less effective
- Keeping child marriage a priority for different stakeholders is not easy as it is not always seen as a priority when taking to account the wide range of needs and risks that Syrians face
- Ensuring significant investment in Syrian refugees as crisis is prolonged and as the Lebanese economy continues to struggle and as questions remain about the long term future of refugees
- Married girls risk falling between service gaps, as despite their age, they function as neither children or adults
- How safe are marriage registration processes for married girls and how can they be made safer when girls do not tend to contribute, lack knowledge of the process and are required to engage in complex and long processes

Gaps

- Lack of analysis by INGO's of how to negotiate legal discrepancies in a practice way between international and national legal frameworks and how this impacts on their work
- Limited work with married girls and their livelihoods, health, education and legal needs
- Lack of resources in the Palestinian refugee camps to meet needs to Palestinian refugees from Syria
- Lack of robust published evaluations of responses to child marriage to ensure that resources are invested in strategies that work and have the most meaningful impact, especially for social behavioural change work which might not result in immediate change
- Limited knowledge of child marriage strategies, approaches, tools and best practices used by different organisations and limited cross -organisational learning
- Research on child marriage largely undertaken in Beka'a Valley which is a very different context to other parts of Lebanon (i.e. the South, Beirut, the north)
- Limited focus on adolescent girls in all programmes due to vulnerability and lack of safe spaces just for girls
- Lack of resources (time, financial, expertise) has resulted in limited capacity to respond to child marriage specifically and SGBV sector is significantly underfunded
- Limited engagement and education and health sectors, especially sexual and reproductive health
- Lack of governmental policies, strategies and best practice tools on child marriage
- Lack of governmental support for Syrian refugee communities who struggle to find work and have limited access to health and education systems
- Lack of consideration of sustainability of programmes and responses
- Role of child protection sector is unclear because married girls come under the SGBV sector
- Identifying rates and impact of child marriage amongst boys
- Lack of alternatives to marriage for adolescent girls which are essential for prevention work
- Lack of coordination and communication between academics and practice focused organisations to shape and share research. Need more programmatic focused research.
- Specialised work with boys and men to support prevention strategies
- Training and knowledge sharing: Participants felt there could be a better sharing of tools and practice responses across agencies and sectors

4. Recommendations



4. Recommendations

Advocacy

- Advocacy work needs to continue to build on the current momentum that there is for responses to child marriage which is being led by a number of organisations like RDFL, ABAAD, Kafa, Amel, UNICEF, UNFPA, Care, IRC and Plan international, and for clearer communication on why child marriage remains a priority despite there being many other child protection or SGBV issues
- Further consideration needs to be given to the most effective actors to advocate for the prioritisation of child marriage, and further actions to eliminate child marriage. For example, how can actors from governmental, INGO, NGO and grassroots organisations work together, and who is best placed to do what.
- Strategies are needed to locate advocacy strategies alongside other strategies to prevent or respond to those affected by child marriage

Policy

- Significant policy development is needed in the education, health and livelihoods sector on their role in preventing child marriage and providing care to those who are married as girls including continued educational access, reproductive health care and access to livelihood or cash assistance despite still being 'children'.
- On-going policy development is also needed in the child protection and SGBV sectors, as although child marriage is often included within wider protection policies, for those organisations who are going to increase their focus on child marriage (including adding child marriage specific indicators and monitoring tools), a specific policy would help define and explain the boundaries of their intervention and outline how to effectively respond to child marriage within broader programmes.
- Guidance should be developed for organisations and agencies seeking to develop their policies on child marriage, highlighting how various aspects of a policy might be developed (such as a definition of child marriage, use of terminology, target population, understandings of the drivers and consequences, approaches to use, specific skills and expertise they

bring to the work, and what they are planning to do or any recommendations for others).

- Policymakers need to develop a set of indicators and monitoring tools which can be used to measure the impact of different programmes (and different aspects within programmes) on child marriage, whether it is a child marriage specific programme or not.

Programmes

- There is a need to more formally develop the preventative potential of PSS activities, life skills training, empowerment programmes, safe spaces, case management and SRH education in relation to child marriage, with clarification of their role in prevention, a tailored theory of change and linked indicators.
- Organisations need to pioneer approaches to child marriage in contexts of prolonged displacement which are neither purely emergency nor development-based, but are sustainable in this unique, and increasingly common, context.
- The publication of a set of case studies (or best practice example) of 'child marriage interventions' which showcase a range of approaches across a range of sectors aimed at both prevention and care would support shared learning across sectors and clarify what is meant by a 'child marriage intervention'. Ideally these would be supportive by evaluative material.

Training and knowledge exchange

- More tools and practice guidance related to child marriage are needed, including the use of creative and participatory tools.
- Further specialised training is needed on:
 - How to negotiate conceptions of consent with different stakeholders, and how to challenge claims that consent was given appropriately by a girl under 18 years of age
 - Responding to the different 'reasons' families and girls have for agreeing to marriage under 18 years of age

- Ethical dilemmas raised in practice (i.e. registration of child marriage facilitated by international organisations) as a “form” of protection.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Further clarity is needed about which approaches are most effective in relation to prevention and care, and whether special or targeted programmes on child marriage are needed to complement and support more general programmes (this appears to be needed globally, as well as in relation to Lebanon).

- Specific evidence on if awareness-raising is effective, in what forms, how often and when, is critical for the many organisations working to prevent child marriage.

- Specific indicators on child marriage should be attached to programmes which seek to reduce or eliminate the drivers underpinning child marriage (such as cash assistance, preventing school dropout or sets of advocacy messages on SGBV).

- Organisations and professionals must record the learning and processes that are occurring in Lebanon to develop responses to child marriage, to consolidate learning and to share with other countries in the region.

- The publishing of internal evaluations of interventions which seek to reduce child marriage would support shared learning and contribute to building an evidence base on ‘what works’.

Research

- Policy and programme makers need to develop a shared list of research questions based on the what they need to know to develop more detailed action plans and programmes which respond to child marriage.

- More research is needed on the notion of ‘consent’ and how to open up conversations about the nature of a girl’s consent to marry with all the stakeholders involved.

- Better large scale data collection mechanisms need to be put in place for the drivers and outcomes of child marriage to allow comparative analysis between different groups, as well as in-depth qualitative research to inform specific programme development.

- More in-depth and specific knowledge is needed on the drivers on child marriage amongst Syrian refugees and the impact of the ‘layers’ of drivers. Poverty is one example. Do all families living below the poverty line agree to any proposals of marriage made to their daughters under 18 years of age? Or could poverty

actually act as a barrier to marriage? And does this mean that those living above the poverty line would not consider any proposals of marriage made to their daughters under 18 years of age?

- Research is needed about girls and families who are vulnerable to, or at risk of, child marriage, but who decided not to marry before 18 years of age.

5. Appendix



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Research tool – Professionals

Interview schedule:

This is a semi-structured qualitative Interview which will use open ended questions as much as possible and be responsive to the answers given

Child marriage

How do you encounter young women who are married or who are at risk of marriage under 18 years old?

Do you use the term 'child marriage'? If so, how is it defined?

How do you understand the process of marriage in the refugee community? For example do you know how marriage proposals are initiated and how they are processed by families, and the type of agreements they make?

Do you know why families agree to proposals made to young women under 18 years of age?

For example, why do some families agree to proposals under 18 and others do not?

From your perspective, what are the main risks associated with early marriage? Why is it so problematic?

How varied are the risks and vulnerabilities of those who are married young? i.e. do you tend to see the same challenges in each case or is every case very different?

How do young women, their husbands and families respond to the challenges they face?

What support is available to young women, their husband and families as they respond to the challenges they face? This could include informal or formal support.

Marriage is a religious process in Jordan/Lebanon, governed by religiously based personal status law. Do young women and their families talk much about marriage from a religious point of view?

What kind of influence do religious teachings on marriage have in the community?

How influential are religious leaders who sanction marriages?

What do you think is the impact of displacement and refugee status on early marriage?

Your intervention

What is the nature of your work in response to early marriage (and early childbearing)?

What policy guidance/approaches/best practice guidance/research do you use to guide your professional response to early marriage (and early childbearing)?

How would you describe the 'spirit' the approach you use, i.e. function/main principles/underpinning philosophy?

Is focus of your intervention prevention or care, or both?

What can you do to prevent?

What can you do to care?

What are main challenges of working in response to early marriage?

What are the opportunities?

What are the current gaps?

What other agencies/stakeholders do you connect with? Do you connect with religious leaders and other community leaders and stakeholders, for example? How are these connections made and what are the outcomes?

Has there been any evaluations of your intervention in relation to early marriage? Can you share any strategy documents, policies or information about programmes?

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