



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, the Regional Action Forum to End Child Marriage in Arab States and the MENA Region (RAF)'s work was grounded in a clear and urgent purpose: preventing child marriage and protecting women and girls whose lives and futures are too often shaped by crisis, conflict, and inequality. Through strengthened movement-building and regional engagement, RAF brought together partners across the MENA region to confront child marriage as a shared challenge requiring collective action.

The launch of RAF's new website, regular all-members' meetings, and regionally focused webinars created spaces where practitioners, advocates, and policymakers could exchange evidence, reflect on setbacks such as legal rollbacks and informal marriages, and align around practical solutions. These efforts helped ensure that child marriage prevention remained visible, coordinated, and rooted in the lived realities of girls and communities across the region.

At the same time, RAF placed child marriage prevention at the heart of the humanitarian response, recognizing it as both a protection concern and a lifesaving priority. Through country consultations and the regional launch of the Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings study, RAF amplified evidence showing how families often resort to child marriage in moments of extreme hardship – and how prevention is possible when legal reform, social norms change, and community mobilization come together to prevent and respond to child marriage.

RAF also mobilized collective regional advocacy efforts around child marriage prevention by centering its statements, stories, and social media content around girls' voices during the International Day of the Girl Child and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, reminding stakeholders that prevention requires the safeguarding of girls' agency, education, and right to choose their own futures.

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Action Forum to End Child Marriage in Arab States and the MENA Region (RAF) has held a significant year filled with achievements in the ongoing battle against child marriage in Arab States and the MENA region. Throughout 2025, RAF has engaged its members, partners, and communities in vital discussions and initiatives aimed at addressing the complexities of child marriage, particularly in regions affected by conflict and displacement.

From launching a comprehensive new website to hosting impactful webinars, report launches, and engaging all members' meetings, the platform has taken critical steps toward raising awareness, sharing knowledge, and advocating for the rights of girls and women impacted by child marriage.

This 2025 annual report outlines key milestones reached during the year and sets the stage for future initiatives aimed at eradicating child marriage, and promoting gender equality in the region, so that every girl can reach her full potential.

About the RAF

Established in 2018, the RAF works to eradicate child marriage in alignment with the UNICEF–UNFPA Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

Co-chaired by UNICEF MENA and UNFPA ASRO, RAF serves as a collaborative regional platform bringing together more than 45 UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, and academic institutions.

Its core objectives include strengthening coordination among regional actors, advancing programmatic interventions that address the multiple drivers of child marriage and related harmful practices, fostering knowledge sharing, and ensuring that evidence is effectively translated into action.



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A. MOVEMENT-BUILDING & REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT AROUND CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION

Launch of RAF Website

In March 2025, RAF launched its dedicated website at www.rafmena.org, marking a significant step forward in strengthening regional communication, visibility, and knowledge exchange on child marriage. The platform offers a clear and consolidated presentation of RAF's mandate, evolution, and membership, helping partners and stakeholders better understand the coalition's role in advancing the child marriage agenda across MENA.

Beyond improving public engagement, the website has become a central hub for strategic learning. It features press releases, stories, and webinar recordings that document regional progress and showcase promising approaches. Importantly, it now hosts a curated resource library of more than 70 regional publications, enabling rapid access to evidence, guidance, and tools that support policy dialogue, programme design, and cross-country collaboration.

Members' engagement and mobilization

On 6 March 2025, more than 25 RAF members convened to identify the platform's coordination, thematic, and advocacy priorities for the year ahead. Members emphasized the importance of addressing child marriage prevention and response in contexts marked by recurring refugee and IDP movements, as well as return situations such as those in Syria and Gaza. They also highlighted the need to examine shifts in child marriage policies and legal frameworks, as well as tackling the growing concern around unregistered or undocumented child marriages in settings like Lebanon and Jordan.

Further to these strategic engagements, RAF hosted its second all members' meeting of the year on October 1st 2025, which was attended by more than 35 members. Together, RAF members discussed the launch and utilization of the child marriage in humanitarian settings study and coordinated together on the drafting on RAF's first joint statement ahead of the International Day of the Girl Child.

Throughout the year, members underscored the importance of linking behavioural and social norms change with policy and legal reform to strengthen child marriage prevention and response efforts across the region. It is also important to note that regular engagement with RAF members contributed to informing UNICEF and UNFPA's strategic discussions on ending child marriage in the MENA region and beyond.

Press Releases

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD 2025: EVERY GIRL'S VOICE MATTERS

PUBLISHED DATE: 11 OCT, 2025



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RAF Webinar: Identification & prevention of informal or unregistered child marriages in the MENA Region
with case studies from Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon & Egypt

7 May 2025
@ 14:00 Amman time (GMT+3)
 Arabic-English translation available

RAF
 REGIONAL ACTION FORUM
 TO END CHILD MARRIAGE
 ARAB STATES/MENA

Shatha Al-Hababih
 Prevention Manager at the Jordan River Foundation

Dr. Nour Al Mousawi
 Board Member at Iraq Health Access Organization

Ghenwa Schinder
 Co-founder & Director of Women Alive Organization in Lebanon

Rasha Abouelazm
 Programme Specialist for Adolescent Girls & Youth at UNFPA Egypt Country Office

Webinar on the identification and prevention of informal or unregistered child marriages in the MENA region, with case studies from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt

On 7 May 2025, RAF hosted its first webinar of the year, titled “Identification and Prevention of Informal or Unregistered Child Marriages in the MENA Region,” featuring case studies from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt.

Speakers from UNFPA Egypt, Iraq Health Access Organization, Jordan River Foundation, and Women Alive Lebanon highlighted legal gaps and loopholes that undermine child marriage prevention efforts, as well as barriers limiting access to essential health and protection services for women and girls affected by child marriage and for their children.

The discussion also underscored the need for multi-sectoral, community-based approaches that can drive lasting social and behavioral change for the long-term prevention of child marriage in these contexts.

Watch the [webinar recording here](#).

OHCHR consultation to inform the development of new global guidelines on preventing and eliminating child, early, and forced marriage in the MENA region

On 30 October 2025, RAF members actively participated in a regional consultation convened by OHCHR to inform the development of new global guidelines on preventing and eliminating child, early, and forced marriage.

Representatives from across the RAF network contributed their expertise on effective strategies to address root causes, strengthen access to essential services, and improve protection mechanisms for girls at risk. Members shared lessons from their country and regional experiences, highlighting promising practices in community engagement, legal reform, and multi-sectoral prevention efforts, as well as key challenges faced in humanitarian and displacement-affected contexts.

Their collective input helped ensure that the forthcoming OHCHR guidelines reflect the realities, priorities, and evidence emerging from the MENA region.





B. CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION & RESPONSE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings Study – Regional Launch

On 20 August 2025, RAF hosted the regional launch of the Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings study in close collaboration with UNFPA ASRO, UNICEF MENARO, and UNICEF Innocenti. UNICEF Innocenti undertook the study in five countries in the Middle East, speaking with more than 60 practitioners and policymakers to understand the challenges faced in designing and implementing child-marriage focused programming in complex and diverse humanitarian settings, as well as the facilitators that enable effective programming.

The launch brought together speakers from the League of Arab States, UNICEF and UNFPA global experts, as well as RAF members and local partners from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria,

and Yemen. Together, presenters and participants discussed the study's key findings and recommendations, while also highlighting concrete examples of effective child marriage prevention and response approaches drawn from their own country experiences.

Watch the [webinar recording here](#).

Scale document up

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للصحة الجنسية والإنجابية

برامج الحدّ من زواج الأطفال في السياقات
الإنسانية في العراق والأردن ولبنان
العوامل المعرّقة والميسّرة



البونيسف – مكتب "إنوشنتي" العالمي للبحوث والاستشراف
آب / أغسطس
2025

UNFPA
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BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO PROGRAMMING

Delivering interventions to
address child marriage in
humanitarian settings in Iraq,
Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen



UNICEF INNOCENTI – GLOBAL OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT
AUGUST 2025

Six key regional recommendations on child marriage prevention and response

During the regional launch, RAF members also endorsed six key regional recommendations on child marriage prevention and response that were developed through in-depth country consultations informed by the report's findings and recommendations. These consultations were held one month prior to the launch event in close coordination with UNICEF and UNFPA country offices, alongside local partners and government stakeholders in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. They include:

(1) Creating a shared regional child marriage data and monitoring system:

Build a standardized platform across countries to collect and share accurate, timely data on child marriage. This should include both quantitative and qualitative insights to help shape smarter, contextually relevant and responsive policies and programmes.

(2) Unifying around a clear legal standard with the minimum age for marriage being set at 18 in the region with no judicial exceptions:

Advocate regionally for setting and enforcing a minimum legal age of marriage at 18, without the possibility of judicial exceptions. Legal reform efforts should be led in partnership with women, girls, civil society, youth advocates, local partners, legal experts, community and religious leaders, using culturally sensitive approaches that foster trust and ownership.



(3) Embedding child marriage prevention across all sectors of the regional humanitarian response:

Make child marriage prevention a key component of education, health, protection, and livelihoods programmes among others, especially in humanitarian settings where cross-sectoral coordination is essential to address the multiple drivers and consequences of early marriage. Invest in the development of regional platforms that could foster learning exchanges between responders leading the child marriage prevention response in various affected countries.

(4) Supporting community-led and culturally rooted change on child marriage:

Equip local communities – especially women, girls, families, health care workers, educators and religious leaders – to take the lead in shifting harmful norms. Invest in regional girl-led advocacy, peer to peer education, and cross-cultural community dialogues that make the case for change in ways that resonate at the grassroots level, while also opening the doors for further exchanges and reflection at the national and regional levels.



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(5) Strengthening the link between legal frameworks and social norm transformation:

Complement legal reforms with strategic social norm interventions that make laws meaningful in practice. Invest in awareness campaigns, community dialogues, and educational initiatives that increase understanding of legal protections, reduce tolerance for child marriage, and create a supportive environment for enforcement. Monitoring should track both legal compliance and changes in community attitudes to measure impact holistically.

(6) Securing long-term, flexible regional funding for child marriage prevention, while stressing that it is often a “lifesaving issue” particularly in humanitarian contexts:

Treat child marriage prevention as “lifesaving” and requiring long term investment to reach positive and lasting change. Advocate for a pooled regional funding mechanism that supports innovation, scale-up of proven approaches for child marriage prevention, while furthering sustainability for such programmes.

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RAF Webinar: Addressing Child Marriage in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in times of Increased Uncertainty, Violence, and Displacement

22 October 2025

14:30 to 16:15
(Amman time/GMT+3)

Featuring colleagues from the Women's Affairs Center in Gaza, the Palestinian Medical Relief Association in the West Bank, UNICEF and UNFPA Country Offices in Palestine, and UNRWA.

[Register on ZOOM](#)

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Webinar on child marriage prevention and response in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

On 22 October 2025, RAF hosted its second webinar of the year entitled “Addressing Child Marriage in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in times of Increased Uncertainty, Violence, and Displacement.” It brought together organizations working across Gaza and the West Bank – including UNICEF and UNFPA Palestine Offices, the Women’s Affairs Center in Gaza, the Palestinian Medical Relief Society in the West Bank, and UNRWA colleagues working at the regional office for MENA as well as in Gaza.

Together, speakers examined the persistent challenges linked to child marriage prevention and response in the context of the OPT. Participants discussed how legal gaps, social norms, and ongoing violence and displacement continue to perpetuate early marriage. They highlighted the need for more consolidated data on child marriage cases, the limitations of current legal protections, and the critical role of community engagement, education, and GBV prevention in addressing child marriage.

Despite the difficult context, the session showcased emerging examples of resilience and locally driven efforts – such as engaging with faith and community leaders as well as men and boys – that are helping to protect girls’ rights by preventing early marriage and advancing gender equality in the OPT.

Watch the [webinar recording here](#).



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C. ADVOCACY & REGIONAL MOBILISATION FOR CHILD MARRIAGE PREVENTION

International Day of the Girl Child 2025 - Statement

On 11 October 2025, RAF released [its first joint statement to mark IDGC 2025](#) – under the theme "The Girl I Am, The Change I Lead – Girls at the Frontlines of Crisis" – stressing on the importance of amplifying the voices of girls across the MENA region and investing in meaningful protection, agency, and participation to reach the common goal of achieving gender equality and ending child marriage.

The statement called on governments, civil-society partners, and international stakeholders to redouble efforts to safeguard girls' rights – including their rights to education, protection, and freedom from harmful practices. It emphasized that crises such as conflict, displacement, and economic hardship disproportionately affect girls and increase the vulnerability to child marriage, urging stakeholders to invest in girl-centered policies and programmes.

International Day of the Girl Child 2025 – Stories

As part of the 2025 International Day of the Girl Child campaign, RAF members at Basmeh & Zeitooneh and Yemen Women Union submitted powerful stories from Lebanon and Yemen. These narratives emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces for women and girls, where awareness and protection can flourish. They also showcased the transformative journeys of individuals overcoming adversity, illustrating how empowerment can catalyze healing, reclaiming lives, and fostering joy after enduring significant hardships. Collectively, these stories reinforce the commitment to elevating grassroots voices on critical issues such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and the rights of girls throughout the region.

Explore the [IGDC 2025 stories here](#).



© Yemen Women Union

16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence

To mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, RAF shared a powerful video compiled by its members at the Women's Affairs Center in Gaza. The video showcases the story of a GBV survivor who has been displaced and separated from her children in Gaza. Despite the immense hardship she has faced, she is choosing to reclaim her life and strengthen her own voice. In her message, she speaks directly to young girls in Gaza about the dangers of child marriage, hoping her experience can help protect them from the suffering she has endured. Her courage stands as an inspiring reminder of resilience, hope, and the importance of empowering girls to shape their own futures.

Watch the full [video here](#).



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The RAF hopes to continue its mission to prevent and respond to child marriage in the MENA region throughout 2026 and beyond.

Below are a few of the activities planned for the coming year:

- Finalizing French and Arabic sections of the RAF website;
- Webinar on child marriage prevention and response in the context of refugee returns to Syria;
- Webinar on partnering with social media influencers and the private sector for the child marriage prevention and advocacy in the MENA region;
- RAF all members meeting and discussions around engaging further with women and girls who have survived child marriage in the region; and
- External evaluation of the RAF and development of a sustainability plan.





Being part of the RAF has been valuable for Basmeh & Zeitooneh in advancing advocacy to end child marriage and address its links to GBV, grounded in community realities. The network created opportunities to share experiences from our work in Shatila and Burj el-Barajneh camps, including during the IDGC, and to engage in discussions that highlight survivor-informed and community-led approaches. RAF has also fostered meaningful connections with organizations working toward similar goals. Going forward, we would welcome more space for peer learning and for local actors' experiences to meaningfully inform regional advocacy and collective action.

– RAF Member Basmeh & Zeitooneh

As a Women's Rights Organization, Women Alive Lebanon deeply values the shared learning, coordination and solidarity that the RAF creates. Being part of a regional movement strengthens our local impact by connecting our community based activism to broader advocacy and best practices, mainly related to marginalized communities. Taking part in different webinars, studies, and events as speakers or participants has enabled us to contribute to the network while at the same time benefiting from other RAF members' expertise, with the ultimate goal of amplifying the voices of young girls and women. As RAF members, we hope that our child marriage prevention and response strategies can align even further, enabling us to respond more efficiently to the the complex economic, social and cultural drivers of child marriage in our region.

– RAF Member Women Alive Lebanon



CONCLUSION

As we reflect on the achievements of 2025, it is clear that our collective efforts have kept the child marriage prevention and response agenda at forefront of our members' humanitarian and development work. The initiatives undertaken this year have not only generated awareness but have also fostered collaboration among diverse stakeholders committed to ensuring a safer and more equitable future for girls.

Looking ahead to 2026, RAF is poised to build on these successes, with plans for further webinars, community engagement, and strategic partnerships aimed at preventing child marriage in increasingly challenging contexts. Together, we remain dedicated to giving a voice to the girls at the frontlines and advocating for meaningful change in policies and practices that protect their rights and ensure their empowerment.



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