

CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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- The world is home to **650 MILLION** child brides, including currently married girls and women who were first married in childhood.

Of those, **40 MILLION** (equivalent to 6 per cent) child brides are in the MENA region. The highest numbers are in Sudan and Yemen.

- Every year, **700,000** girls are forced into child marriage in the MENA region.



- The prevalence of child marriage varies within the region, from a high of one in three in Sudan and Yemen to a low of one in 50 in Tunisia.
- Child marriage is driven by multiple interconnected factors, varying within and across countries. Poverty, low levels of education, community pressure, gender-discriminatory social and cultural norms, absence or non-enforcement of laws. Insecurity and other harmful practices determine and perpetuate the practice.
- Girls living in rural areas or those from poorer households have a higher risk of being married early.
- Child marriage increases during armed conflicts.

Figures by country

► Egypt

Nearly **one in every 20 girls (4 per cent)** between the ages of 15 and 17 and **one in every 10 (11 per cent)** adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are currently married or were married before, with large differentials between rural and urban areas.

► Sudan

The prevalence of female carers age 20-24 years who married at or before age 15 was 26.6 per cent.

The proportion of respondents who married before age 18 was much higher at 60.2 per cent, suggesting that many marriages take place between the ages of 15 and 18.

► Yemen

Thirty two per cent of girls in Yemen are married before the age of 18.

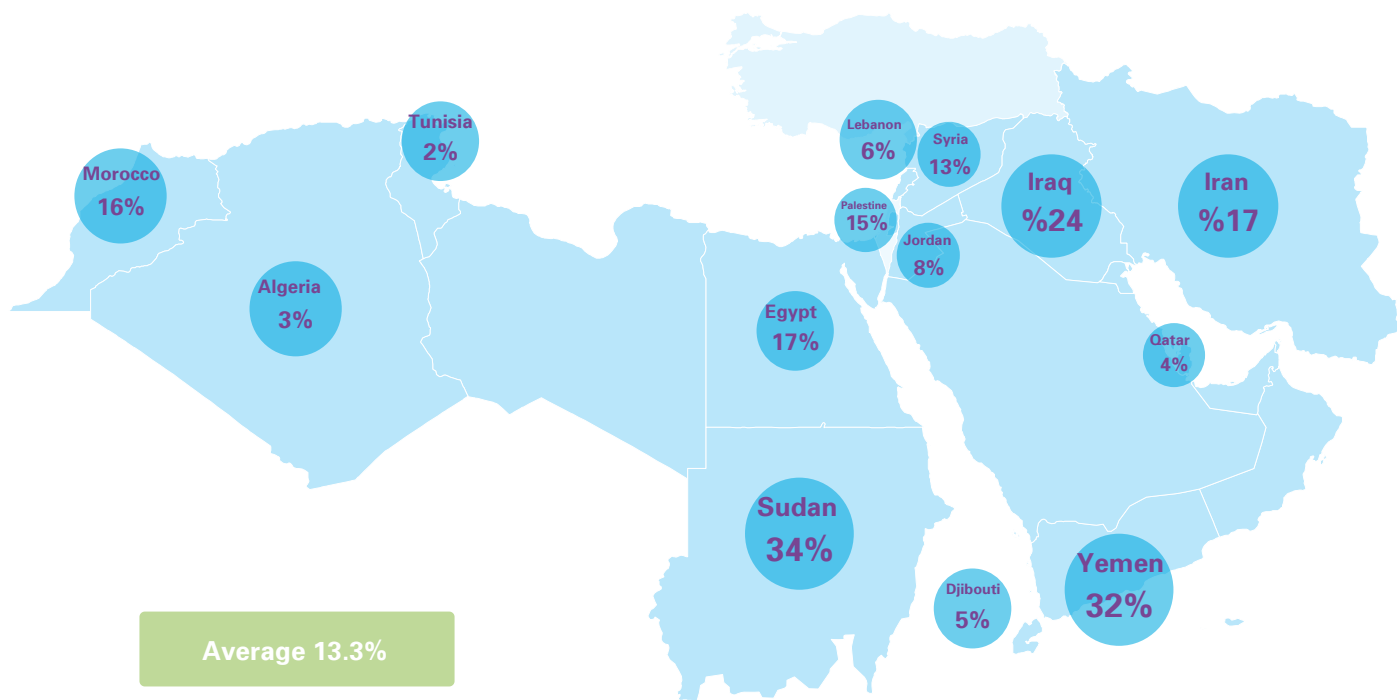
► Morocco

Nine per cent prevalence of child marriage

► Djibouti

Nearly 3.3 per cent of girls aged 10–14 and **10 per cent** of girls aged 15-17 are married.

Percentage of women who were married before age 18 in the MENA region



The impact of COVID-19 on child marriage

According to a UNICEF global report from March 2021, the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage can be seen in five ways:

- Interrupted education and school closures increase child marriage risk by

22%
per year



- Disruptions to programmes and services**, because delayed programmes to prevent child marriage are estimated to result in a one-year loss of gains from such programmes. Widely applied mobilisation of effective programming could reduce risk by

33% in a mitigation scenario.

- Economic shocks**, given that in countries where paying a bride price is common, loss of household income increases the probability of marriage by

3%

- Death of a parent** can increase the likelihood that a female orphan will be married off, since family members may find it hard to support her.

- Higher pregnancy rates** as child marriage and dropping out of school increases.



UNICEF's response*

► Egypt

Socio-behavioural activities in the frame-work of the foster-parenting project, showing docudramas on different topics including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage in clubs, including for mothers, fathers and children.

► Jordan

UNICEF is working on a strategy for the Zaatari Refugee Camp - where there has been an increase in child marriage – aiming to involve communities in self-evaluation. Based on the outcomes, the strategy will be replicated in other areas and at the national level.

► Morocco

In 2019, UNICEF launched a project that promotes positive social norms and a protective legal framework for girls against sexual violence and child marriage.

UNICEF and the public prosecutor's office are conducting a study on the legal framework and judicial practices in relation to child marriage, to develop the capacities and awareness of magistrates and judges to better assess and defend the best interests of a child and to strengthen their role in protecting children from marriage

UNICEF, along with UN Women, UNFPA and the National Observatory of Human Development are developing a national study on child marriage, focusing on prevalence, profiles, costs and policy impacts.

► Sudan

Several child marriage prevention initiatives are on using community facilitators and religious and key community leaders.

UNICEF supports girls' clubs in schools in ten states. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, these clubs provided the opportunity for a successful and coordinated exchange between mothers, girls and teachers, in the course of which the issue of child marriage was also tackled. Sometimes during these discussions, cases of child marriage were reported.

► Yemen

Yemen is part of the 'Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage' modified to take account of the

humanitarian crisis. Utilising a whole-community approach to empowering girls and engaging community stakeholders. Based on a strategy to engage with communities, anyone with the potential to influence the community is identified to lead social dialogue on child protection.

► Djibouti

UNICEF and UNFPA integrate work on child marriage within activities for the prevention of Gender-Based Violence and harmful practices, particularly FGM. For instance, during the "16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women and Girls" international campaign, UNFPA posted awareness-raising videos on social media on GBV, including child marriage.

*Many of these responses have been suspended or impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic



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