

Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa

unicef 
for every child

Executive Summary

UNICEF Middle East and
North Africa Regional Office



This report was developed in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and funded by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The views expressed and information contained in the report are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, UNICEF.

Acknowledgements

The development of this report was a joint effort with UNICEF regional and country offices and partners, with contributions from UNFPA. Thanks to UNICEF and UNFPA Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, Morocco and Egypt Country and Regional Offices and their partners for their collaboration and crucial inputs to the development of the report.

Proposed citation: 'Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa – Executive Summary', United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Middle East and North Africa Regional Office in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2017.

Child Marriage in the Middle East and North Africa
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office

Study Rationale

01 The overall rate of child marriage in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been declining for decades and is now meaningfully lower than the global average. The current rates remain nonetheless alarming, with serious concerns about the impact of instability on child marriage within the region. At the regional level, 18 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18 whilst 3 per cent of girls are married before the age of 15.¹ However, prevalence varies across the region, masking the wide variation in prevalence between different countries in the region which ranges from 3 per cent married before 18 in Algeria to 32 per cent in Yemen.² Moreover, data on national averages do not capture trends of child marriage prevalence at sub-national level where rates are much higher, particularly in countries affected by conflict.³ Although the relationship between conflict and increase in the incidence of child marriage has not yet been clearly established, this is a worrying trend in what is a fragile region affected by conflict and prevailing humanitarian contexts in a number of countries (see box 1).

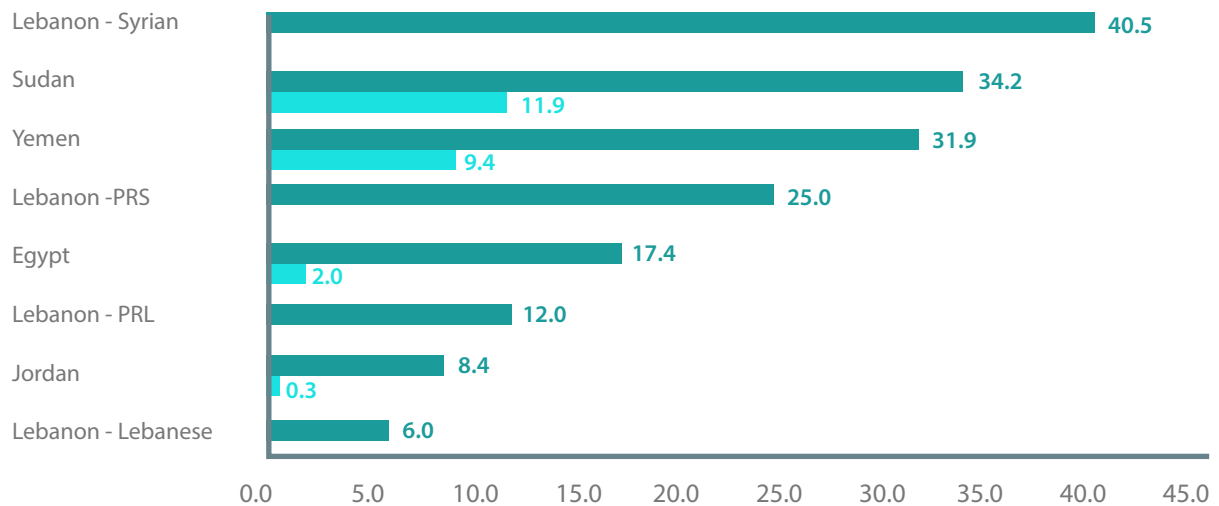
BOX 1

How conflict influences child marriage

In the MENA region, where child marriage is practiced in peacetime, its prevalence increases during violent conflict. In Yemen a survey undertaken in 2013 showed the prevalence of respondents married before the ages of 15 and 18 had increased since the start of the conflict. This is also true of girls affected by the conflict in Syria, as evidenced by the growing number of Syrian refugee girls being married in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. Of the top ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage, nine are considered fragile states, illustrating the reality that conflict impacts child-marriage decisions. As CARE International's 2015 report put it, the increased prevalence of child marriage in conflict situations is largely the result of the, 'fatal confusion between protecting girls and sexual violence'. In an environment where girls and young women are more susceptible to rape, families choose marriage as a method to protect girls from the dishonour of being raped and having children out of wedlock. This increased need to secure girls' honour (as a method of securing family honour) is seen in Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, where girls from urban Syrian communities – areas where child marriage was not commonly practiced before the conflict – are increasingly being married before age 18.

02 In the six countries of interest, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen, prevalence rates vary greatly, with high rates in regions affected by conflict. These statistics are based on the most recently available DHS, MICS (see figure 1), or equivalent population-based representative house hold survey. For the countries with available data, the percentage of women aged 20-24 years married before age 15 ranged from a low of 0.3 per cent in Jordan⁴ to a high of 11.9 per cent in Sudan.⁵ The percentage of women aged 20-24 years who married before age 18 was lowest amongst Lebanese women in Lebanon at 6.0 per cent and highest amongst Syrian women in Lebanon at 40.5 per cent.⁶ Median age at first marriage of women 25-49 ranged from 18.2 years in Yemen to 26.3 in Morocco.⁸

Figure 1: Percentage of women 20-24 first married by exact ages 15 and 18.



- Percent of women 20-24 first married by exact age 18
- Percent of women 20-24 first married by exact age 15

Source: Egypt DHS 2014; Jordan PFHS 2012; Lebanon UNICEF Baseline Survey 2016; Sudan MICS 2014; Yemen DHS 2013

03 There is progress in the international and regional responses to child marriage prevention but important gaps remain. Several international conventions have committed to eradicating child marriage, detailing states' responsibilities for protecting children from marriage, defining minimum age of marriage, and requiring free and full consent in any marital decisions. Amongst them, the African Union has recently urged its Member States to develop comprehensive action plan for marriage at 18.⁹ More recently, the global community agreed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) target 5.3, which proposes to eliminate harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, a key initiative to advance gender equality. Although some progress has been made, these legal reforms and commitments to prevent marriage and safeguard children's rights have not been carried out adequately in many MENA countries. Commitments made by several states in the region can be followed more intently by drafting national action plans and adopting a minimum age of marriage for girls at 18 as important first steps to eradicating child marriage. The enforcement of such laws and plans are critical, however, ensuring sustainable change requires collaboration and commitment across ministries, from the national to local levels within countries. Indeed, efforts to prevent child marriage will be in vain unless translated into action, which requires not only rhetoric, but funding to support action.

Background

01 The Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage is a joint initiative between UNICEF and UNFPA focused on proven strategies, including:



Increasing girls' **empowerment**



Access to **education and health care** services



Raising awareness among parents and communities on the dangers of child marriage



Increasing **economic support** to families



Strengthening and **enforcing laws** that establish 18 as the minimum age of marriage.



The programme also emphasizes the importance of **using robust data** to inform policies related to adolescent girls.

02 In light of the Global Programme, this study was designed to inform the scaling up of efforts to address child marriage in the MENA region. In 2016 the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MENARO) partnered with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to take stock and assess current and ongoing programmatic responses, explore promising approaches, and identify gaps with a view to accelerate and scale up efforts to address child marriage across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, specifically in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen and Morocco. The study provides country-level and regional-level analyses and recommendations for programming at the local, national and regional levels to strengthen work to end child marriage.

03 This study followed a five-phase methodology, and was carried out in 2016-2017.

- Desk review of legal policies and national strategies/action plans as well as programmes and interventions related to child marriage prevention.
- Evidence gap mapping.
- Primary data collection with key experts (representatives from governmental institutions, UN organizations, and non-governmental organizations and service providers) and subsequent analysis highlighting promising approaches and where gaps remain.
- Stakeholder consultation during which the findings and recommendations were validated, resulting in a draft report on how to strengthen and expand promising practices in addressing child marriage.
- Revision and finalization of results and recommendations.

Key Findings

The key findings and recommendations for the regional analysis are summarized in terms of the 5 outcomes of the Global Programme.

5 Outcomes of the Global Programme

- 01 Outcome 1:**
Girls' Voice & Agency
- 02 Outcome 2:**
Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours
- 03 Outcome 3:**
Service Delivery
- 04 Outcome 4:**
Legal Context
- 05 Outcome 5:**
Evidence Generation

Outcome 1: **Girls' Voice & Agency:**

Across the six countries of focus, restricted social and spatial mobility outside of the household is a significant factor driving child marriage, contributing to limited access to education, economic opportunities, and health facilities, as well as vulnerability to gender-based violence, and limited access to justice.

For example, in Yemen, the Personal Status law requires a wife's obedience to her husband and his consent to leave the home or travel abroad (Art. 40).¹⁰ Similarly, in Egypt and Morocco, a woman's ability to move freely within and outside of the household is restricted by men's control over women's mobility. Interviews with child marriage experts at all levels indicated that mobility restrictions have important implications for accessing education and health services.

Outcome 2: **Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours:**

Across the six countries, the drivers of child marriage are complex, diverse and contextual; they are the outcomes of the interplay between the macro-social forces and the local traditions and cultural experiences. In this regard, child marriage serves multiple social and cultural functions which together reinforce gendered social roles: that of maintaining kinship and securing inheritance/economic stability; marking transition to adulthood; providing financial security; protection from (sexual) violence; and promoting social cohesion in the community; amongst others. These functions vary in degrees of strength depending on the country's historical, economic, political and cultural heritage as well as global social changes that can affect the country. This is because these factors can lead to political conflict, extreme economic insecurity, deterioration of infrastructure and service delivery, or reinforcement of dominant cultural models related to women's femininity and sexuality.

Outcome 3: **Service Delivery:**

Service delivery was the domain in which findings were most different between countries, reflecting the need for services to be tailored to their diverse, specific contexts. However, some gaps in service provision related to child marriage were identified across multiple countries. For example, key informants from both Egypt and Jordan discussed the urgent need for appropriate reporting mechanisms to effectively report and respond to child marriages. Respondents from both Jordan and Yemen recognized a need to develop better services for girls at risk of child marriage and for those already married. Both Sudan and Yemen called for a critical need in funding to provide effective prevention and response services. Finally, both Lebanon and Yemen identified the health sector as a promising point of contact through which to reach at-risk and married girls.

Outcome 4: Legal Context:

Despite the fact that most countries studied have ratified international conventions, including CEDAW and CRC, which set the minimum age of marriage at 18, exceptions to key provisions of these conventions allow child marriage to remain legal in certain circumstances in most countries. Of the six countries, all have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Committee for the Rights of the Child considers that the minimum age for marriage must be 18 years. Additionally, apart from Sudan, all countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which restricts states from giving legal effect to marriages that involve children, and urges states to specify a minimum age for marriage. However, although most countries have ratified CRC and CEDAW, many reservations remain outstanding. Egypt remains the only country with a minimum age for marriage of 18 without judicial exception. Jordan and Morocco have both set the legal age for marriage as 18 but provide judges with the discretion to marry girls that are younger. In both Sudan and Yemen, puberty is broadly used as the age at which marriage of girls is appropriate and acceptable. In Lebanon, religious law determines the age of marriage, which varies depending on the religion and denomination.

Figure 2: International commitments



Outcome 5: Evidence Generation:

Across the six countries, the most common need articulated by stakeholders related to evidence generation was the need for better coordination amongst different groups conducting research and programming related to child marriage. According to them, this lack of coordination directly contributes to the perpetuation of evidence gaps. Additionally, respondents from several countries identified the need for better data on child marriage, a need which is discussed more thoroughly in the following paragraphs. Two countries identified specific domains where further evidence is needed—respondents in Egypt wanted more evidence on the link between child marriage and education, whilst respondents in Yemen wanted more evidence on the link between child marriage and conflict. Promisingly, robust studies on child marriage are currently underway in both Lebanon and Sudan.

It is currently difficult to assess the prevalence of child marriage in the MENA as most of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data on child marriage prevalence precede conflicts in the region, making them largely unreliable. Jordan is a positive example in terms of addressing this data gap. The country's most recent Population, Family and Health Study (conducted in 2012) specifically included data collection amongst Syrian refugees in a way that allows for comparison with other populations and regions within and outside the country. It is critical that updated, nationally-representative population studies be conducted in all countries, with an eye to sampling that will reinforce understandings of child marriage amongst refugee and migrant populations.

In addition to prevalence data, additional tools and methodologies are needed to better understand the social norms that may be underlying child marriage in these countries. Social norms are not well captured in traditional surveys such as the DHS and MICS.

The following regional recommendations address general recommendations that apply broadly in all cases where child marriage programming is being developed. These represent the key overriding findings from this study and should be considered as critical to effective child marriage programming.

Key Regional Recommendations

- 1 There is a need to strengthen the focus of interventions in a context-specific way to improve its scalability; a comprehensive situational analysis must be implemented, including a gender analysis to understand the disparities in power and resources as well as conflicts of interest.¹¹
- 2 Support, nurture and consult with local gender expertise in the form of local women's organizations as well as those focusing on child marriage, including capacity development to engage men and boys, to ensure that programming is driven and informed at the grassroots level.¹²
- 3 Ensure high quality interventions by establishing a theory of change and including stakeholders in a participatory approach to design and implementation; where possible, conduct a pilot phase.¹³
- 4 Guarantee multi-year funding of programmes to ensure sufficient time for rigorous evaluation over a several-year period; funding to governments should have clear tranches linked to monitoring so that results are seen before new money is released.
- 5 Focus on programming that targets child marriage and the structural factors that drive it; programmes that incorporate child marriage as a smaller part of broader goals (i.e. empowerment, SRH, HIV) are less likely to have impact.¹⁴
- 6 Improve scalability to ensure reliable service delivery to the most rural and remote communities. This can be achieved through sustained and expanded funding to programming that is proven to effectively reach remote communities, such as mobile units to provide safe spaces and health services.
- 7 Emphasize the socioecological framework when designing effective programming, by recognizing the interplay between interventions and child marriage at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels.¹⁵

- 8 Countries' legal frameworks must be strengthened to meet international standards by eliminating exceptions that grant judges authority to sanction child marriages.

The following recommendations set out evidence-based programme recommendations specific to the five outcome areas of the Global Programme, drawing from the key recommendations at the country levels.

Recommendations specific to the 5 outcomes of the Global Programme

Outcome 1: Girls' Voice & Agency



Create safe spaces for girls

- ✓ Create adolescent girls' empowerment groups through safe spaces in schools and the community, using peer-to-peer methods to develop skills, discuss life and sex, and report violence and child marriage.¹⁶
- ✓ Support schools to apply a zero-tolerance policy to the use of violence and sexual behaviour in schools.¹⁷
- ✓ Use health and Sexual and Reproductive Health as a gateway for girls' access, establish clinics in communities and schools that provide health advice and services, in addition to discussing issues of acceptable sexual behaviour and child marriage.¹⁸
- ✓ Provide out-of-school girls aged 15 to 17 with literacy classes, life skills programming, and sport activities whilst also intervening with their parents and communities in order to change norms about girls' roles in society.¹⁹
- ✓ Support the adoption of women's safety audits at the community level.²⁰
- ✓ Take a 'whole of community' approach to identifying, reporting and preventing harassment and abuse of women in public places.²¹
- ✓ Model and upscale UN Women's 'Women and Girls Oasis' at the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan.²²
- ✓ Model and upscale the safe spaces initiative in Lebanon which works through national Listening and Counseling Centers, offers activities for children whilst mothers participate in their own activities.²³
- ✓ Create opportunities for healthy interactions and communication between boys and girls.²⁴



Build on girls' empowerment through education

- ✓ Provide direct incentives (cash, food) to keep girls in school, conditional on children's school attendance (evidence shows that this does work, albeit that it is largely unsustainable in terms of cost alone).^{25,26}
- ✓ Replace direct cash transfers to families with delivering incentives through the school. Work with ministries of education to decrease the cost of school through provision of safe transport, uniform, school meals, and equipment.²⁷
- ✓ Partner with national level governments to ensure that curricula do not affirm detrimental gender norms and raise awareness of harmful practices.²⁸ One example of a gender-sensitive curriculum currently being implemented in the MENA region is the Life Skills and Citizenship Education initiative.²⁹
- ✓ Cultivate critical thinking in girls, recognizing and investing in their agency, so that they are better able to make informed choices when given the opportunity.³⁰
- ✓ Train teachers to recognize their own gender biases and promote a gender transformative approach to teaching which includes sessions on gender, violence, bodily changes, emotions and conflict resolution.³¹
- ✓ Support the training of female teachers to keep girls in school (in Yemen, for example, male teachers can be an obstacle for girls' enrolment).³²
- ✓ Ban all forms of discrimination that prevent access to school based on marital status, pregnancy or motherhood, whilst addressing needs for child support to enable young mothers to return to school.³³



Build on girls' empowerment by providing economic opportunities

- ✓ Provide girls with workforce education and vocational training.³⁴
- ✓ Provide girls with opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.³⁵
- ✓ Provide girls with financial literacy and savings and loan opportunities, including opportunities for saving and investment where access is not controlled by male relatives.³⁶



Increase opportunities for girls' participation

- ✓ Build mechanisms for girls to participate at the local/community level along with creating an environment that will allow them to participate.³⁷
- ✓ Consider a wide range of opportunities for girls' participation, including community activities, initiatives, digital engagement and volunteering activities.³⁸

- ✓ Support girls to participate in UNICEF's Voices of Youth initiative, which provides an online platform for young people to share information and perspectives.³⁹

Outcome 2: Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours.



Engage receptive religious leaders

- ✓ Work with religious leaders to build their capacity to communicate accurate information to communities on child marriage,⁴⁰ including by working with other religious leaders to develop their understanding of scriptural support for girls' education and delaying marriage.⁴¹ For example, see box 2.

BOX 2

Good Practice from Morocco on the importance of engaging religious leaders

Based in Morocco, La Rabita Mohammedia des Oulémas (Mohammadia League of Scholars) has been particularly successful in engaging religious leaders and communities on gender-based violence, including child marriage. Their peer-educator model is being replicated in several other African countries. In addition, La Rabita has a production of audio-visual aids (short films) aimed at sensitising children. La Rabita trains young men to use new methods of public speaking and persuasion to teach children and youth about human rights. Peer educators also play a major role in enhancing children's critical thinking and implementing a culture that respects human rights. The use of the New Technologies of Information and Communication has proven to be a powerful eye opening and leadership building approach.



Implement holistic community programming

- ✓ Mobilize gatekeepers (community leaders, religious leader, teachers, doctors) and build their capacity as champions of girls' education and the benefits of delaying marriage.⁴²
- ✓ Using 'communication for development' and 'behaviour change' strategies, employ the media, radio and television, mosques and schools to relay messaging on the negative consequences of child marriage and the benefits of delaying marriage (including examples of benefits and achievements experienced by individuals and families who delayed marriage);⁴³ whilst undertaking local community outreach programmes that focus on child participation and education of parents in changing social norms.⁴⁴
- ✓ Develop initiatives that work with men and boys using a peer-to-peer methodology, introducing and encouraging more progressive ideas of gender norms, the roles of men and women, and the benefits to delaying marriage.⁴⁵

- ✓ Train 'youth agents of change' to lead transformative actions in schools and other settings to promote respectful gender relationships, gender equality and safety in public spaces.⁴⁶
- ✓ Engage the community through group and community education sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage.⁴⁷
- ✓ Establish community committees, devoted to detecting and intervening in cases of child marriage.⁴⁸



Work directly with men and boys



➤ Work with young men to discuss and challenge social perceptions and expectations placed upon them, building their understanding and capacity to exercise agency in a way that is more gender equitable and less harmful.⁴⁹



➤ Model and scale up the MenCare approach of Pro-mundo and Wold Vision, working with fathers, uncles and male family leaders to understand the harm of early marriage, and address gender norms and roles within and without the household alongside their female family members.⁵⁰



➤ Build the capacity of civil society organizations, especially women's organizations, to work with men and boys on addressing and reducing harmful normative attitudes and behaviour.⁴⁸

BOX 3

Good practice on the importance of engaging men and boys

The review of programming in the region included Save the Children's CHOICES curriculum, which worked with young adolescent girls and boys to question gender roles and norms. Results from this project included an increased agreement amongst participants that girls make their marriage decision and that girls should discuss the unsuitability of potential grooms with their fathers. This project highlights a critical point for programming on child marriage – the importance of working with men and boys. Working with men and boys in the community can increase the ability of girls to obtain permission to access services and opportunities; it may also address the risks associated with the hostility that men can have towards programming that is restricted to women and girls. Working with men and boys is also necessary to challenge the norms and behaviours in relation to women, which can be enhanced when messaging and normative change is passed from men to men through peer networks.

One approach to behaviour and socio-normative change is to address the roles and responsibilities that drive male relationships with women. Working with the framework of what 'responsible' or 'real' male behaviour is towards women, programming can start to reframe this as actions and behaviours that do no harm to women and girls, including sisters, cousins and daughters. Such actions and behaviours include sexual conduct and early marriage. The notion that young men are considered to be wild and reckless, whilst older men are more responsible and stable, can be the basis of the reason why older men are considered more desirable for a girl to marry. However, this framing of young men being associated with risky sexual behaviour, violence and lack of engagement in care work, can be challenged directly when men and boys are given adequate support, with evidence showing that they can adopt equitable attitudes and behaviours which have protective effects against harmful practices.

In societies where girls and boys are often separated, there is a lack of understanding about what is considered acceptable behaviour with the opposite sex. In a report by Girl Power Alliance, this was identified as an important reason behind harassment of girls in Pakistan, for example. As such, programming should include the establishment of safe spaces, in which girls and boys can safely explore different ideas of their gender roles and experiment with new forms of interaction. Such spaces need to be established in ways that do not generate conflict with parents (or include programming approaches to increase parental permission). However, examples could include sports, dance, arts and culture and other activities that could be complemented by education on transforming gender norms, relationships and sexuality.

Programming can be framed around work with parents, in particular fathers and uncles, to understand the harm of early marriage. Such work can also look at the financial implications on early marriage for the girl, as well as exploring and illustrating how a greater balance between the genders may look in the household. As part of the MenCare campaign, for example, Promundo and World Vision engaged fathers in India in the promotion of gender equality in the home and the prevention of child marriage through encouraging men, their partners and daughters, to reflect upon the cultural and gender norms that devalue girls and present barriers to men's participation as caring, involved fathers.



Identify and support positive deviants

- ✓ Learn from the actions and attitudes of positive deviants in order to identify emic methods for improving gender-equitable attitudes at the household and community level.⁵¹

Outcome 3: Service Delivery



Build technical capacity of stakeholders

- ✓ Develop tools and build capacity in order to clarify referral and reporting processes.
- ✓ Strengthen training for case managers on how to ensure access to services for child brides.
- ✓ Develop country specific technical reference materials for service providers, that include relevant information on laws, regulations, processes and services relevant to child marriage.
- ✓ Increase the number of Syrian staff working with child marriage-affected refugee communities.
- ✓ Incorporate knowledge and capacity building on identifying and preventing child marriage in the training of service delivery providers in the health and education sectors.



Increase financial resourcing and support of local/rural organizations /service delivery

- ✓ Provide financial support to women's rights activists/groups who work on child marriage advocacy, outreach and legal advocacy groups that bring cases of child marriage to courts. Engage donors in advocacy with governments and other stakeholders on child marriage.⁵²
- ✓ Ensure funding to the state on child marriage is attached to conditions that require cooperation with civil society and contains clear monitoring frameworks and benchmarks that must be met in order to get further funding.⁵³
- ✓ Reach out to new stakeholders, especially those working in rural areas and young gender activists who are able to promote messaging at the ground level and locally.⁵⁴
- ✓ Ensure that women's rights organizations and implementing partners for programming are key strategic partners and involved in monitoring.⁵⁵
- ✓ Support greater donor coordination to prevent competitive behaviour between organizations.⁵⁶
- ✓ Provide long-term, multi-year, core funding to women's rights organizations who are working on child marriage, so that they can engage in activism as well as project implementation, as necessary.⁵⁷
- ✓ Make grant mechanisms more accessible in terms of technical and language requirements.⁵⁸
- ✓ Use OECD's 'Strategies to Improve Rural Service Delivery' to strengthen delivery of services to rural and remote communities.⁵⁹
- ✓ Develop joint capacity development efforts, coordinating resources for service delivery.⁶⁰

Employ a multi-sectoral approach

- ✓ Integrate prevention and response services across various sectors to create a holistic approach for reducing child marriage and mitigating its effects by meeting the needs of married adolescents.⁶¹
- ✓ Integrate child marriage prevention and response into broader structural efforts.⁶²
- ✓ Seek opportunities to leverage funding and resources across funders and implementers from all sectors.⁶³

Outcome 4: Legal Context



Build understanding of politicians and judges to understand girls' rights and the detrimental impacts of child marriage

- ✓ Develop 'bench books' or judicial guides for judges and judicial officers on child rights and child marriage.
- ✓ Build the capacity of judges and justice professions, including on international norms on child rights and child marriage and how they differ to domestic frameworks; access to fair trials; and gender considerations.
- ✓ Provide capacity development and leadership forums for female parliamentarians to strengthen the weight of their advocacy on child marriage, whilst providing broader training on child marriage prevention for parliamentarians in general to recognize risks and rights related to the practice.



Develop national strategy plans and implementation plans

- ✓ Support participatory processes to developing national strategies and implementation plans with a monitoring framework.
- ✓ Support the development of inter-ministerial taskforces and strengthen their ability to coordinate a national approach to addressing child marriage.
- ✓ Advocate for incorporation of child marriage in strategies addressing violence against women (e.g. in Egypt) and women's empowerment.⁶⁴



Strengthen child marriage laws and enforcement

- ✓ Set the minimum age for marriage as 18 in law without judicial exception, codifying Sharia law to eliminate subjective interpretation.⁶⁵
- ✓ Prohibit and criminalize marriage to a person under the age of 18.

- ✓ Introduce statutory rape laws.
- ✓ Build capacity of judicial officers and marriage registrars to understand and apply the minimum age law where it exists; to understand the detrimental impact of child marriage and benefits in delaying marriage; and to promote counselling for couples seeking marriage where one or more party is under eighteen.⁶⁶
- ✓ Once laws are in place, build girls' and communities' knowledge of girls' and women's legal rights related to marriage.⁶⁷

Outcome 5: Evidence Generation



Strengthen the coordination of research amongst stakeholders

- ✓ Take a participatory approach to establishing a system of coordination and collaboration on research and data collection and analysis.
- ✓ Ensure that government and civil society are engaged in any coordination mechanisms.
- ✓ Develop an evidence-based regional programming framework.



Standardize key indicators and ensure all programming is coupled with high quality interventions⁶⁸

- ✓ Revisit indicators used for household surveys to ensure gender-disaggregated data and data on the social norms driving child marriage.
- ✓ Ensure that Monitoring and Evaluation identifies unintended impacts: For example, when coupled with provision of school uniform, the presence of teacher training rendered the positive impact of uniform provision invisible; likewise, the impact of increasing the age of marriage was that the dowry price increased; some schools demanded payments when they knew that there was a cash-based programme in action.
- ✓ Strengthen monitoring systems, using surveys and real-time monitoring to track incidence of child marriage, and using UNICEF's global monitoring framework, Monitoring Results for Equity Systems (MoRES) to monitor child marriage programme activities.
- ✓ For UNICEF implementers, ensure interventions are aligned with the new version of the UNICEF gender action plan (GAP) and new strategic plan 2018-2021 at the global level and the Country Programme Document (CPD) at the local level, paying specific attention to how this can link up with the adolescent girls' empowerment lens stipulated in the new CPD.

Results from the study identified the need for further evidence on the drivers and consequences of child marriage. These should be designed in accordance with the priorities identified by Synanemyr et al (2015)⁶⁹

Causes:

- Research the impact of structural and geopolitical factors, including conflict, migration and urbanization.
- Better understand the normative shifts in perceptions and expectations of marriage.
- Study what works in delaying marriage, including education, structural factors and normative changes.
- Build understanding of how girls exercise their agency in deciding to marry. In identifying their agency as 'thin', 'opportunistic' and 'oppositional', there is room to build and strengthen agency.⁷⁰

Consequences:

- Research health and social consequences of child marriage, beyond maternal and perinatal health, including specific vulnerabilities of younger adolescent girls.
- Gather longitudinal data on the intergenerational impact of child marriage and its relationship to social, development, health, and gender issues.
- Collect data on the economic costs of child marriage including early childbearing, maternal morbidity and mortality, abortion, violence, and decreased educational and employment potential.

Prevention:

- Identify essential components of child marriage interventions to scale up, the required intensity and duration of implementation, mechanisms for delivering these interventions, and the cost of scaling up.
- Measure sustainability of changes in child marriage norms and practices, and the wider benefits of these changes on girls' and women's lives.
- Conduct research into prevention and response initiatives to identify the effective mix of sanctions and incentives.
- Identify lessons that can be learned from other areas of social and cultural norm change.

Key Conclusions and Implications for Programming

- Throughout the region, structural and geopolitical factors influence the drivers of child marriage. In particular, conflict increases the risk of economic insecurity and poverty which together, exacerbate child marriage practices and sexual violence. In addition to increasing prevalence, these structural and geopolitical forces further affect funding to programming focused on child marriage with drastic cuts, whilst presenting challenges to the implementation of such programming, especially in relation to securing government commitment and overcoming logistical issues.
- Where government and donor priorities turn towards humanitarian needs, women's rights organizations

are often the first to be stifled by competing priorities. Yet women's movements have been seen to be at the forefront of democratization in the region and should be at the centre of the efforts to cease conflict and instability. These movements are also key to the efforts to change social norms on child marriage. However, they must have the core resources necessary to be able to allow activism to grow and develop organically.

- Effective programming on child marriage engages the whole community; that is, community leaders, parents, teachers, children and adolescents, and health professionals. Due to the significance of religion in those communities, especially amplified in times of conflict, displacement and extreme poverty, engaging religious leaders is also key. However, it is important to recognize that there remain significant differences in opinion on the message of religious scripture when it comes to child marriage. As such, it is necessary in the first instance, to work separately with religious leaders and scholars to strengthen agreement on scriptural support for delaying marriage, before rolling out programming that relies on such actors as advocates for delaying marriage.
- Data shows that understanding the benefit of education influences child marriage decisions by reducing its prevalence. One of the main approaches to increasing girls' attendance and retention at school is the use of cash incentives which, whilst effective, are acknowledged to be financially unsustainable. Evaluations of programmatic results have indicated, however, that quality teaching is a significant driver for increased retention of girls in school. As such, and in recognition of girls' agency, there is wide scope to focus programmatic interventions on strengthening the capacity of teachers, and increasing the number of female teachers, as a way to incentivize girls' attendance.
- While it is critical that child marriage is seen within the wider frame of violence against women and patriarchal gender norms that prevent women and girls' empowerment, child marriage initiatives are less likely to be effective if they are subsumed into other broader programming. Similarly, at the national level, it is not enough to incorporate child marriage into a broader violence against women policy.
- Across the region, the domestic legal frameworks as they relate to child marriage do not meet international standards, on paper or in practice. Where child marriage laws do exist, evidence shows that they will only be effective in reducing prevalence where resources are invested in enforcement, in particular, through capacity development of law enforcement, public and judicial officials. Since the legal framework and its enforcement are inextricably embedded within socio-cultural norms, work towards strengthening the legal framework must not be pursued in a vacuum.
- This research has shown that positive progress is being made in the region to address child marriage. There are signs that there is an increasing understanding that girls can benefit from spending a longer time in school and delaying marriage. However, the prevalence of child marriage in the region is still rooted in the perception that it is an appropriate method for protecting girls from financial and/or physical insecurity – perceived or real. As such, programming must address both the societal gender norms that constrain the agency and potential of girls, whilst addressing the physical and structural barriers that affirm these norms and practices. Programming must be holistic, incorporating all levels of the socio-ecological model in its approach. Not only will this approach address child marriage, it has the potential to address the women and girls' empowerment deficit in the region more generally.

References

1. UNICEF. 2016. *State of the World's Children*. New York: UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_SOWC_2016.pdf
2. UNICEF (2016). *State of the World's Children*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_SOWC_2016.pdf
3. Women's Refugee Commission (2016) *A girl no more: The changing norms of child marriage in conflict* (NoVo Foundation, Canada), p. 1. Available at: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/girls/resources/1311-girl-no-more>
4. CARE (2015) 'To Protect Her Honour' *Child marriage in emergencies – the fatal confusion between protecting girls and sexual violence*. Available at: http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_Child-marriage-in-emergencies_2015.pdf
5. Women's Refugee Commission (2016) *A girl no more: The changing norms of child marriage in conflict* (NoVo Foundation, Canada), p. 13-14. Available at: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/girls/resources/1311-girl-no-more>
6. Department of Statistics/Jordan and ICF International. (2013). *Jordan Population and Family Health Survey 2012*. Available at: <http://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-FR282-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm#sthash.E0kTkqAC.dpuf>
7. Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF Sudan. (2016). *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 of Sudan, Final Report*. Khartoum, Sudan: UNICEF and Central Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS5/Middle%20East%20and%20North%20Africa/Sudan/2014/Final/Sudan%202014%20MICS_English.pdf
8. UNICEF's 2016 *Child Protection Baseline Survey, Lebanon*. Not publicly available.
9. Yemen National Health and Demographic Survey 2013. Rockville, Maryland, USA: MOPHP, CSO, PAFAM, and ICF International. Available at: <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR296/FR296.pdf>
10. Ministère de la Santé/Maroc, Projet PAFAM/Egypte. (2012). *Enquête sur la Population et la Santé Familiale (ENPSF) 2010-2011*. Available (French language only) at: <http://www.sante.gov.ma/Documents/Enqu%C3%AAtes%20.pdf>
11. World Bank. (2016). *Compendium of International and National Legal Frameworks on Child Marriage*. This compendium has been developed under the framework of the Global Forum on Law, Justice and Development to inform Global Forum's partners and other development practitioners on legal instruments preventing child marriage. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
12. *Ibid.*
13. BRIDGE (2003) *Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report*, (Institute of Gender Studies, University of Sussex), p. 34 <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/bridge-publications/cutting-edge-packs/gender-and-armed-conflict>
14. Oxfam; International Alert (2017) *Now is the Time: Research on Gender Justice, Conflict and Fragility in the Middle East and North Africa* (UK Foreign & Commonwealth) <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/now-time-research-gender-justice-conflict-and-fragility-middle-east-and-north-africa>; see also: BRIDGE (2003) *Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report*, (Institute of Gender Studies, University of Sussex), p. 34 <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/bridge-publications/cutting-edge-packs/gender-and-armed-conflict>
15. Kalamar, A; Lee-Rife, S; Hindin, M (2016) *Interventions to Prevent Child Marriage Amongst Young People in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Published and Gray Literature*. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59 (2016) S16-S21
16. *Ibid.*
17. See Section 2.3 of this report for a full breakdown of these social factors in the MENA region.
18. Plan International; Coram International (2015) *Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf
19. Plan International; Coram International (2015) *Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf
20. Plan International; Coram International (2015) *Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf
21. Based on the Ishaq program, see: Brady, M. et al. (2007). *Providing new opportunities to adolescent girls in socially conservative settings: The Ishaq programme in rural Upper Egypt*. Population Council. Available at: https://www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/downloads/66__providing_new_opportunities_to_adolescent_girls_in_socially_conservative_settings.pdf; see also *Literacy Through Poetry: UNESCO. Literacy Through Poetry (LTPP)*. Available at: <http://litbase.uil.unesco.org/?menu=8&programme=25>
22. UN Women. (2017). *Creating safe public spaces*. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces>
23. Coker, A.L., Fisher, B.S., Bush, H.M., Swan, S.C., Williams, C.M., Clear, E.R., DeGue, S. (2014). *Evaluation of the Green Dot Bystander Intervention to Reduce Interpersonal Violence Amongst College Students Across Three Campuses*. *Violence Against Women*. DOI: 10.1177/1077801214545284. Please note that this is an evidence-based intervention from the United States that has been rigorously tested. Whilst we recognize that the context of implementation would be very different in communities in the MENA region, we feel that there is sufficient evidence of its effectiveness to warrant an attempt to adapt it to community sexual harassment norm change in the MENA region.
24. Jabbar, S. A., & Zaza, H. I. (2016). *Evaluating a vocational training programme for women refugees at the Zaatar camp in Jordan: women empowerment: a journey and not an output*. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21(3), 304–319;
25. *Ibid.*
26. Murphy-Graham, E; Leal, G (2014) *Child marriage, agency, and schooling in rural Honduras*, *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp 24- 49, p. 42
27. Three of the four successful projects reviewed in Columbia, Mexico, Zimbabwe and Inida used this approach, see: Kalamar, A; Lee-Rife, S; Hindin, M (2016) *Interventions to Prevent Child Marriage Amongst Young People in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Published and Gray Literature*. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59 (2016) S16-S21; World Bank. (2015). *Building resilience & opportunity: Social protection reform in Egypt*. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/06/09/building-resilience-and-opportu>

- nity-social-protection-reform-in-egypt
26. Buchmann, N., Field, E., Glennerster R., Nazneen S., Pimkina, S., Sen, I. (2017). *Power vs Money: Alternative Approaches to Reducing Child Marriage in Bangladesh, a Randomized Control Trial*. Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/empowering-girls-rural-bangladesh>
 27. Plan International; Coram International (2015) *Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf ; see also: Women's Refugee Commission (2016) *A girl no more: The changing norms of child marriage in conflict* (NoVo Foundation, Canada), p. 2 <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/girls/resources/1311-girl-no-more>
 28. Plan International; Coram International (2015) *Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf
 29. ILO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNRWA, and The World Bank. (2017). *The Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative and the 12 core life skills*. Presentation provided by UNICEF MENARO.
 30. Murphy-Graham, E; Leal, G (2014) *Child marriage, agency, and schooling in rural Honduras*, *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp 24- 49, p. 42
 31. Achyut P., Bhatla N., Verma H., Uttamacharya, Singh G., Bhattacharya S. and Verma R. (2016).
 32. *Towards gender equality: The GEMS journey thus far*. New Delhi, International Center for Research on Women. Available at: <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/GEMS-report-Jharkhand.pdf>
 33. UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. (2006). *The Impact of Women Teachers on Girls' Education*. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001459/145990e.pdf>
 34. *Key informants consistently identified girls' inability to attend school after marriage or after becoming pregnant, due to discriminatory social norms, as a key issue for child brides. Some key informants also specifically suggested banning discrimination that prevents access to school based on marital status, pregnancy, or motherhood. Girls Not Brides and ICRW. (2016). Taking action to end child marriage: the role of different sectors: Economic growth and workforce development*. Available at: <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/4.-Addressing-child-marriage-Econ-growth.pdf>
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. *Included at the request of UNICEF's MENARO.*
 38. *Included at the request of UNICEF's Egypt CO.*
 39. *Included at the request of UNICEF's MENARO.*
 40. *See Grand Challenges Canada project in Nigeria 2014-2016, Walker, J (2015) Engaging Islamic opinion leaders on child marriage: preliminary results from pilot projects in Nigeria, Faith & International Affairs, 13:3, 48-58, p. 53.*
 41. *See Ford Foundation project in Nigeria 2013-2015, Walker, J (2015) Engaging Islamic opinion leaders on child marriage: preliminary results from pilot projects in Nigeria, Faith & International Affairs, 13:3, 48-58, p. 54.*
 42. *See Ford Foundation project in Nigeria 2013-2015, Walker, J (2015) Engaging Islamic opinion leaders on child marriage: preliminary results from pilot projects in Nigeria, Faith & International Affairs, 13:3, 48-58, p. 54; Raj, A; Gomez, C; and Silverman, J (2014) Multisectoral Afghan perspectives on girl child marriage: foundations for change do exist in Afghanistan, Violence Against Women, Vol 20(12) 1489-1505, p. 1498; see also: Pathfinder. 'Safe Age of Marriage in Yemen: Fostering Change in Social Norms'. Available at: <https://www.pathfinder.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ESD-Child-Marriage.pdf>*
 43. *Raj, A; Gomez, C; and Silverman, J (2014) Multisectoral Afghan perspectives on girl child marriage: foundations for change do exist in Afghanistan, Violence Against Women, Vol 20(12) 1489-1505, p. 1497; see also: Pathfinder. 'Safe Age of Marriage in Yemen: Fostering Change in Social Norms'. Available at: <https://www.pathfinder.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ESD-Child-Marriage.pdf>*
 44. *Modelled on the Promoting Protective Social Norms for Children Project, funded by the Government of Belgium in Morocco.*
 45. *Plan International; Coram International (2015) Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf. *gender synchronization approach to male engagement seems to be quite effective so far, as seen in EMERGE (Edström, J.; Hassink, A.; Shahrokh, T. and Stern, E. (eds) (2015) 'Engendering Men: A Collaborative Review of Evidence on Men and Boys in Social Change and Gender Equality'; EMERGE Evidence Review, Promundo-US, Sonke Gender Justice and the Institute of Development Studies)*
 46. *UN Women. (2017). Creating safe public spaces*. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/creating-safe-public-spaces>
 47. *International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). (2011). Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows*. Available at: <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Solutions-to-End-Child-Marriage.pdf>
 48. *As modelled by KAFA in Lebanon.*
 49. *Greene, M., Perlson, S., Taylor, A. and Lauro, G. (2015) Engaging Men and Boys to Address the Practice of Child Marriage*. Washington, DC: GreeneWorks.
 50. *Greene et al (2015)*
 51. *This recommendation was included at the request of UNICEF's MENARO.*
 52. *Voinarevich, O (2015) A fairy tale interrupted: the long-term impacts of child marriage in Yemen and the necessary adjustments to both local and international laws to stop the practice and to protect voiceless child brides, Rutgers Race and the Law Review, Vol 16:2, 203-218,*

p. 216

53. Oxfam; International Alert (2017) *Now is the Time: Research on Gender Justice, Conflict and Fragility in the Middle East and North Africa* (UK Foreign & Commonwealth) <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/now-time-research-gender-justice-conflict-and-fragility-middle-east-and-north-africa>
54. Oxfam; International Alert (2017) *Now is the Time: Research on Gender Justice, Conflict and Fragility in the Middle East and North Africa* (UK Foreign & Commonwealth) <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/now-time-research-gender-justice-conflict-and-fragility-middle-east-and-north-africa>
55. Oxfam (2017)
56. Oxfam (2017)
57. Oxfam (2017)
58. Oxfam (2017)
59. Oxfam (2017)
60. OECD. (2010). *OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Strategies to Improve Rural Service Delivery*. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/regional-policy/service-delivery-in-rural-areas.htm>
61. Girls Not Brides and ICRW. (2016). *Taking action to address child marriage: the role of different sectors: an overview*. Available at; <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/1.-Overview-Addressing-child-marriage-role-of-diff-sectors.pdf>
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. Oxfam; International Alert (2017) *Now is the Time: Research on Gender Justice, Conflict and Fragility in the Middle East and North Africa* (UK Foreign & Commonwealth) <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/now-time-research-gender-justice-conflict-and-fragility-middle-east-and-north-africa>
65. Voinarevich, O (2015) *A fairy tale interrupted: the long-term impacts of child marriage in Yemen and the necessary adjustments to both local and international laws to stop the practice and to protect voiceless child brides*, *Rutgers Race and the Law Review*, Vol 16:2, 203-218, p. 216
66. Plan International; Coram International (2015) *Research Report, Getting the Evidence@ Asia Child Marriage Initiative*, http://www.plan-belgie.be/sites/default/files/acmi_research_report_2015_lowres_pdf.pdf
67. *Knowledge-building interventions could be modeled on USAID's Women's Legal Rights (WLR) Initiative conducted on women's legal rights and the family code throughout Benin, as profiled in Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Vision for Action*, available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pdacu300.pdf
68. Kalamar, A; Lee-Rife, S; Hindin, M (2016) *Interventions to Prevent Child Marriage Amongst Young People in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review of the Published and Gray Literature*. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59 (2016) S16-S21
69. Svanemyr, J; Chandra-Mouli, V; Raj, A; Travers, E; Sundaram, L (2015) *Research priorities on ending child marriage and supporting marriage girls*, *Reproductive Health*, 12:80
70. Murphy-Graham, E; Leal, G (2014) *Child marriage, agency, and schooling in rural Honduras*, *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 59, no. 1, pp 24- 49, p. 41.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa
16 Abdel Qader Al-Abed Street
P.O. Box 1551
Amman 11821 Jordan

Tel: +962-550-2400
www.unicef.org/mena
menaro@unicef.org

facebook www.facebook.com/UNICEFmena
twitter www.twitter.com/UNICEFmena
instagram www.instagram.com/unicef_mena

unicef 

for every child