

MOROCCO Country Brief

UNICEF Regional Study on Child Marriage
In the Middle East and North Africa



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

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MOROCCO

Regional Study on Child Marriage

Key Recommendations

Girls' Voice and Agency

Build on promising approaches to enhance social and economic empowerment of girls through education and legal rights including reproductive health rights.

Continue to provide financial incentives for sending girls to school through cash transfers.

ICRAM 2 is a multi-sectoral governmental plan on gender equality to support the implementation of the commitments expressed in the Government Policy Programme for the 2021-2017 period. The Plan provides a platform for mainstreaming women's rights in both the local and regional levels.

Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours

Raise awareness of girls' productive potential.

Provide opportunities for girls to support themselves financially.

Implement holistic community programming.

Service Delivery

Increase funding and investment in education.

Strengthen rural service delivery.

Legal Context

Address gaps in the Moudawana.

Increase legal protections through knowledge-building with judges and judicial social workers.

Establish a communication plan on the law on violence against women and the dissemination of awareness-raising materials.

Evidence Generation

Increase coordination amongst stakeholders and UN agencies including research, delivery of services package and information system.

Integrate a module on marriage of minors in the next national surveys (EPSF, PAPFAM, prevalence survey on gender-based violence, etc.).

POLITICAL & ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Despite the 2011 Arab Spring turmoil that affected many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Morocco has experienced political stability in recent years, with the arrival of the moderate Parti de la Justice et du Développement (25 November 2011). Following the Party's establishment, a coalition Government was formed on 3 January 2012. Since then, Morocco has enacted stringent social and economic reforms, leading to a more open and democratic society, with greater separation of powers, increased decentralization, and fairer laws and institutions.¹

Due to a wide range of macroeconomic, social and labour market reforms, the country's income has grown steadily. According to the World Bank, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita almost doubled from 2001 to 2011, reaching the equivalent of US\$3,000 in 2012.² This remarkable economic growth contributed to eradicating extreme poverty and significantly reducing poverty overall.³ The economy remains heavily dependent on the agricultural and artisan sector which continues to drive Morocco's economic growth⁴. After a record cereal production in 2015, the country suffered from a severe drought in 2016; nevertheless, agriculture production still represents almost 15 per cent of Morocco's GDP.⁵



**GDP per capita
doubled reaching
US\$3,000 in 2012**

Source: World Bank

Favourable economic conditions contributed to substantial achievements in terms of health and education outcomes, particularly in terms of narrowing gender gaps.

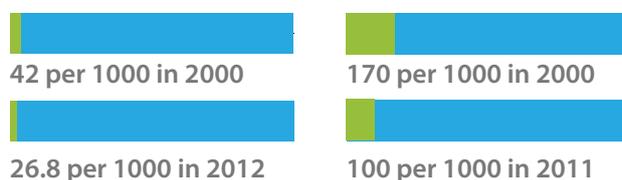
Improvement in access to health care and services as well as health outcomes are, in part, due to the Moroccan authorities which launched a number of actions and strategies (e.g. the maternal mortality surveillance system and national health coverage) to enhance access to health services and improve health outcomes.⁶ A World Bank report indicates, for instance, that infant mortality rates have dropped from 42 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 26.8 in 2012, and the maternal mortality ratio has dropped from 170 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 100 in 2011.⁷



**Infant mortality
rates dropped from**



**Maternal mortality
ratio dropped from**



Source: World Bank

In terms of education outcomes, Morocco also experienced a noteworthy expansion in access to schooling at all levels, following the implementation of the 1999 National Education and Training Charter (CNEF). From 1990/91 to 2012/13, national net enrolment rates increased from 52.4 per cent to 98.2 per cent for primary education, from 17.5 per cent to 56.7 per cent in lower secondary education and from 6.1 per cent to 32.4 per cent in upper secondary education. Progress in education outcomes have also been seen in the girl/boy enrolment ratio for the primary level which increased from around 70 per cent in the mid-1990s to 95 per cent. The secondary and tertiary level, went from 75 per cent to 85 per cent and from 70 per cent to almost 90 per cent respectively.⁸

National net enrolment rates:

Source: World Bank

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

Legal frameworks have undergone numerous reforms towards enhancing gender equality⁹, making Morocco stand out as a country with one of the most liberal and progressive legal frameworks in the MENA region with respect to gender equality. Amongst some of these efforts, the Government of Morocco introduced a new family code in 2004, known as the Moudawana, which considerably expanded the rights of women towards equality within the family. These included raising the minimum female and male marriage age from 15 to 18, allowing women to stipulate a monogamy clause in the marriage contract, removing the legal obedience clause, requiring the wife to be present for repudiation to be recognized, giving women permission to initiate divorce citing mutual consent or irreconcilable differences, rescinding the spousal approval requirement for women to work, and giving women the right to child custody.^{10,11} However, discretionary power left to judges to grant an exception to the rule should be more regulated, and taking into account the best interests of the child.

Along the same lines, the country retracted its reservations to the Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2011, which covered issues related to passing of nationality and equality of marital rights, and adopted the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in 2012. These changes gave women legal rights to negotiate their marriage and divorce and increased their access to better education and employment opportunities.¹²

Despite great strides in the legal system to protect women and girls' rights, important gender gaps remain.¹³ Child marriage is amongst these gaps, acting as a significant barrier in terms of accessing fundamental resources, from education to key economic assets.

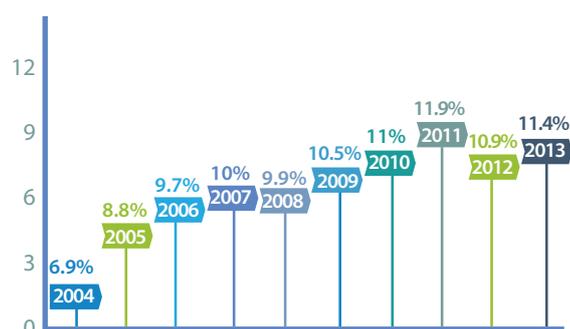
PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

The most recent nationally representative survey including indicators of child marriage in Morocco was the Population and Family Health Survey (ENPSF) conducted in Morocco in 2010-2011. Unfortunately, the published results do not report the percentage of all women ages 20 to 24 who married before the ages of 15 and 18, which are the global standard indicators that are reported for the remainder of the countries in this report. Instead, the findings report the percentage of all women 15-49, for marriage before age 15, and the percentage of all women 20-49, for marriage before age 18. In 2011, 18.7 per cent of women ages 20-49 in Morocco married before the age of 18 and 2.6 per cent of women ages 15-49 married before age 15.¹⁴ Without the percentages by five-year age groupings, it is impossible to use these data to estimate trends in child marriage over time. However, historical data are available on marriages performed in family courts in Morocco between 2004 and 2013.

Data from Morocco's Ministry of Justice and Liberties for the period 2004-2014, published by UNICEF and shown in Figure 1, show that the proportion of all marriages conducted in family courts that involve a minor has increased, from 7.0 per cent in

2004 to 11.5 per cent in 2013.¹⁵ However, it should be noted that these data do not include undeclared marriages, which are numerous in Morocco, making them an imperfect approximation of trends in child marriage overall.¹⁶

Figure 1. Percent of all family court marriages that involve a minor, 2004-2013, Morocco



Source: Data from Morocco's Ministry of Justice and Liberties for the period 2004-2014, published by UNICEF

In 2011, the median age at first marriage amongst women in Morocco ages 25 to 49 was 26.3 years, but this varied by several background characteristics.¹⁷ It was lower amongst women who lived in rural areas (25.3 years versus 27.2 in urban areas) and lowest amongst those who lived in Tada-Azilal (23.2 years).¹⁸ There was a positive association between median age at first marriage and wealth quintile, ranging from 25.3 years in the poorest wealth quintile to 28.4 in the wealthiest.¹⁹

There was also evidence of a positive relationship between educational attainment and median age at first marriage in Morocco, with the median age at first marriage more than six years higher for women who completed secondary or greater education compared to those who completed none (30.8 years versus 24.6).²⁰ It is important to note that the causality of this association is not clear; low educational attainment may be both a cause and/or a consequence of child marriage.

METHODOLOGY

The data presented here was collected from a combination of roundtables and three key informant interviews with staff from governmental institutions, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations. An ICRW researcher facilitated four roundtables over the course of three days (April 10-12, 2017). A total of 30 key informants participated in the roundtables and three key informants were interviewed individually. All discussions were recorded and transcribed independently by a researcher from Mohamed V University. The findings were then aligned with the Global Programme's five outcomes (described below) and cross-checked with the local researcher to ensure that the data were consistent with their overall impressions during the field missions.

Table 1: Key Informant Interviews

Government

Ministère de la Justice et des Libertés
Ministère de la Santé
Ministère des Affaires Islamiques
the Rabita Mohammedia des Oulémas (Mohammadia League of Scholars)
Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale
Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale
Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme

UN & Multilateral Agencies

UNICEF	UNFPA	UNWomen	UNHCR
Embassy of Denmark			
International Migration Organization			

NGOs

Association Solidarité Féminine
Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc
Initiative pour la Protection des Droits de la Femme
Association Droit et Justice

Foundation YTTO

INSAF

LIMITATIONS

This report presents the main findings strictly based on the roundtables and the key informant interviews and are, therefore, limited to those categories of respondents which included experts from the Government, UN and other bilateral agencies, NGO/Service Providers, and one embassy. Considering the study's goals and focus on scaling up promising programmatic approaches, the study focused on service providers, government officials, multilateral agencies, and donors—all of whom would be able to identify 'best practices' to end child marriage. As a result, the findings are only representative of these respondents' views of promising approaches to end child marriage in Morocco.

KEY FINDINGS

The key findings are outlined within the framework of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme's five outcomes:²¹

- Adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage are better able to express and exercise their choices.
- Households demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours regarding gender equality and equity.
- Relevant sectoral systems deliver quality and cost-effective services to meet the needs of adolescent girls.
- National laws, policy frameworks and mechanisms to protect and promote adolescent girls' rights are in line with

with international standards and properly resourced.

- Governments support and promote the generation and use of robust data and evidence to inform programme design, track progress and document lessons.

1 Girls' Voice and Agency

Findings point to a combination of factors related to patriarchal traditions and unequal gender norms that limit a girl's ability to express her voice and exercise her choices.

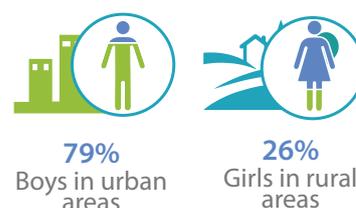
■ Family authority over girls' decisions

In terms of marriage decisions, respondents indicated that adolescent girls are generally discouraged from self-selecting their spouse and deciding on the timing of marriage which, in some cases, may be perceived as defying a father's authority. Instead, respondents reported that the family is key in making these decisions for girls.

■ Girls' restricted access to resources, including education and economic opportunities

Findings indicate that discrimination in girls' access to education persists due to the social and cultural norms that continue to place rural girls at a disadvantage.²² According to a World Bank report, "the net enrolment rate is 79 percent for boys in urban areas but only 26 per cent for girls in rural areas in lower secondary education."²³

Enrolment rate in secondary education



Source: World Bank

In addition, the lack of adequate infrastructure and physically accessible schooling facilities further constrains girls' opportunities and capabilities in expressing their voices and agency, making them more vulnerable to early marriage. As roundtable participants stated several times, distance to school puts girls at a disadvantage, which is further exacerbated by social norms because it is often not acceptable for young girls to walk to school alone. As the Minister of Islamic Affairs noted:



"There is injustice to the girl; she is not protected. She does not have the same access to resources as boys."



In Morocco, marriage is a determining factor in the economic inactivity rates of women in both rural and urban areas. Indeed, estimates from the World Bank indicate that being married invariably reduces the probability of participation for women, regardless of their residence.²⁴ These figures confirm that if marriage determines a woman's participation in economic life, then being married before the age 18 decreases a girl's access to economic participation. Most participants supported this observation, noting that once a girl is married, she is likely to drop out of school to devote her life exclusively to motherhood and care work.

2

Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours

Child marriage persists in Morocco because of social norms related to gender roles, relations, and expectations that are embedded in Morocco's social structures.

Parents' attitudes on child marriage and its relation to Islam

Many participants spoke of the mentalités (attitudes) of the families as being the major driver of child marriage, requesting that more research be done on better understanding change in attitudes, along with ethos (behaviour). One key informant from the Initiative pour la Protection des Droits de la Femme succinctly noted:



"The real problem is the mentalités, particularly of the parents. They think it's going against Islam."



In Morocco, Family Law is embedded in sacred texts of the Qu'ran, making it difficult to separate religion from family affairs. The reforms brought by the Moudawana have considerably challenged the traditional view of a woman and a child's rights in a country where the social order is founded on the superiority of the man in terms of rights and power.²⁵ This has led to resistance from traditional communities and families (rural and urban) who, despite the legal age at marriage being established at 18 for girls, continue to marry off their daughters before 18. Many participants said that the challenge lies in the misinterpretations of religious principles which enables child marriage in Morocco. Some participants further noted that the Arab Spring has had an impact on reinforcing conservative beliefs in terms of traditions in gender roles. Furthermore, participants from the Civil Society roundtable stated that most families with whom they work typically lack knowledge of the negative consequences of child marriage.

Community pressure on parents to marry daughters early

Other key informants added that prevailing social norms related to honour and stigma add pressure on families to marry their daughters at an early age.

Social pressure to marry a daughter at an 'acceptable' age (usually right after puberty) to avoid social sanctions from the community (i.e. gossip, shame, stigma) force families into marrying their daughters early.

There are also cases of families who resort to child marriage in cases of a daughter's suspected sexual relationship (or in some cases a pregnancy) outside of marriage, an act that in Morocco is still perceived as a crime under Article 490 of the Criminal Code.

■ Social and economic incentives to the family

Marrying a daughter at a young age offers many perceived social and economic benefits to the family: it increases the dowry, alleviates a burden in the home, decreases the risk of out-of-wedlock pregnancy, avoids stigma and ensures family honour. In addition, respondents indicated that many families perceive child marriage as a source of security for the girl who remains under parental/guardian care until marriage and, once married, under her husband's responsibility. The ways in which these multiple factors interact to reinforce the practice of child marriage are more pronounced in communities who continue to suffer from marginalization, particularly in terms of accessing education, services and information.

3 Service Delivery

■ Need to focus on rural areas

Several key informants felt that child marriage is a serious problem which is less likely to be addressed in rural areas of Morocco, as expressed by a member of ADFM (Association of Democratic Women):



“There isn't one Morocco; there are many, namely rural and urban. Girls in rural areas have far less access to education, media, employment, and civil society exposure. We know from the Ministry of Justice statistics that underage marriage is both a rural and urban phenomenon, but rural girls are more prone and more exposed to child marriage because of lack of access to education and work opportunities.”



One key informant from Insaf confirmed this point, adding that:



“The problem with Al Fatiha is that we can't quantify it. The statistics from the Ministry of Justice don't speak for the customary marriage, which is so prevalent in rural areas.”



Data from Morocco supports this assertion. Data from the Ministry of Justice (2013) show that 48 per cent of marriage applications for minors processed through the formal justice system were from rural areas. However, according to the World Bank, just 39 per cent of Morocco's population lives in rural areas.²⁶ Therefore, the rate of marriage applications for minors is higher per person in rural areas and lower in urban areas.²⁷ Additionally, as noted above, the mean age at first marriage is about two years lower in rural areas than urban areas of Morocco.²⁸

4 Legal Context

■ Legal loopholes permit child marriages

In 2004, the Family Code or Moudawana increased the legal age of marriage for girls from age 15 to age 18. It is required by law that both parties – females and males – consent to marriage. Women no longer need consent from a male guardian to marry.²⁹ Despite the legal prohibition, child marriages are still common, enabled by loopholes in the Family Code that grant judges the power of discretion to allow them. This practice was vehemently criticized by several key informants. On this point, the representative of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs noted that:



“The Moroccan law does not protect the child; there is injustice in the judge's power of discretion.”



Data from the Ministry of Justice support this observation; in 2013, more than four out of five (85.4 per cent) of child marriage requests were approved by judges.³⁰

In 2013



4/5 Child marriages approved

Source: Data from Morocco's Ministry of Justice and Liberties.

Although a judge does have power to authorize the marriage of a child under 18, the application for permission to marry must be submitted by the legal guardian of the minor directly to the Family Court. The judge must account for the criteria that are contained in the Moudawana.³¹ As noted however, evidence of child marriage indicates that most rural marriages of child brides are carried out under customary Muslim law (Al Fatiha), and thus do not have proper documentation of the union.³² Participants repeatedly raised this issue, noting that many customary marriages go unnoticed because they are not legally certified. As the data from the Ministry of Justice data show, the practice of customary marriages still occurs despite the refusal of a judge. The latter is therefore obliged to apply Article 16 of the Moudawana to register the marriage, retroactively.

Most participants decried the Family Code's loopholes which enable judges to authorize a marriage below 18 under certain circumstances, making the law on the legal age of marriage largely ineffective.

Overall, findings suggest that the family law fails to determine the minimum age of marriage, leaving it to the judge's discretion to allow an underage marriage. Surprisingly, once the Family Affairs Judge issues the decree granting the petition to

marry for a minor who has not reached the age of legal capacity for marriage, it is not open to appeal whilst the decree to refuse is open to appeal, leading to re-submission of requests by the parents/legal guardians. A Family Affairs Judge may authorize the marriage of a girl or boy below the minimum legal age of marriage (18 years) per Article 19 of the Family code (Moudawana). He has to justify his decision, explaining the interest and reasons for the marriage, after hearing the parents/legal tutors of the minor and after proceeding a medical expertise or/and a social survey about the minor. Surprisingly, once the Judge issues a sentence authorizing the marriage for a minor, it is not open to appeal whilst a refusal is open to appeal, leading to re-submission of requests by the parents/legal tutors.³³

However, there was a consensus amongst all participants that judicial authorizations tend to circumvent the inclusion of a full medical and psychological test to determine the minor's capacity to enter into marriage and yet they were approved by the Family Court. As a member of CNDH put it:



"We should reconsider the idea of the medical test, because it doesn't take into account the psychological state of the girl. We should consider the supreme interest of the child. Unfortunately, doctors who issue these certificates are not trained to understand the interest of a girl child beyond her role as a wife and mother."



5

Evidence Generation

Need for better data on child marriage

Overall, participants pointed to the lack of robust data on child marriage due to the discrepancies in the legal system in terms of recording customary marriages, making it difficult to obtain accurate data. One UNICEF researcher said:



“To account for this complex phenomenon, we need a variety of indicators. We need to collect data from the Ministry of Justice...and the National Observatory of Human Development. We also need to conduct surveys on households, for they are close to reality.”



In addition, more refined methodologies, using gender analysis, including sex-disaggregated data, would not only produce more robust data but it would also contribute to a clearer understanding of the correlation between child marriage and poverty as well as education, which to date, is not well understood. Data enumerators should be trained to undertake household surveys with a gender lens.

■ **Need for better communication between research organizations engaged in child marriage research**

Participants noted a gap in the coordination and the sharing of information between universities and research centres engaged in child marriage research. Better communication mechanisms between ministries and stakeholders who work on child marriage are needed to share best practices and reduce duplication of efforts.

Participants from the bilateral agencies roundtables agreed that the lack of communication and coordination between the various stakeholders widens the gap in reliable data. Many participants also suggested that more qualitative studies should be done, not only amongst communities that resort to child marriage but also amongst those who delay marriage beyond 18.

PROMISING APPROACHES IDENTIFIED BY ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Girls' voice & agency

Morocco has many programmes in place aimed at enhancing girls' voices and agency. These include the following programmes: Supported by the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Commerce et du Développement du Canada, the FORSA programme aims to reinforce socioeconomic opportunities during the school to work transition for the most vulnerable adolescents. FORSA builds on UNICEF's multi-sectoral partnerships to reinforce girls' empowerment by promoting social and economic inclusion of vulnerable adolescents and youth.

The programme Tamkine (empowerment), which ran from 2008-2012, was a multi-sectoral Joint Programme that addresses violence against women and girls from all forms of violence by addressing the inter-linkages between poverty and vulnerability.

In response to high unemployment amongst youth, Morocco implemented an ambitious reform of its vocational training system, aimed at increasing youth employment. The intent of this reform was to:

- Increase the system's capacity.
- Develop several specific fields of training designed to fit the evolving needs of the labour market.³⁴

Household and community attitudes and behaviours

Morocco has made great strides in developing programmes that address social norms related to child marriage. For example, La Rabita Mohammedia des Oulémas has been particularly active in successfully engaging religious leaders and communities on gender-based violence, including child marriage.

Their peer-educator model is being replicated in several 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 human rights culture. The use of the New Technologies of Information and Communication has proven to be a powerful eye opening and leadership building approach.

The majority of key informants pointed to the work of the YTTO Foundation, a Moroccan organization which has been working to end gender-based violence, including child marriage since 2011. YTTO's Caravans go into remote villages to encourage families to educate their daughters and sensitize them about the negative consequences of marrying off their daughters early.^b Furthermore, UNFPA is supporting the development of a Communication for Behavioural Impact Plan (COMBI) focusing on child marriage and gender-based violence.

Service delivery

Roundtable participants noted that efforts to reinforce girls' and boys' access to education (mainly in rural areas) have been underway, such as the Tayssir programme, a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme aimed at increasing the rural primary school completion rate. Instigated by the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP), the Tayssir programme reduced school dropout, especially at higher levels, and successfully re-enrolled former dropouts.³⁵ Since 2007, the MENFP has also operated boarding schools for students ages 5 to 16 from impoverished households in rural areas.³⁶

Legal context

The presence of civil society organizations makes Morocco one of the most proactive North African countries in its fight against gender inequality. Following the reform of the Moudawana in 2004, feminist groups have been playing a critical role in building a social movement to address gender inequality and gender-based violence. They are also

at the forefront of service provision and programmatic responses in terms of issues related to gender-based violence, including child marriage. These groups include the Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF – Women's Action Union), Insaf, YTTO, l'Union de l'action féminine, Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM – the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women), and the Association el Amane pour le Développement de la Femme (El Amane Association for the Development of Women).

These women's rights organizations, along with international human rights advocates, continue to press the Moroccan government for intensive reforms to the penal code designed to better protect women and girls. "Avaaz, a global advocacy group, recently submitted a petition signed by more than one million people to Morocco's Parliament, demanding the adoption of promised legislation to address violence against women." The group stresses four critical areas: treatment for survivors of sexual abuse; revision of the prohibition on rape, to widen its applicability; and strengthened prohibitions against child marriage.³⁸

There are also advocacy efforts underway to remove articles 20 and 21 of the Moudawana. The Himaya project, a collaboration between the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF aims to enhance the implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child³⁹ in the Family Code. This included a training programme for judges on children's rights and principals.

During 2015, Morocco adopted the Integrated Public Policy for Child Protection (PPIPEM), which was developed with technical support from UNICEF and in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental actors. The PPIPEM "expresses the ambition and the will to build an integrated child protection system that takes into consideration the institutional, social, economic and cultural development of the country and is supported by the necessary means and resources to ensure an effective protective environment in accordance with national and international standards."⁴⁰

Evidence generation

UNICEF is currently developing an Integrated Information

System on justice for children as a part of the Himaya project. In addition, UNICEF also supported a networking of more than 60 NGOs aimed at monitoring the application of children's right at the local level. The collaboration increased networking and coordination through the creation of four thematic groups addressing the following issues: child labour, violence against children including sexual violence, children on the move and children without family protection. The group of NGOs elaborated a roadmap and an advocacy strategy defining the modalities and partnership framework governing the participation of associations in the effective implementation of the policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings suggest that girls in Morocco face substantial barriers, often leading them into early marriage. Recommendations are grouped under the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme's five outcomes:

Girls' Voice & Agency

- **Build on promising approaches to enhance social and economic empowerment of girls through education and legal rights**

To encourage families to send and keep their daughters at school, civil society, bilateral agencies and the Government of Morocco must work hand in hand to: invest in the building of schools or classrooms that are closer to communities; involve the local communities and parents in the schools; train more female teachers; offer cash incentives and support for transportation and school supplies to families to alleviate financial barriers to education; and emphasize learning for girls on both numeracy and life skills. In addition, safe spaces can be instrumental in building a girl's agency and voice, as it gives them the opportunity to meet other girls in similar situations, and creates a peer support network.

ICRAM, a national programme on gender equality, may present an effective entry point to mainstream prevention against child marriage (MSFFESD). ICRAM is a tool to facilitate the implementation of the commitments expressed in the Government Policy Programme for the 2012-2016 period. The Plan provides a platform intended to mainstream women's rights in public policies and development programmes at both the local and regional levels.

- **Continue to provide financial incentives for sending girls to school**

This may involve increasing funding to NGOs, or encouraging public social transfers for school attendance. Incentives can range from covering transportation costs, to covering school fees, to giving cash transfers, to providing hot meals. It should be noted that although cash incentives are a promising stop-gap measure to keeping girls in school and delaying age of marriage, these programmes may be unsustainable in terms of cost, and should be coupled with community norm changing interventions.⁴¹ Still, girls' continued school attendance and education is a key factor in preventing child marriage, and should be incentivized appropriately.

Household and Community Attitudes and Behaviours

- **Raise awareness of girls' productive potential**

Findings draw attention to the financial motivations of families to marry their daughters. Programmes are needed to raise families' awareness on their daughters' productive potential as being an advantage to the household. Specifically, programmes should involve parents, girls and boys in developing ways of allowing girls to go to school or work and emphasize girls' productive potential.

Programmes that attempt to shift social norms and perceptions should build on the model established by the Promoting Protective Social Norms for Children project, funded by the Government of Belgium in Morocco. This project conducted both a national campaign and local community outreach programmes (including child participation and parenting education), to attempt to change the norms

around violence against children in Morocco. The project aimed to increase civil society's capacity to promote a protective perception of childhood and protective parental practices to families, and to increase the capacity of children to participate in an improved response to violence, abuse and exploitation. UNICEF identified this as a model to use for future programming attempting to change social norms around child marriage.

■ Provide opportunities for girls to support themselves financially

The findings show that girls are typically unable to support themselves financially, forcing them to rely on support first from their father, and then from husbands. Providing alternate opportunities for girls to independently support themselves would reduce girls' economic burden on their parents, and remove an incentive for families to marry them off.

■ Implement holistic community programming

Whether that takes the form of an awareness campaign, health services, or dialogue workshops, child marriage programming is more likely to be successful when it is engaging a variety of community actors. Because girls have limited voice and agency, only engaging with girls on child marriage issues will have limited efficacy – it is imperative to engage their families and community leaders if norms around child marriage are to change. Any behaviour-change strategy intended to address the norms around child marriage needs to mobilize the entire community. Programmes should use UNICEF's Communication for Development (C4D) strategies to work with both adults and children in the community to identify problems, propose solutions and act upon them.

Service Delivery

■ Increase funding and investment in education

Invest in secondary schools that are closer to the communities; hire more female teachers and integrate harmful traditional practices and their negative consequences in school curricula; subsidize transportation costs. As one participant lamented:



“Schools are scattered in rural areas, kids have to travel to reach schools, and these schools lack the basic equipment, so the conditions are not appropriate for a motivating education. Also, because of distance, there are security fears and issues, especially for girls. Means of transport are rare and even when they exist, they may be costly.”



■ Strengthen rural service delivery

Mechanisms to reach out to girls in remote communities adequately need to be well thought-out in order to strengthen the delivery of programming and services both directly related to child marriage and indirectly related, such as education and health services. Though not specific to the MENA region, the OECD's "Strategies to Improve Rural Service Delivery" report may be a helpful resource for understanding both the challenges and range of strategies for extending and improving rural services.⁴²

Legal Context

Findings suggest that there are several concrete areas in which the judicial sector can and should improve its performance and accountability.

■ Address gaps in the Moudawana

Legislators should address the gaps in the Moudawana that allow the extensive use of discretion; for instance, the waiver procedure for underage marriage should be eliminated.

However, international experience shows that introducing marriage laws before communities are ready may lead to limited enforcement of the law through

illegal marriages and increased vulnerability of at-risk and already-married girls.⁴³ Thus, advocacy efforts and community norm change programmes should work in tandem to end child marriage both *de jure* and *de facto*.

■ Increase legal protections through knowledge-building with judges

The Government should also take significant steps to improve training of judges on basic principles of fair trials, the specific rights and obligations under the Moudawana, and the needs of girls and other vulnerable groups. It should also address the inadequate legal infrastructure by ensuring that courts be adequately staffed, particularly with social workers as mandated under the Moudawana, to guarantee that the medical and psychological well-being of minors is given adequate consideration.

Evidence Generation

■ Increase coordination between stakeholders

The majority of roundtable participants agreed that civil society in Morocco is very dynamic and engaged. However, there is a need for more funding, cooperation, and support from both national government and bilateral agencies. Strong linkages and partnerships need to be built between civil society and government entities to ensure that progress on ending child marriage in Morocco continues to progress. Coordination is key – if

stakeholders work in partnership with one another they can share information, capitalize on experience, and develop integrative approaches and activities.

Participants from UN agencies and other international agencies working on child marriage agreed that there is a gap in the evidence base on child marriage in Morocco. Correlations between variables such as poverty and education are still not clearly understood. In addition, indicators used for household surveys must be revisited to ensure sex-disaggregated data. This gap in the evidence and methods comes from the lack of coordination between ministries, civil society, and international agencies. Greater collaboration amongst institutions and transparency of research methods will be needed to close this evidence gap in Morocco. Currently, data sources on the marriage of minors are disparate. It is therefore necessary to carry out a national study on the prevalence of the phenomenon, but also on the determining factors. This action will help to adapt the relevant policies and actions against the marriage of minors, and strengthen advocacy amongst decision-makers (legislators).

Researchers and practitioners also need to contextualize child marriage within the framework of broader socio-economic transformations – generally overlooked in child marriage research – which affect child marriage practices. These include a thorough analysis of geopolitical factors, including migration, urbanization, climate-change related droughts and food insecurity and how those affect normative shifts in marriage practices (e.g. improved access to education for girls, changes in family structures from extended to nuclear families, changes in relationships, etc.).

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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

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