

**Terms of Reference for Partner Institution  
Study on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia**

**UNICEF ROSA and UNFPA APRO  
Global Programme to End Child Marriage**

**A. Context**

Child marriage<sup>1</sup> affects millions of young women and girls globally. Over 700 women alive today were married as children. While child marriage predominantly affects girls, boys are also affected: 156 million men alive today worldwide were married as children. Child marriage is a human rights violation with profound negative consequences, restricting children's choices, changing their course in life, and putting them at significant risk of abuse and violence. Member states have recognized the urgent need to end child marriage in international normative commitments and in the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for the elimination of all harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in Target 5.3.

Globally, rates of child marriage have declined over the past several decades. However, due to population growth, the number of girls alive today *at risk* of being married as children will rise to 320 million by 2050. If current trends continue, the total number of women alive today who were married in childhood will grow from more than 700 million to almost 1 billion women and girls by 2030.

Rates of child marriage are highest in sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. Among women aged 20-24, 59 percent in Bangladesh, 40 percent in Nepal, 35 percent in Afghanistan, 27 percent in India and 21 percent in Pakistan were married before 18 (UNICEF 2016, NHFS 2015-2016<sup>2</sup>). Rates of child marriage have declined in the region in particular for girls under the age of 15 (World Bank 2017). However the number of girls married as children in South Asia remains very high: India alone has the largest number of girls married as children of any country worldwide. Given the limited scale of initiatives to address child marriage in the region and globally, the decline in child marriage over time is likely to be a result of economic growth and changing social norms rather than policy or programmatic interventions (UNICEF-UNFPA, *Key Drivers of the Changing Prevalence of Child Marriage in South Asia*, forthcoming).

Vulnerability and insecurity including as a result of humanitarian crises and emergencies threatens to undermine this progress. There is growing evidence that in times of humanitarian crisis, child marriage increases, including in conflict-affected settings and as a result of natural disasters. Sudden and protracted crises expose women and girls to disproportionate risk, including early marriage and unintended and unwanted pregnancy (UNFPA 2014). In fragile and insecure contexts and crises, child marriage may be used as a coping strategy by families, perceived as a means of "protection" for girls, and a way to reduce the economic burden of daughters on the household (World Vision 2013, Alstona et

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<sup>1</sup> The term child marriage refers to both formal marriages and informal unions where one of the partners is under the age of 18.

<sup>2</sup> For data see: <http://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/> (accessed 11 April 2018);

al 2014), with severe consequences for their safety, wellbeing and rights, as well as for recovery and resilience building.

Addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings is expected to contribute to ending the practice. There is increasing recognition that child marriage rates increase as a result of crises and emergencies, with significant detrimental short and longer term consequences. However, together with gender based violence, child marriage is often neglected in preparedness and response efforts (Girls Not Brides 2016, Care 2015, Plan 2011).

The drivers of child marriage are complex and interlinked, and causality is not easy to determine. For example poverty is a major driver of child marriage, but child marriages also increase poverty, contributing to early childbirth, increasing the aggregate fertility rate, and limiting girls' education and employment opportunities (World Bank 2017). Similarly girl's participation in education is positively correlated with delays in child marriage, while marrying as a child constrains or puts an end to girl's schooling, and women who dropped out of school are more likely to have married young. Gender inequality and the low status of girls underpin and are reinforced by child marriage. For child brides there is a lack of agency and autonomy, and exposure to exploitation and abuse.

Humanitarian crises exacerbate these underpinning drivers of child marriage, by reducing the capacities of existing protective mechanisms, and increasing poverty and economic hardship. Disasters and crises impact gender roles in both positive and negative ways. While crises can have the potential to challenge existing roles and structures, they can also foster insecurity and increase women and girls' vulnerability to violence and abuse – thereby increasing women and girl's dependence and reinforcing traditional gender norms (Oxfam 2013<sup>3</sup>). Successful interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings must therefore address these underpinning factors that drive the practice (Girls Not Brides and ICRW 2016, WRC 2016).

Asia Pacific is the world's most disaster prone region, and South Asia is significantly affected. The South Asia region is prone to flooding, landslides, droughts and earthquakes, and faces a number of protracted conflicts and related internal and cross-border population displacement (UNICEF 2017). In 2015 South Asia accounted for 64 per cent of total global fatalities due to natural disasters — the majority as a result of the 7.6 magnitude earthquake that struck Nepal in April which caused 8,790 deaths (ESCAP 2016). Bangladesh and Pakistan were among the top 10 countries most affected by climate related disasters from 1995-2014.

Despite the high rates of child marriage in South Asia, and the significant vulnerability of the region to natural disasters and climate change, to date only a handful of studies have examined the impact of such crises on child marriage in the region. While a number of studies have looked at child marriage in conflict and crisis settings, many of these have been conducted in the Middle East and Africa, and most have focused on child marriage in conflict affected settings. For example, research conducted among Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that more than a third of women aged 20-24 were married before the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/hpn-gender-conflict-humanitarian-action-291113-en.pdf>

age of 18, including 24 percent of 15-17 year olds, a significant increase compared to Syria before the crisis, and that school enrolment declined significantly among girls as they aged<sup>4</sup>, echoing similar findings from other studies (UNICEF 2014, Save the Children 2014, UN Women 2013).

Studies conducted in South Asia to date have examined the impact of natural disasters and climate change on child marriage in Bangladesh (Human Rights Watch 2015, Alstona et al 2014), and the relationship between conflict and child marriage in Sri Lanka (FOKUS WOMEN 2015) and Nepal (World Bank 2011). In the wake of the earthquake that occurred in Nepal in 2015 anecdotal evidence identified an increase in child marriage rates in the wake of the disaster (Girls Not Brides and ICRW 2016). While studies have not yet been undertaken, anecdotal evidence indicates that child marriages are occurring among the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh (2017 Humanitarian Response Plan September 2017-February 2018: Rohingya Refugee Crisis). The forthcoming UNICEF-UNFPA study (*Key Drivers of the Changing Prevalence of Child Marriage in South Asia*) examines DHS data to determine whether there are significant difference in child marriage rates due to emergencies.

Undertaking research on child marriage in humanitarian settings is methodologically challenging, as is research on gender based violence in crises, given the difficulties in gathering evidence from vulnerable and displaced population groups. Studies in South Asia have used qualitative (Human Rights Watch 2015) or mixed methods (Alstona et al), as well as analysis of secondary sources (Fokus Women 2014) and available survey data (Valente 2011). Studies in other regions have also included dedicated surveys with specific at risk population groups (UNFPA 2017), and used existing available survey and administrative data sources to explore trends in child marriage (UNICEF 2014). However, estimating changes in child marriage rates as a result of crises is difficult – marriages are more likely to be unregistered and child marriage may be a sensitive issue among specific groups (UNICEF 2014). At the same time, lack of available data does not mean that violence and harmful practices are not occurring, or that it is acceptable to “wait for the data to act”. Given the extreme vulnerability and hardship that people experience during crises and emergencies, it is particularly critical that research on gender based violence and harmful practices is in line with ethical standards and “does no harm”.

UNFPA and UNICEF are committed to stepping up investments towards ending child marriage and reducing adolescent pregnancy. In its new Strategic Plan 2018-21, UNFPA committed to supporting governments and civil society to address determinants and adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and strengthen responses to eliminate harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage. Ending child marriage is a targeted priority in UNICEF’s Child Protection Strategy (2009), UNICEF’s Gender Action Plan (2018-2021), and an explicit results area in UNICEF’s new Strategic Plan 2018-2021, under Goal 3.

UNICEF and UNFPA’s Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (2015-2018) aims to enhance investments in and support for married and unmarried girls and provide evidence for the corresponding benefits; engage key actors – including young people as agents of change – in catalyzing

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.unfpa.org/news/new-study-finds-child-marriage-rising-among-most-vulnerable-syrian-refugees#>

shifts towards positive gender norms; increase political support, resources, positive policies and frameworks; and improve the data and evidence base. Research on child marriage in humanitarian settings was identified as a priority during an expert group meeting on ending child marriage in South Asia conducted by UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA in 2016.

## **B. Purpose and objectives**

In order to build on the limited evidence available on child marriage in emergencies, and support interventions to address the specific drivers of child marriage in humanitarian crises, UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA are commissioning a study on child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia with a specific focus on disaster (including natural and man-made disasters) and climate related emergencies.

The objectives of the study are to:

- i) examine rates of child marriage for girls and boys before, during and after periods of disaster and crisis, where data is available.
- ii) review and analyse the key drivers and factors that are considered to contribute to an increase (or decrease) in child marriage in humanitarian settings as well as how crises impact and exacerbate underlying drivers of child marriage such as poverty, lack of access to education, and gender norms, gender inequality and gender based violence
- iii) identify examples of existing interventions to prevent and address child marriage in emergencies, as well as challenges in designing, funding and implementing such interventions
- iv) examine the extent to which humanitarian action plans identify child marriage as an issue, and identify and budget for response activities
- v) assess the extent to which strategies to address child marriage in development settings can be successfully adapted for humanitarian settings, and/or whether different strategies are needed
- vi) examine the contribution of efforts to address child marriage to broader recovery and resilience building efforts, as well as to security and stability.
- vii) make recommendations for more effectively addressing and responding to child marriage in emergencies and for integrating interventions into humanitarian preparedness and response.

## **C. Scope of work**

The study will focus on 1-2 countries in South Asia with a high rate of child marriage and high vulnerability to disaster and climate related crises and emergencies among Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal or India. Final selection of countries for inclusion in the study will be made based on the proposed methodology and in consultation with the technical advisory group.



asia & the pacific



The partner institution will be responsible for the following key tasks:

- Undertake a systematic literature review of available studies (including studies conducted by UNICEF and UNFPA listed in the terms of reference)
- Undertake analysis of available data sources to estimate the impact of crises on child marriage rates (including Demographic Health Surveys, Multi-Indicator Cluster Studies.) to complement and inform further data generation options to implement during the assignment. The analysis should also build on existing analysis conducted by UNICEF and UNFPA, which will be made available to a selected institution.
- Develop a conceptual framework and analysis of data sources, recommend countries/sites (among focus countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan) for inclusion in the study as well as a proposed methodological approach including ethical considerations. The proposed methodology should be robust with qualitative and quantitative elements. It could include panel data, targeted surveys, network analysis, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in addition to any other proposed methods. Key informant interviews with humanitarian and development actors should also be included.
- Conduct fieldwork in 1-2 countries/sites in line with the final agreed methodology.
- Present and discuss preliminary findings with UNFPA and UNICEF and selected stakeholders.
- Prepare draft and final presentation and report on the study findings and recommendations, including recommendations for programme interventions and future research.

#### D. Overview of milestones, deliverables and estimated timeline

Key deliverables will include the following:

1. Literature and conceptual framework for the study.
2. Proposed methodology and recommended countries for inclusion the study.
2. Final methodology and study design.
3. Final report to a publishable standard in line with UNFPA and UNICEF guidance
4. Webinar and powerpoint presentation.

The estimated duration of the work is one year with the following timeline.

Milestone/deliverable	Estimated timeline
Literature review and conceptual framework including analysis of available data sources:	6 weeks from finalization of partner agreement
Proposed methodology and recommended countries for fieldwork	8 weeks from finalization of partner agreement
Fieldwork conducted in line with agreed methodology (this timing could be adjusted if for example the fieldwork includes sites that are experiencing natural disasters such as annual flooding)	14-16 weeks finalization of partner agreement

Presentation and discussion of preliminary findings (presentation and draft report) with stakeholders	4-6 weeks from completion of fieldwork
Draft report	4 weeks from discussion of preliminary findings with stakeholders
Final report	4-6 weeks from draft report depending on feedback to draft report
Presentation and webinar	Within 2 weeks of submission of the final report

The study will be undertaken as desk work in the location of the implementing partner and in the countries where fieldwork is to be conducted. Presence in Bangkok and/or Kathmandu may be required for presentation and discussion of preliminary findings. Availability for teleconferencing to discuss progress and feedback is required.

#### **F. Expected profile of partner institution**

It is expected that the partner institution will have demonstrated experience in research on child marriage, gender equality and child protection in development and humanitarian settings; demonstrated knowledge of literature on child marriage in development and humanitarian settings; experience in conducting research on child marriage in South Asia.

Proposed team members must have the following qualifications:

- Demonstrated analytical, research and communication and writing skills in English, knowledge of languages in the region is considered an asset
- Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of child marriage, dynamics of social change, drivers of harmful practices, and gender inequalities.
- Demonstrated experience in conducting research in complex development and humanitarian settings, including experience in quantitative and qualitative survey and research design, data collection, and analysis.

Shortlisted institutions will be requested to hold an oral presentation of a full proposal with a detailed research plan and approach and proposed methodology to conduct this work via tele-conference.

#### **F. Technical guidance and oversight.**

UNFPA APRO's Technical Adviser, Gender and Human Rights will provide overall management and technical guidance to this work in close consultation with UNICEF ROSA's Child Protection Adviser and will facilitate input from relevant stakeholders and country offices in the region.

#### **G. Contractual Arrangement**



A selected institution will enter into an implementing partnership agreement with UNFPA APRO with an annual workplan. This may entail additional elements of follow-up studies.