

## Child marriages: MEPs discuss how to put an end to this scourge

**One in every three girls in developing countries is married before turning 18, and one in nine before 15. Child marriages limit future prospects as children are usually forced to drop out of school. Girls also face dangerous complications from pregnancy and childbirth, the leading causes of death among adolescent girls in developing countries. They are also at great risk from suffering abuse. On 11 April Parliament's women's rights and human rights subcommittee discussed the issue with experts.**

Child marriage affects both girls and boys, but girls are most at risk, representing 82% of the children married. The child marriage rate is slowly declining worldwide, but population growth will increase the number of people living with the consequences of a child marriage: 950 million by 2030 (compared to 700 million today).

Child marriages occur on all continents but the highest rates are found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The three countries with the highest rates of child marriage are Niger (77% of women are married before the age of 18), Bangladesh (74%) and Chad (69%). In a [resolution](#) adopted in plenary last week, MEPs called on the Bangladesh government to close the loopholes in their legislation on child marriages, allowing exemptions to the minimum age of 18 for women and 21 for men.

### The factors driving child marriages

the causes of child marriages include poverty, gender inequality and parent's fear for their children's security. Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, a Swedish member of the EPP group, said she had spoken to parents in refugee camps who saw marriage as the best way to provide their children with a future.

A [recent study](#) among Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that 24% of refugee girls between 15 and 17 were already married. Estimates indicate that child marriage rates are four times higher among Syrian refugees than among Syrians before the conflict.

### How to tackle it

Experts and MEPs stressed the importance of working directly with the children and the communities to change social norms, guarantee access to health, education and legal services

and ensure a strong and legal framework.

“Parliaments everywhere should adopt laws to protect children and in particular not deny girls of their dignity and ability to make fundamental choices in their own lives,” said Pier Antonio Panzeri, an Italian member of the S&D group, chair of the human rights subcommittee and co-chair of the hearing.

Professor Benyam Dawit Mezmur, chair of the UN committee on children's rights, stressed the importance of the role of regional organisations, while and Fredrik Malmberg, the Swedish ombudsman for children, called on EU countries to end double standards for asylum seekers. “Our legislation and our institutions should provide equal protection from all children,” he said.

Ms Vilija BLINKEVIČIŪTĖ (S&D, LT), Chair of the Committee on Women’s Rights and

Gender Equality and co-chair of the hearing remained that child and early marriage can be significantly lowered by education and economic empowerment for women.

“Tackling child marriage gives us an entry point to address a whole range of other issues,” said Lakshmi Sundaram, executive director of the non-governmental organisation Girls not Brides. She said child marriages could hold back other development efforts, “such as ending violence against women, keeping children in school, or getting rid of HIV/Aids”.

### Find out more

[Press release: child brides in Bangladesh \(6 April 2017\)](#)

[Hearing programme and speakers](#)

[Human rights subcommittee](#)

[Women's rights committee](#)

[Unicef report on child marriages](#)

[UNFPA page on child marriages](#)



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Mauritania/Malian refugee/ Fati, 13, poses for a picture in Mbera refugee camp, 50 km away from the Mali border, on 13 February 2013.

Fati arrived to the camp in October 2012, when she was six months pregnant along with her husband. ©UNHCR/B.Malum



Benyam Dawit Mezmur (left) stressed the importance of the role of regional organisations in tackling child marriage during the hearing in Parliament