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REPORT

Towards an EU external strategy against early and forced marriages – next steps
(2017/2275(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Charles Goerens

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

Towards an EU external strategy against early and forced marriages – next steps (2017/2275(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 4 October 2017 on ending child marriage¹,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, in particular, Article 16 thereof, and all other UN treaties and instruments concerning human rights,
- having regard to Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to Article 10(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and its four fundamental principles of non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), survival, development and protection (Article 6) and participation (Article 12), and having regard to its resolution of 27 November 2014 on the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child²,
- having regard to Article 16 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,
- having regard to the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages,
- having regard to the UN General Assembly resolutions of 18 December 2014 and 19 December 2016 on child, early and forced marriage,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council's resolution 29/8 of 2 July 2015 on Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage, its resolution 24/23 of 9 October 2013 on Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage: challenges, achievements, best practices and implementation gaps and its resolution 35/16 of 22 June 2017 on Child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian settings,
- having regard to the position adopted by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in June 2015 on child marriage, in Johannesburg (South Africa),
- having regard to the Joint General Comment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) on Ending Child Marriage,

¹ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2017)0379.

² OJ C 289, 9.8.2016, p. 57.

- having regard to Articles 32, 37, and 59(4) of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),
 - having regard to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Report of 2012 entitled ‘Marrying Too Young – End Child Marriage’,
 - having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
 - having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and, in particular, Article 9 thereof,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 26 October 2015 on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020,
 - having regard to the Council conclusions of 3 April 2017 on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child,
 - having regard to the fundamental principles laid down in the 2016 European External Action Service communication on a Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy,
 - having regard to the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, adopted by the Council on 25 June 2012¹; having regard to the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019, adopted by the Council on 20 July 2015²; having regard to the joint staff working document of the Commission and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 27 June 2017 entitled ‘EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019): Mid-Term Review – June 2017’ (SWD(2017)0254),
 - having regard to the revised EU guidelines for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child of 6 March 2017 entitled ‘Leave No Child Behind’,
 - having regard to the European Consensus on Development of 7 June 2017, which underscores the EU’s commitment to mainstreaming human rights and gender equality in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (A8-0187/2018),
- A. whereas child, early and forced marriages are a serious violation of human rights and, in particular, women’s rights, including the rights to equality, autonomy and bodily integrity, access to education and freedom from exploitation and discrimination, and are a problem that exists not only in third countries, but might also occur in some Member States; whereas eliminating these practices is one of the priorities for the EU’s external action in the field of promoting women’s rights and human rights; whereas various

¹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/131181.pdf

² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_en_2.pdf

international charters and laws prohibit the marriage of minors such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols; whereas child, early and forced marriages have an extremely negative impact on the physical and mental health and personal development of the individuals concerned and on the children born from the marriages, and, as a result, on society as a whole; whereas child marriage is a form of forced marriage since children inherently lack the ability to give their full, free and informed consent to their marriage or its timing; whereas children represent part of a highly vulnerable group;

- B. whereas the EU is committed to promoting the rights of the child, and whereas child, early, and forced marriages are a violation of these rights; whereas the EU is committed to comprehensively protecting and promoting the rights of a child in its external policy;
- C. whereas no marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, and by any person under a minimum age for marriage;
- D. whereas child marriage is a global problem which cuts across countries, cultures and religions; whereas child brides can be found in all regions of the world, from the Middle East to Latin America, from Asia to Europe and from Africa to North America; whereas child marriage also affects boys, but to a much lesser extent than girls;
- E. whereas, to date, more than 750 million women have married before the age of 18, of whom 250 million were married before the age of 15; whereas there are currently around 40 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 who are married or cohabiting; whereas, every year, some 15 million more get married before the age of 18, of whom 4 million get married before the age of 15; whereas 156 million boys have also married before the age of 18, of whom 25 million were married before the age of 15; whereas child, early and forced marriages are more frequent in poor, underdeveloped regions; whereas the number of child, early and forced marriages is increasing as the global population grows; whereas a recent UNICEF report estimates that, in 2050, around 1.2 billion girls will have married before the age of 18; whereas nine out of 10 countries with the highest child marriage rates are classified as fragile states;
- F. whereas the root causes of child marriage are, in general, poverty, lack of education, deep-rooted gender inequalities and stereotypes, the perception that marriage will provide ‘protection’, family honour and the lack of effective protection of the rights of boys and girls as well as harmful practices, perceptions, customs, and discriminatory norms; whereas these factors are often exacerbated by limited access to quality education and job opportunities and are reinforced by certain entrenched social standards of child, early and forced marriages;
- G. whereas child, early and forced marriages are linked to a high risk of early and unwanted pregnancies, high rates of maternal and child mortality, lower use of family planning and unwanted pregnancies with increased health risks, inadequate or non-existent access to information about sexual and reproductive health services and usually signal the end of a girl’s education; whereas some countries even prohibit pregnant girls and young mothers from returning to the classroom; whereas child marriage can also lead to forced labour, slavery, and prostitution;
- H. whereas, although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises the

importance of measures that encourage regular school attendance, many girls are not in education due to a number of factors, for example because schools are inaccessible or expensive; whereas child, early and forced marriages have a disproportionate devastating impact and lifelong consequences for their victims and very often deprive the persons concerned of the possibility of continuing their studies as girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory time before a marriage or shortly afterwards; whereas education, including sex education, is an effective way of preventing child, early and forced marriages because access to education and training contributes to empowerment, employment opportunities and promotes freedom of choice, the right to self-determination and active participation in society enabling individuals to free themselves from any form of control adversely affecting their rights without which the economic, legal, health and social situation of women and girls and the development of society as a whole continues to be hampered;

- I. whereas, every year, 17 million children have a child, forcing them to take on adult responsibilities and endangering their health, education and economic prospects; whereas child, early and forced marriages expose girls to early childbearing involving considerable risks and difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth, particularly owing to highly inadequate or non-existent access to medical support, including high-quality health centres, frequently resulting in maternal mortality and morbidity; whereas there is an increased risk of contracting transmitted infections including HIV; whereas complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death in girls aged 15 to 19 in low- and middle-income countries; whereas the mortality rate of babies born to adolescent mothers is around 50 % higher and these babies have a higher risk of physical and cognitive development problems; whereas the experience of frequent and early pregnancies may also cause a range of long-term health complications, and even death;
- J. whereas child, early and forced marriages are a violation of the rights of the child and a form of violence against girls and boys, and whereas, as such, states have an obligation to investigate allegations, prosecute perpetrators and provide redress to the victims, who are primarily women and girls; whereas these marriages must be condemned and cannot be justified on any cultural or religious grounds; whereas child, early and forced marriages increase the risk of gender-based violence, and are often at the origin of domestic and intimate partner violence and sexual, physical, psychological, emotional and financial abuse and other practices harmful to girls and women, such as female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes, as well as increasing the risk of girls and women being exposed to discrimination and gender-based violence during their lives;
- K. whereas the number of child, early and forced marriages increases significantly in situations of instability, armed conflict and natural and humanitarian disasters, during which medical and psychological care or access to education as well as opportunities to make a livelihood are often lacking and social networks and routines are disrupted; whereas during the recent migration crises, some parents, seeking to protect their children, especially daughters, from sexual aggression, or because they are regarded as a financial burden on their families, feel they have no choice but to have them marry before the age of 18 in the belief that it could provide a route out of poverty;
- L. whereas forced marriage is one of the most common causes of persecution on the

grounds of gender as claimed by a significant number of women seeking asylum; whereas there are still a number of hurdles to recognising forced marriage as a reason for granting international protection despite it being a form of gender-based persecution and constituting a serious and systematic violation of fundamental rights, entailing inhuman and degrading treatment which may amount to torture;

- M. whereas the Istanbul Convention classifies forced marriage as a form of violence against women, and calls for the acts of forcing a child to enter into a marriage and of luring a child abroad with the purpose of forcing her or him to enter into a marriage to be criminalised; whereas the lack of access by victims to legal, medical, and social support can exacerbate the issue; whereas 11 EU Member States have yet to ratify the convention;
- N. whereas the nature of child, early or forced marriages means many cases often go unreported, with cases of abuse crossing international borders and cultural boundaries, and can amount to a form of human trafficking, leading to slavery, exploitation, and/or control;
- O. whereas in July 2014 the first Girl Summit, aimed at mobilising domestic and international efforts to end female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriages within a generation, took place in London;
- P. whereas preventing and responding to all forms of violence against girls and women, including child, early and forced marriages, is one of the targets of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020;
- Q. whereas child marriage will cost developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030¹;
- R. whereas early and child marriages remain a taboo subject which needs to be addressed publicly so as to put an end to the daily suffering of the young and adolescent girls involved and the continuous violation of their human rights; whereas one way of doing so would be to support and disseminate the work of journalists, artists, photographers and activists addressing the issue of early marriages;
- 1. Notes that some EU Member States allow marriage at 16 years with parental consent; calls on legislators, both in the EU Member States and in third countries, to set the minimum uniform age for marriage at 18 years and to adopt necessary administrative, legal and financial measures to ensure effective implementation of this requirement, for example by promoting the registration of marriages and births and by ensuring that girls have access to institutional support mechanisms including psycho-social counselling, protection mechanisms and opportunities for economic empowerment; reiterates that child, early and forced marriages should be regarded as a serious violation of human rights and an infringement of the fundamental rights of the children concerned, first and foremost of the right to freely express their consent and the right to their physical integrity and mental health, but also indirectly of the right to education and to the full

¹ Wodon, Quentin T.; Male, Chata; Nayihouba, Kolobadia Ada; Onagoruwa, Adenike Opeoluwa; Savadogo, Aboudrahyme; Yedan, Ali; Edmeades, Jeff; Kes, Aslihan; John, Neetu; Murithi, Lydia; Steinhaus, Mara; Petroni, Suzanne, *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report*, Economic Impacts of Child Marriage, Washington, D.C., World Bank Group, 2017.

enjoyment of civil and political rights; condemns child, early and forced marriages and considers that any infringement of legislation should be addressed in a proportionate and effective manner;

2. Believes it is important to tackle the multiple causes of child, early and forced marriages, including harmful traditions, endemic poverty, conflicts, customs, consequences of natural disasters, stereotypes, a lack of regard for gender equality and women's and girls' rights, health and well-being, the lack of appropriate educational opportunities, weak legal and policy responses with special attention to children from disadvantaged communities; calls, in that regard, for the EU and its Member States to work together with the relevant UN bodies and other partners to draw attention to the issue of child, early and forced marriage; calls for the EU and Member States to meet the objectives of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to combat harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, more effectively and to hold those responsible to account; supports increased funding from the EU and its Member States via development aid mechanisms which promote gender equality and education, in order to improve access to education for girls and women and strengthen opportunities for them to participate in community development and in economic and political leadership, with a view to addressing the causes of child, early and forced marriages;
3. Recognises that a statutory ban on child, early and forced marriages by itself would not guarantee an end to these practices; calls for the EU and its Member States to better coordinate and strengthen the enforcement of international treaties, legislation and programmes, as well as via diplomatic relations with governments and organisations in third countries, in order to address issues related to child, early and forced marriages; calls for every effort to be made to enforce statutory bans and complement them with a broader set of laws and policies; recognises that this requires the adoption and implementation of comprehensive and holistic policies, strategies and programmes, including the repeal of discriminatory legal provisions concerning marriage and the adoption of affirmative measures to empower girl children;
4. Notes that gender inequality, the lack of respect for girls and women in general and adherence to cultural and social traditions which perpetuate discrimination against girls and women are among the biggest obstacles to combating child, early and forced marriages; recognises, furthermore, the link between child, early and forced marriages and honour-based violence and calls for such crimes to be properly investigated and for the prosecution of the accused; notes, in addition, that boys and young men can also be the victims of such violence; calls for these practices to be addressed in all of the EU's relevant programming and in the EU's political dialogues with partner countries in order to provide mechanisms to tackle them, as well as through education and awareness-raising efforts in partner countries;
5. Points out that in order to comprehensively tackle child, early and forced marriages, the European Union, as a major actor in global development and human rights, must play a leading role in cooperation with regional organisations and local communities; calls on the EU and the Member States to work with law enforcement authorities and judicial systems in third countries, and to provide training and technical assistance to help with the adoption and enforcement of the legislation prohibiting child, early and forced marriages and eliminating laws, social standards and cultural traditions which act as a

brake on the rights and freedom of young girls and women; calls on Member States to contribute to initiatives such as the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls;

6. Calls, therefore, on the Member States which have not already done so to include a complete ban on child, early and forced marriages in their domestic legislation, to enforce penal law and to ratify the Istanbul Convention; calls on Member States to cooperate with civil society in order to coordinate their actions on the issue; stresses the importance of adequate and long-term support, for shelters for women and refugees and unaccompanied and displaced children, so that no-one is denied protection due to lack of resources; calls on all Member States to enforce the minimum age for marriage set by legislation and to monitor the situation, by collecting gender disaggregated data and evidence on related factors, in order to be able to better assess the magnitude of the problem; calls on the Commission to set up a European database, including information from third countries, to monitor forced marriage;
7. Recommends that Member States align their legislation on the treatment of all third-country nationals present in the EU, including migrants who married before the age of 18 and introduce a child-centred case management system to determine the best interests of the child, based on which the decision on the legal recognition of the marriage can be taken and extend humanitarian treatment to those who married before the age of 18 or by force and guaranteeing protection in cases in which the women or girls involved demand the dissolution of the forced marriage; calls for special procedures to be put in place in reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers;
8. Calls on the European Union, in the context of its foreign and development cooperation policies, to offer a strategic pact to its partners, and, to that end, to require that:
 - a. all its partner countries prohibit child, early and forced marriages, eliminating any legal loopholes and that they enforce legislation in line with international human rights standards, including the removal of any provisions that could allow, justify or give rise to child, early or forced marriages, including those that enable the perpetrators of rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, abduction, people trafficking or modern forms of slavery to escape prosecution and punishment if they marry their victims, specifically by repealing or amending those laws;
 - b. this prohibition is respected and enforced in practice at all levels once the law has entered into force, and that comprehensive and holistic strategies and programmes that include measurable progressive targets are put in place to prevent and eradicate child, early and forced marriages, and that they be adequately funded and evaluated, notably through ensuring access to justice and accountability mechanisms and remedies;
 - c. partner governments show sustained leadership and political will to end child marriage and develop comprehensive legal frameworks and action plans with clear milestones and timelines integrating child marriage prevention measures across different sectors, and calling for political, economic, social, cultural and civil environments that protect and empower women and girls and support gender equality;
 - d. the resources needed to achieve this objective are mobilised, taking care to open this cooperation up to all institutional actors such as the judiciary, educational and health

professionals, law enforcement, and community and religious leaders as well as civil society in the area of tackling child, early and forced marriages;

e. the level of public development aid allocation to government authorities is made dependent on the recipient country's commitment to complying, in particular, with the requirements on human rights, including in the fight against child, early and forced marriages;

f. the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) programme is implemented in triangular cooperation involving these organisations, the European Union, its Member States and their civil society organisations working in this field and the partner countries in combating child, early and forced marriages through the implementation of budgeted national action plans, prioritising programmes and methods likely to go beyond so-called cultural, religious or tribal practices that, in reality, constitute the worst violations of the rights of children and the dignity of children; calls for this cooperation also to address the associated issues of honour-based violence;

g. the implementation of these programmes build on the relevant conventions and texts, as well as the specific goals and targets adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution of 25 September 2015 in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 3 ('Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'), Goal 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'), Goal 16 ('Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'), especially 'end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children';

h. the implementation of these programmes should also build on Goal 5 of the SDGs ('Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'), including access to family planning and the full range of public and universal sexual and reproductive health rights, in particular modern contraception and safe and legal abortion for girls; calls on the European Commission and Member States, in this context, to support the SheDecides movement and pledge additional funding to international aid for sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortions and information about abortions, thereby countering the Global Gag Rule which was reinstated by the United States government in early 2017;

i. issues relating to child, early, and forced marriages are raised in the ongoing dialogue between EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis and third countries; encourages the Commission and the Member States to integrate a gender perspective into peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction programmes, to develop economic livelihood and education programmes for girls and women who are the victims of child, early and forced marriages, and to facilitate their access to health and reproductive services in conflict-affected areas;

9. Considers it paramount to create space for respectful dialogue with community leaders and to raise awareness among the public in general and among those at risk in particular, on the basis of education and awareness-raising campaigns and through social networks and new media as part of the fight against child, early and forced

marriage; calls, therefore, for the development of cross-cutting governmental, legal, societal, and diplomatic actions aimed at preventing such practices; believes it is crucial to engage within local communities with key stakeholders such as male and female teenage students, teachers, parents and religious and community leaders through community-based programmes or specific awareness-raising programmes to draw attention to the negative impact of child marriage on children, families and communities, about the existing law on child marriage and gender inequality and how to access funding to address it;

10. Considers that the empowerment of women and girls through education, social support and economic opportunities is a crucial tool to fight against these practices; recommends that the EU promote and protect equal rights for women and girls as regards access to education, placing special emphasis on free, high-quality primary and secondary education and integrating sexual and reproductive health education into schools' curricula providing girls' families with financial incentives and/or assistance for school enrolment and completion; stresses the need to guarantee refugee children full access to education and to promote their integration and inclusion in national education; recognises the need for support and protection for those who are at risk of child, early, or forced marriages, and those who are already in such a marriage in terms of education, psychological and social support, housing and other high-quality social services, as well as mental, sexual and reproductive health services and healthcare;
11. Calls for the European Union to ensure that training is provided to government officials, including their diplomatic staff, social workers, religious and community leaders, to all law enforcement agencies, judicial systems of third countries, teachers and educators and other personnel in contact with potential victims, so that they are responsive to cases of child marriage and gender-based violence, and better able to identify and support girls and boys exposed to child, forced and early marriages, domestic violence, the risk of sexual violence and any other practice which undermines human rights and dignity, and that they are able to take effective action to ensure that the rights and dignity of these individuals are respected;
12. Calls for the European Union to ensure that training is provided to law enforcement agencies so that they are better able to uphold the rights of girls exposed to forced and early marriages, domestic violence, the risk of rape and any other practice which undermines human dignity;
13. Calls on the Member States to guarantee migrant women and girls an autonomous residence permit which is not dependent on the status of their spouse or partner, in particular for victims of physical and psychological violence, including forced or arranged marriages, and to guarantee that all administrative measures are taken to protect them, including effective access to assistance and protection mechanisms;
14. Calls for the EU and its Member States to consider supporting and strengthening protection measures in third countries, such as safe shelters, and access to legal, medical, and, where necessary, consular support, for victims of child, early, and forced marriages;
15. Recognises that the European Union, which is committed to upholding human rights and fundamental values, including respect for human dignity, must be absolutely

irreproachable at Member State level, and calls on the Commission to initiate a wide-ranging awareness-raising campaign and to dedicate a European year to the fight against child, early and forced marriages;

16. Strongly supports the work of the Girls Not Brides global partnership in ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their potential;
17. Welcomes the African Union's ongoing campaign to end child marriage and the work of organisations such as the Royal Commonwealth Society to advocate increased action to end child marriage and tackle gender inequality;
18. Stresses the urgent need to inform and educate men and boys, winning their support for measures to uphold human rights, including the rights of children and women;
19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the United Nations.

18.4.2018

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

for the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Towards an EU external strategy against early and forced marriages – next steps
2017/2275(INI)

Rapporteur: Daniela Aiuto

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas child, early and forced marriage¹ is a violation of the human rights enshrined in international standards such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages and which form part of the core principles embodied in the European Union as an area of security, freedom, justice and human rights, including women's and girls' rights; whereas child, early and forced marriage perpetuates other violations of human rights that disproportionately affect women and girls and is an obstacle to socio-economic development;
- B. whereas, despite commitments at international, national and regional level, child, early and forced marriages remain widespread across the world, according to UN estimates, affecting almost 700 million women and 150 million men who are in forced marriages which were contracted before they reached majority; whereas early marriage continues to be a problem which disproportionately affects underage and young girls; whereas eradicating child marriage would be a strategic way of promoting women's rights and empowering women;
- C. whereas it has repeatedly been proven that early or child marriage has negative consequences for and is harmful to girls and women, their children and their

¹ Defined as 'marriage entered into without the free and valid consent of one or both spouses, or before the age of 18' according to the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages of 7 November 1962 and Resolution 1468 (2005) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on forced marriages and child marriages.

communities; whereas child, early and forced marriage very often results in school drop-out, depriving girls and women of their basic rights and increasing the likelihood of them being victims of gender-based and persistent poverty, and whereas being deprived of education and of future paid employment leaves young brides more likely to be and remain poor;

- D. whereas, every year, around the world, 16 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth to a child and at least one million girls become mothers before reaching the age of 15; whereas 95 % of the world's births to adolescents occur in developing countries, nine in 10 of these births occur within marriage or a union and about 70 000 adolescents in developing countries die annually of causes related to pregnancy and childbirth¹;
- E. whereas studies show a strong correlation between child marriage and premature childbirth; whereas early marriages and forced marriages have grave consequences for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including unwanted pregnancies, because of low levels of family planning and sexual education, and pose a serious threat to the physical and mental health of women and girls by significantly increasing the risk of early, frequent and/or unwanted pregnancies, maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, obstetric fistula and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, while complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls between the ages of 15 and 19 and children who are born to teenage mothers are 50 % more likely to die in the first few days after the birth;
- F. whereas, every seven seconds, somewhere in the world, a girl under 15 gets married, often to a man much older than herself; whereas, if the rise continues at its present rate, the number of women married in childhood will, according to estimates, increase to 950 million in 2030 and to 1.2 billion in 2050²;
- G. whereas marriage before 18 years of age increases the likelihood of domestic violence; whereas child brides are often victims of violence since large age differences aggravate the imbalance of power between girls and their much older husbands;
- H. whereas deep-rooted gender inequalities and stereotypes, harmful practices, perceptions, customs and discriminatory norms are root causes of child, early and forced marriage; whereas this increases the risk of women and girls being exposed to discrimination and gender-based violence during their lives;
- I. whereas education is one of the most effective ways of preventing early and forced marriages and of helping women and girls make choices in full knowledge of the implications for their lives; whereas education prepares girls for jobs and livelihoods, raises their self-esteem and their status in their households and communities, and gives them more say in decisions that affect their lives³, thereby reducing the likelihood of child marriage and delaying childbearing;
- J. whereas there is increasing concern about early and forced marriages in conflict-

¹ 'Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy', UNFPA (2013).

² 'Every Last Girl: Free to live, free to learn, free from harm', report by Save the Children, 11 October 2016.

³ 'Motherhood in Childhood': Facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy, UNFPA (2013).

affected areas; whereas this practice tends to be justified by certain belligerent and extremist groups, all the while having a deep impact on the health and well-being of women and girls;

- K. whereas child marriage is ingrained in some traditions and cultures, but no culture or religion can justify such a practice, particularly when human rights and the rights of children are at stake; whereas in many communities where early marriage is prevalent, men have greater privileges and girls are often regarded as a financial burden to their families and, as a result, generally suffer low self-esteem;
- L. whereas all little girls have the right to be able to live out their childhood in full, playing, benefiting from the right to education, and being protected from violence, physical and psychological damage and abuse and exploitation of all kinds;
- M. whereas girls, both younger and older ones, have the right to develop their full potential as citizens, as laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- N. whereas early marriages and forced marriages in themselves constitute an obstacle to development, and the fact that such marriages continue to be arranged has held back efforts to achieve Goals 1 to 6 of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, poverty reduction, education, maternal and child mortality and health, including sexual and reproductive health¹;
- O. whereas preventing and responding to all forms of violence against girls and women, including early and forced marriages, is one of the targets of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020;
- P. whereas although forced marriage is contrary to the law throughout the EU, its exact definition varies; whereas the lack of a generally accepted definition has hindered efforts to establish data on the number of forced marriages in the EU;
- Q. whereas forced marriage remains a concern within the EU; whereas it is not a specific crime in most of the Member States, and instead protection is provided through a combination of more general criminal provisions, such as on rape or abduction;
- R. whereas, given that a minor aged under 18 cannot validly consent to marriage, child marriages must be regarded as forced marriages; whereas it is regrettable, therefore, that 144 out of 193 countries have no law banning child marriages;
- S. whereas many cases of forced marriage are not reported or are reported to private organisations and NGOs rather than to public authorities; whereas, when cases are reported to national authorities, no consistent data collection system exists at Member State level, even though this is urgently needed;
- T. whereas child marriage will cost developing countries trillions of dollars by 2030²;
- U. whereas governments need to recognise the importance of combating early and child

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution 69/156 of 18 December 2014 on child, early and forced marriage.

² Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report 2017.

marriage in efforts to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; whereas helping girls avoid child marriage and delay pregnancy and enabling them to attend school would give them the opportunity to improve their future skills and income, thereby helping to eradicate poverty for future generations; whereas promoting gender equality and women's empowerment would ensure that girls have decision-making power over their family lives, and their sexual and reproductive lives; whereas eradicating child and early marriage would reduce infant mortality and alleviate the wide range of health problems associated with pregnancy or early childbirth;

- V. whereas in the majority of communities that practice early and child marriage women are often the victims of the decision-making process, and whereas involving and educating community leaders and women from these communities is fundamental in changing attitudes and behaviour concerning child marriage; whereas, moreover, legislation outlawing early and forced marriage is needed;
 - W. whereas inter-generational poverty is one of the most frequently cited reasons for forcing girls into child marriage; whereas parents are generally unaware of the risks of early pregnancy owing to a lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health;
 - X. whereas in respect of child marriage, as in all areas of action to combat violence against women, it is vitally important to mobilise men and boys to challenge gender discrimination and change harmful traditional practices that are deeply ingrained in the culture of a given community;
 - Y. whereas early and child marriage remains a taboo subject which needs to be addressed publicly so as to put an end to the daily suffering of the young and adolescent girls involved and the continuous violation of their human rights; whereas one way of doing so would be to support and disseminate the work of journalists, artists, photographers and activists addressing the issue of early marriages;
 - Z. whereas campaigns to end early marriage of girls and young women will not succeed without acceptance of the sexuality of adolescents and their right to make their own decisions about their bodies, relationships and sexual activity; whereas, for such decisions to be taken with full knowledge of the facts, information on sexuality and contraceptive methods must be made available to both adolescents and their parents;
1. Condemns child, early and forced marriage and other harmful coercive practices imposed on women and girls, including teenage girls and girl children in Europe and the rest of the world, since practices of this kind constitute a serious violation of human rights and, specifically, the abuse of a minor where the victim is under 18 years of age;
 2. Stresses that child, early, and forced marriages are a gross affront to the right to free consent;
 3. Recognises that child marriages and forced marriage have also become a real problem within the EU, requiring common, decisive and coordinated action by all Member States;
 4. Calls on the Member States to actively refuse to recognise forced marriages and provide

full family-independent support to victims;

5. Notes that many parents living in distress and extreme poverty in refugee camps feel the need to protect their daughters from the threat of sexual violence by marrying them to older men; stresses however that the EU and its Member States should be united and consistent in their dismissal of the requests of refugees for legal recognition of marriages where one of the alleged spouses is a child or teenager; underlines that refugee status cannot be used as a legal backdoor to recognition of child marriages in Europe;
6. Recommends that a holistic and comprehensive approach be taken to child, early and forced marriages, which means addressing the root causes of child marriage, including gender inequality, poverty and lack of social and economic opportunities; stresses, while underlining the importance of education as a powerful tool for the prevention of child, early and forced marriages, that gender mainstreaming should be extended beyond traditional sectors such as education and health and reach out into all other policy areas;
7. Calls for the EU to play a major role in combating this human rights violation at national, European and international level and calls on the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission to make use of all the existing instruments available while putting forward a specific strategy with a view to determining what steps need to be taken to combat early, forced and child marriage and other practices harmful to girls and women, such as female genital mutilation, so-called honour crimes, sex slavery and trafficking, and determining the objectives which should be set and funding earmarked expressly for that purpose in order to achieve the overall aim of eradicating the above forms of marriage by 2030, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (target 5.3); calls, therefore, on the Commission and the EEAS to include in the strategy the need to address gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms which contribute to the acceptance and continuation of the above-listed harmful practices;
8. Recalls that ending child, early and forced marriage is included as one of the priorities for the EU's external action in the field of promoting women's rights and human rights;
9. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to draw up an action plan to help combat child, early and forced marriage in the context of the EU's relations with partner and non-member countries, in particular in the area of development, and to pay special attention to respect for women's and girls' rights in all trade and partnership agreements, not least by making use of the 'human rights clause'; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to prioritise these issues in the political dialogue with partner countries and establish concrete measures in collaboration with all key actors to eliminate harmful practices; calls, furthermore, on the Member States to encourage efforts to combat child, early and forced marriages in their relations with third countries;
10. Welcomes the launching of the joint EU-UN global gender initiative – the 'Spotlight Initiative' – to address sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices such as early forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) or human trafficking; notes, however, that the Spotlight Initiative mainly addresses elements of the agenda which are already a shared concern globally; underlines therefore the need to advance gender

equality in a more comprehensive way, through an adequate mix of programmes and modalities; calls on the Commission to use the midterm review of its international cooperation programmes to increase funding for the Gender Resource Package in order to streamline gender into bilateral cooperation and through thematic programmes;

11. Calls for the EU and the Member States to work together with UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA and other partners, including civil society organisations (CSOs), diaspora and migrant associations to draw attention to the issue of child, early and forced marriage by focusing on women's empowerment, including through education, economic empowerment and enhanced participation in decision-making, as well as on the protection and promotion of the human rights of all women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health;
12. Points to the need to make European funding for external action dependent on effective implementation of measures to eradicate early and forced marriage;
13. Encourages the Commission and the Member States to integrate a gender perspective into peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction programmes, to develop economic livelihood and education programmes for girls and women who are the victims of early and forced marriages, and to facilitate their access to health and reproductive services in conflict-affected areas;
14. Stresses the need to allocate funding to child marriage prevention programmes that aim to create a social environment in which girls can achieve their full potential, including by means of education, social and economic programmes for out-of-school girls, child protection schemes, shelters, legal counselling and psychological support; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to these kinds of programmes and activities in their external actions; calls, furthermore, on the Commission to carry out a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of its existing programmes and use of available funding for the prevention of early marriage in order to ensure that the programmes are implemented in the regions and countries where child marriages are most prevalent; encourages the EU delegations to fulfil the EU's commitment on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 to closely monitor the situation and develop relevant programmes in support of local legislative actions;
15. Stresses the need to develop empowerment programmes for girls and young women as a key strategy for the prevention and discouragement of early marriage, improving both their self-esteem and their awareness of their rights, including the legal right to refuse marriage;
16. Stresses that ending child, early and forced marriages would in turn have a large positive impact on the educational attainment of girls and their children, would contribute to women having fewer children and could increase their expected earnings and household welfare;
17. Points out that community contacts at local level are essential in helping to overcome traditional and discriminatory attitudes regarding education for girls, thereby improving women's employment prospects for the purposes of ensuring their own livelihoods and those of their families;

18. Encourages the development of information programmes involving all community leaders, educating them with regard to the harmful effects of traditions such as early marriage, so that they can subsequently play an active role in raising awareness within their communities;
19. Stresses the urgent need to inform and educate men and boys, winning their support for measures to uphold human rights, including the rights of children and women;
20. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take integrated, comprehensive and coordinated measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls, including child, early, and forced marriage, in particular through facilitating victims' access to justice and enhancing child protection mechanisms, while providing better support, and further and improved access to funding, for those non-governmental organisations working for the elimination of these practices;
21. Calls on all Member States to fully implement the laws prohibiting child, early and forced marriage by ensuring access to justice, including remedies, and by establishing structures and programmes to support, assist and protect the victims of child, early and forced marriages, including safe reception centres and the assistance of qualified female staff such as midwives, gynaecologists, psychologists and social workers; calls, in this connection, on the Commission and the Member States to ensure the effective implementation of the EU Victims' Directive, in particular by improving access for victims of violence against women to general and specialised victim support and by putting in place effective reporting mechanisms respecting the anonymity and confidentiality of victims in order to encourage victims of forced marriage to report the offence free from the fear of further stigmatisation;
22. Calls for the EU and the Member States to guarantee facilities and training for health workers to enable them to provide confidential and non-judgmental youth-friendly services, information and resources that fulfil the WHO standards of equitability, accessibility, acceptability, appropriateness and effectiveness;
23. Encourages the Commission and the Member States to launch awareness-raising campaigns on the phenomenon, its consequences and available legal remedies throughout the EU, including in refugee camps and in the candidate countries;
24. Welcomes the introduction, as part of the Schengen Information System, of a new alert, which can be used to protect children at risk of forced marriage;
25. Points out that Article 37 of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) stipulates that the States Parties must criminalise 'the intentional conduct of forcing an adult or a child to enter into a marriage'; deplures, therefore, the fact that only 12 Member States of the EU have criminalised forced marriage and recalls that, in line with the requirements of this convention, victims who are brought into another country where they lose their right to reside in the EU as a result of the forced marriage should be granted effective recourse to regain their residence status; calls on the Member States

which have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to do so without delay¹;

26. Calls on the Member States to guarantee migrant women and girls an autonomous residence permit which is not dependent on the status of their spouse or partner, in particular for victims of physical and psychological violence, including forced or arranged marriages, and to guarantee that all administrative measures are taken to protect them, including effective access to assistance and protection mechanisms;
27. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to adopt measures which discourage parents – be they EU citizens or not – from offering their under-age daughters as brides, both through trips to their respective countries of origin and – worse still – within the borders of the EU itself, and where necessary to punish those parents;
28. Acknowledges that most of the countries around the world have laws that set a minimum age of marriage, stresses, however, that many countries provide for exceptions to the minimum age requirement for marriage, mostly subject to parental consent or authorisation of the court, and that these should be addressed by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; calls on those Member States and invites those non-EU countries that have not yet done so to criminalise forced and early marriages, inter alia by revising the minimum legal age, irrespective of parental approval, requiring the full consent of both spouses and penalising those who coerce another person into marriage;
29. Proposes the express inclusion of forced marriage as a form of trafficking in human beings in Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and to develop a shared policy and common definition of forced marriage which should be used consistently at national and European level in policies and civil and criminal law provisions on forced marriage;
30. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor the cases of child, early and forced marriages within the EU and to consider establishing unified legal standards with regard to the procedure for dealing with cases of child and early marriages;
31. Encourages the consideration of mandatory birth registration in the countries where early, child and forced marriage is prevalent as the lack of registration can lead to a higher risk of child and early marriage;
32. Calls on the Commission to set up a European database to monitor and report forced marriage and other forms of gender-based human rights violations, including sexual exploitation;
33. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to set up a consistent data collection system on child, early and forced marriages, including sex-disaggregated data, as robust and reliable data are essential to evidence-based policy making and better targeted interventions;

¹ 'Forced marriage from a gender perspective', Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament (2016).

² List of the Convention ratifications: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?desktop=true>

34. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to draw up specific studies based on the data collected, in order to have a clear picture of the phenomenon at EU level, with specific information relating to each Member State;
35. Emphasises the negative influence of humanitarian crises, conflicts and natural disasters on the proliferation of forced, child and early marriages; stresses, therefore, the need to combine development and humanitarian efforts;
36. Emphasises the need to promote and safeguard the fundamental rights of all women and girls, in particular the right to express their sexuality and to take decisions relating to their sexuality freely and responsibly, in particular as regards their sexual and reproductive health, without facing constraints, discrimination or violence;
37. Emphasises that universal respect for and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) contributes to the achievement of all the health-related sustainable development goals, such as prenatal care and measures to avoid high-risk births and reduce infant and child mortality; points out that access to family planning, maternal health services and safe and legal abortion services are important elements in saving women's and girls' lives; is concerned that no EU delegations in the Middle East and North Africa and the Europe and Central Asia regions chose any SRHR-related indicator despite the significant SRHR needs in these regions; calls on EU delegations in these regions to re-evaluate these worrying figures in order to determine whether they may be linked to misreporting or whether there is a need to complement current programmes with targeted actions on SRHR;
38. Stresses that, while focusing on the prevention of early marriage, the EU, Member States and third countries should also support young women who are already married, helping them to become aware of their sexual and reproductive rights and their right to contraception, for example;
39. Condemns the reinstatement and expansion of the Global Gag Rule and its impact on women's and girls' health; recalls that populations in vulnerable situations, including those that are normally unable to access services 'due to stigma, poverty, location, violence, or HIV status' are hardest hit;
40. Reiterates its call for the EU and its Member States to proactively support women's and girls' rights worldwide and to significantly increase both national and EU development funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights, in particular for access to birth control and safe and legal abortion, with a view to reducing the financing gap left by the United States in this area;
41. Strongly supports the She Decides initiative and calls for the EU and the Member States to step up their support for this initiative and other efforts on SRHR;
42. Believes that increasing the number of women in political and economic decision-making positions can help to ensure that the necessary legislation is put in place and that there is increased support for institutions and civil society organisations working to prevent early and forced marriage.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	12.4.2018
Result of final vote	+: 19 -: 1 0: 3
Members present for the final vote	Daniela Aiuto, Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Malin Björk, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Iratxe García Pérez, Anna Hedh, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Florent Marcellesi, Angelika Mlinar, Marijana Petir, João Pimenta Lopes, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Jadwiga Wiśniewska
Substitutes present for the final vote	Livia Járóka, Urszula Krupa, Kostadinka Kuneva, Nosheena Mobarik, Jordi Solé, Marc Tarabella, Mylène Troszczynski, Julie Ward
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Margrete Auken

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

19	+
ALDE	Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea, Angelika Mlinar
ECR	Nosheena Mobarik
EFDD	Daniela Aiuto
GUE/NGL	Malin Björk, Kostadinka Kuneva, João Pimenta Lopes
PPE	Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Livia Járóka, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi
S&D	Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Iratxe García Pérez, Anna Hedh, Marc Tarabella, Julie Ward
VERTS/ALE	Margrete Auken, Florent Marcellesi, Jordi Solé

1	-
PPE	Marijana Petir

3	0
ECR	Urszula Krupa, Jadwiga Wiśniewska
ENF	Mylène Troszczynski

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	16.5.2018
Result of final vote	+: 45 -: 2 0: 2
Members present for the final vote	Lars Adaktusson, Michèle Alliot-Marie, Francisco Assis, Petras Auštrevičius, Goffredo Maria Bettini, Elmar Brok, Klaus Buchner, Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Aymeric Chauprade, Javier Couso Permuy, Arnaud Danjean, Eugen Freund, Sandra Kalniete, Tunne Kelam, Wajid Khan, Eduard Kukan, Arne Lietz, Barbara Lochbihler, Sabine Lösing, Tamás Meszerics, Francisco José Millán Mon, Clare Moody, Javier Nart, Pier Antonio Panzeri, Ioan Mircea Pașcu, Tonino Picula, Julia Pitera, Cristian Dan Preda, Jozo Radoš, Michel Reimon, Sofia Sakorafa, Alyn Smith, Dubravka Šuica, Charles Tannock, László Tőkés, Ivo Vajgl
Substitutes present for the final vote	David Coburn, Marek Jurek, Norica Nicolai, Urmas Paet, Soraya Post, Marie-Christine Vergiat, Željana Zovko
Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote	Charles Goerens, Heidi Hautala, Renate Weber, Francis Zammit Dimech, Joachim Zeller, Jaromír Štětina

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

45	+
ALDE	Petras Auštrevičius, Charles Goerens, Javier Nart, Norica Nicolai, Urmas Paet, Jozo Radoš, Ivo Vajgl, Renate Weber
EFDD	Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Aymeric Chauprade
GUE/NGL	Javier Couso Permuy, Sabine Lösing, Sofia Sakorafa, Marie-Christine Vergiat
PPE	Lars Adaktusson, Michèle Alliot-Marie, Elmar Brok, Arnaud Danjean, Sandra Kalniete, Tunne Kelam, Eduard Kukan, Francisco José Millán Mon, Julia Pitera, Cristian Dan Preda, László Tőkés, Joachim Zeller, Željana Zovko, Jaromír Štětina, Dubravka Šuica
S&D	Francisco Assis, Goffredo Maria Bettini, Eugen Freund, Wajid Khan, Arne Lietz, Clare Moody, Pier Antonio Panzeri, Ioan Mircea Pașcu, Tonino Picula, Soraya Post
VERTS/ALE	Klaus Buchner, Heidi Hautala, Barbara Lochbihler, Tamás Meszerics, Michel Reimon, Alyn Smith
2	-
EFDD	David Coburn
PPE	Francis Zammit Dimech
2	0
ECR	Marek Jurek, Charles Tannock

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention