

Child Marriage in Armenia (Overview)



If I had this knowledge [before], I would never have married at that age.

I made my life harder than it could have been.

—Child spouse

Child marriages

Early or child marriage is the union, whether official or not, of two persons, at least one of whom is under 18 years of age.¹ By virtue of being children, child spouses are considered to be incapable of giving full consent, meaning that child marriages should be considered a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. In Armenia, rates of child marriage are very low. However, child marriages occur in some remote *marzes* (regions)² of the country, and are more common among some minority ethnic groups.

Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that affects girls and boys in different ways. Overall, the number of boys in child marriages around the world is significantly lower than that of girls. Girl child spouses are also vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse within relationships that are unequal, and if they become pregnant, often experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not ready for childbearing. Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home.

Various international treaties, conventions, and programmes for action address child marriage. These include: the 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (which followed the UN Fourth World Conference on Women). These international instruments cover the abolishment of harmful customs and traditions, violence against the girl child, marriage consent, marriageable age, registration of marriage, and the freedom to choose a spouse.

This fact sheet provides information about child marriages in Armenia and offers recommendations aimed at addressing the issue. It includes a review of national legislation and the country's ratification of the various international standards relevant to the issue, analysis of current practices and attitudes towards child marriages, and statistical information about the prevalence of the practice. The methodology for this study involved a review of the existing legal framework and literature related to child marriages in Armenia, and interviews and focus groups with child spouses and experts working in the fields of children's and women's rights.

*Investing in girls,
developing their social
and economic assets,
ensuring they have access
to education and health
services, and ensuring
that they can postpone
marriage until they are
ready; all this means
greater dignity for women.*

—Dr. Babatunde

Osoimehin, Executive

Director, UNFPA



Recommendations

- Improve sexual education for young people. This could include enlarging the geographical area covered by projects offering youth and adolescent reproductive health education, especially in bordering *marzes*. Also, the rights of women should be considered as an important factor in family formulation issues.
- Ensure the collection of more specific gender- and child-related statistics.
- Increase the number of youth-friendly centres (YFC) especially in *marzes* and rural communities in order to help young couples with family planning and reproductive health issues. The scope of similar projects run by international organisations focused on reproductive health and family planning issues for youth and adolescents should be extended and firm cooperation with local governance authorities is highly welcomed.
- Develop mechanisms to increase the low level of awareness of family planning and reproductive health issues among national minorities, refugees, and other vulnerable groups, with the active participation of community leaders, local governance authorities, and NGOs. Development of relevant mechanisms should be incorporated in national and territorial development policies as well.
- Improve legislation and enforcement mechanisms to address underage married women as children, with regard to the protection of their rights.

Legal and national context

Rates of poverty remain high in Armenia. Poverty continues to be the major cause of exclusion of children from social services, particularly those living in rural areas. Despite noticeable progress in reducing poverty rates in Armenia, 41.9 per cent of children under the age of five are considered to be poor and 8 per cent are extremely poor. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (1991-1994) negatively impacted on child rights and protection as many children became fatherless and/or even homeless.

Poverty drives high rates of migration, particularly of young men. This means that it is more difficult for women to find spouses, affecting the overall fertility rate, which has decreased by 2.4 times

during the last 22 years. At the same time, a strong trend of sex-selective abortion has been noted in Armenia, particularly in regard to higher-order births; a study by UNFPA found that with third and fourth siblings, the ratio increased to 106 and 107 boys born for every 100 girls, respectively, indicating that parents are choosing to abort female fetuses. Naturally, this poses a potential threat in terms of giving rise to demographic imbalance.³ According to official statistical data on civic status registration in the Republic of Armenia from 1993 on, the sex ratio at birth has been significantly higher (110-120 boys per 100 girls) than the average that is seen as a biological norm.⁴

International standards

Armenia is a member state of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Armenia acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1992 and adopted a Law on Children's Rights in 1996, which reinforced the provisions outlined in the CRC. The Government of Armenia also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 with no reservations.

National legislation

Over the last two years, Armenia has introduced amendments to key domestic laws, including the Family Code, Labour Code, and Criminal Code, designed to better protect children; children's rights are also protected under the Constitution. For instance, the Criminal Code of Armenia was amended to include counts on trafficking and on violence and neglect against children, as well as on juvenile justice. The relevant national laws are harmonised internally and with international legislation. The Government of Armenia also adopted the National Plan of Action for Protection of Children's Rights which became an integral part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. According to a government representative interviewed for this research, the different agencies working with children (for instance, the judicial system, local authorities, and educational institutions) interact with each other and exchange information. There have also been Strategic Action Plans put in place to promote gender equality and women's equal roles in decision-

making and management in socio-economic, education, health, culture, and public information sectors.⁵ Experts interviewed for this study agreed that Armenia has a strong legislative framework to protect children's rights and women's rights, but that these laws are not adequately implemented.

“...children's rights are sufficiently protected in the national legislation of Armenia. According to the Law on Children's Protection, childhood is under the protection and care of the state and society. The law ensures the protection of children from violence, takes measures to protect child health and ... education, and also [protects the] interests of children who do not live with their parents, and defines additional guarantees for orphans.”
(Government expert)

The Family Code of the Republic of Armenia (RA) defines a child as anyone under the age of 18.⁶ A similar definition is implied in the Civil Code.⁷ The RA Criminal Code does not provide a definition of a child and juvenile, but stipulates that 'the person who reached the age of 16 before the committal of the crime is subject to criminal liability'.⁸ One NGO representative interviewed for this study noted the need to establish a standardised, legal definition of the child in national legislation.

“I think that legal problems are largely due to imperfection or lack of enforcement mechanisms.” (NGO representative)

Who can contract a marriage?

The Constitution of RA (5 July 1995) enshrines the right to free choice and consent in marriage. According to Article 35, 'men and women of marriageable age shall have the right to marry and form a family with free expression of their will'.⁹

The legal minimum age for marriage was raised to 18 for both men and women in April 2013.¹⁰ Before this, the minimum age had been 17 years

for women. The government claims that the new minimum age will help eliminate gender inequality in Armenia and bring the country into compliance with CEDAW.¹¹ It is possible for someone aged 16 or 17 to marry, if they have permission from their parents or legal guardian.

Only civil marriages registered in the civil authorities' register are legally recognised in Armenia, though religious marriages are traditionally performed as well. Usually the marriage ceremony includes a visit to the civil registry office, as well as the religious ceremony. There are no official data in the country on the number of religious marriages, as these are not registered in civic registry offices.

Under the Criminal Code, sexual intercourse or other sexual acts with a person 'obviously under 16' (according to the legal wording), by a person who is over 18 years of age, is punished with a fine of between 100 and 250 times the minimum wage, or with imprisonment for a term of up to two years (Article 141: 'Sexual acts with a person under 16').¹² No information was found on how effectively this law is implemented. There is no specific legislation dealing with forced marriage.

Family planning and reproductive rights

The main legislation regarding family planning and reproductive rights is the Law on Human Reproductive Health and Rights (2002). Article 5 of this law stipulates that young people under the age of 18 have the right to receive comprehensive medical advice on sexual and reproductive health issues, and in case of necessity, to obtain medical treatment (Article 5.1). The Law also guarantees the right to reproductive health protection to all citizens, and provides for freedom of choice regarding the termination of pregnancy.¹³

Adolescents can receive advice on contraception and reproductive and sexual health without permission from their parents or guardian, but they must have permission for any medical intervention (including prescription of contraceptives). An adolescent girl can only secure an abortion if she has her parents'¹⁴ or legal representative's permission, apart from in certain exception circumstances, when a Medical Commission protocol is followed.¹⁵

“To raise public awareness about the existence of child marriages, it is necessary to start with schools. It is necessary to provide relevant information on sex education, especially in secondary schools. It is a very important issue. Sex education as a high school programme in Armenia must be a priority. In any case it will inevitably contribute to the elimination of early marriages.” (Legal expert)

According to the results of the Armenia Demographic and Health Survey 2000 (ADHS), contraceptive use rate among all girls aged 15-19 was 2.2 per cent; in the 2010 ADHS, it was 1.7 per cent. Among married girls aged 15-19, the 2010 DHS found that 19.1 per cent were using some form of contraception.¹⁶ The ADHS 2010 also found that virtually all respondents in all age groups, male and female, knew about at least one method of contraception (either modern or traditional).¹⁷

According to the Law on Human Reproductive Health and Rights, adolescents should receive sexual education in secondary schools and other educational institutions, in cooperation with family and health services and civil society organisations.¹⁸ Since 2008, Armenian students have taken a mandatory ‘life skills’ course in grades 8–11 of secondary school, which includes information on reproductive health, sex, pregnancy, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, teaching of this course is unsatisfactory, as teachers often do not have the necessary knowledge, and are unwilling to conduct these lessons.

Child marriages in Armenia

Statistical information on child marriages in Armenia is very limited, as statistical information on children, adolescents, and young people is generally difficult to obtain. The same is true for sex-disaggregated data. However, respondents interviewed for this study felt that the rate of child marriages among the general population in Armenia is low. Since independence (1991), the average marriage age has increased among both women and men; indirect evidence that child marriages are decreasing. Child

marriage is more widely practised among certain minority ethnic groups, in particular the Yezidis.

The statistical information on child marriage that is available is mainly gathered through surveys such as Population Censuses and the ADHS. The ADHS was last conducted in 2010, and the most recent Population Census was in 2011 (although only partial results are available). According to ADHS data from 2010 and 2000, girls aged 15-19 made up 7.9 per cent of all married women in 2010 and 8.5 per cent in 2000, indicating a decrease of 0.6 per cent. Boys in the same age group made up 1 per cent of all married men in 2010. Elsewhere, official statistics included in the annual Demographic Handbook (based on census data) indicate that for 2012, 5.6 per cent of girls aged 16-19 and 0.9 per cent of boys aged 16-19 were married (both registered and unregistered).¹⁹ Comparison of child marriages for women and men aged 15-19 seems to provide evidence that more women than men get married before the age of 19. However, it appears that the median age of first marriage is increasing for women and men; the 2010 ADHS found that women aged 25-29 reported a median age of 22.7 for first marriage, while women age 45-49 reported a median age of 20.7 years.

“Parents often think that girls in particular need to marry early, so they are more obedient.” (Legal expert)

Age-specific fertility among women age 15-19 is also declining, from 61.9 births per 1,000 women in 1990, to 31.6 births per 1,000 women in 2000, and 26 births per 1,000 women in 2012.²⁰ According to ADHS 2000, 4 per cent of women age 15-19 had given birth. In 2010 ADHS the comparable figure is 3 per cent.

“Based on our experience I can say that some cases of child marriage exist, but it is not widespread. Though we have no any research or study ... I would like to mention that in six villages there were 15-20 recorded cases of child marriages.” (NGO representative)

Study participants felt that the rate of child marriages among the general population in Armenia is very low, as in general, people have traditional attitudes and disapprove of young people having sexual relations and getting married at an early age, and early marriages are the subject of criminal legislation (in that sex with someone under the age of 16 is a criminal offence). Furthermore, overall high levels of poverty, unemployment, and migration are actually pushing up the average age of marriage, which is increasing year by year.

However, some child marriages do take place among Armenians. Cases of early marriages are more prevalent in remote regions of the country. Factors identified during interviews and focus group discussions for this study that account for these differences were lack of employment, poverty, migration, and limited access to education for girls in comparison to urban areas. Also, traditions are stronger in rural districts than in urban ones. That said, this study found that vulnerability to child marriage is primarily determined by ethnic or religious background; in addition, the practice is more common among socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

As noted by a child rights NGO representative, the origins of child marriage in Armenia have a long history and have been grounded in the lack of value placed on adolescent girls and their role in society. The role of girls was considered mostly to be confined to reproduction, and their role in education, work, and public participation in decision-making processes was ignored. Among some groups, these views are still common.

In most cases, those taking part in this study felt that child marriage was a problem that is not being addressed properly.

The reasons for contracting child marriages may differ between ethnic groups. While child marriages among minority ethnic groups are primarily the result of traditional attitudes to the role of women in society, among other groups in the general population reasons identified by research participants included a young couple falling in love and being pressured to marry to avoid scandal (because sexual and romantic relationships outside of marriage are considered unacceptable), parents' decision, or even the possibility of emigrating.

“Early marriages are often not officially recorded, which in turn cause a lot of problems related to birth registration, property, etc.” (NGO representative)

During the focus group discussions it was revealed that most child marriages are not officially registered, or are registered only after the couple reaches the legal age for marriage. The couple commonly begin living together right after the religious wedding (*harsaniq*), even in cases of early marriage. Parents sometimes agree to carry out religious marriage ceremonies for couples when one or both spouses is under 18 as the religious marriage ceremony is the key event for relatives and friends. Focus group participants also mentioned cases where couples register their marriage when their first child is born. This mostly happens if parents want to give the father's surname to the new-born, in which case the parents' marriage must be registered with the civil authorities. It is worth mentioning that religious marriage without legal registration leaves girls and women extremely vulnerable and contributes to gender inequality. On the one hand, a divorced woman becomes the only livelihood earner in the family; on the other hand, the wife receives no alimony, property, or other financial support, unless she applies to the court.

“I was kidnapped when I was 14 years old [during the Soviet period] from the street in front of the school. It was 2 September and I was in the eighth [grade]. It was my husband's decision, he was 22. Neither me nor my parents wanted me to marry at that age. Before the kidnapping my husband's parents came to our house and asked my parents to marry me off, but my father refused, saying: 'My daughter is an adolescent and I do not want to marry her now. She is still a child and needs care from her parents' side.' This was the reason for the bride kidnapping.”
(Child spouse, Ararat region)

In most cases discussed during this study, parents had made the decision that a child would marry. However, respondents also noted that in some cases, children themselves made the decision. Study participants also mentioned cases of bride abduction, when the decision is made solely by the groom, or by agreement between the two sets of parents; however, this is a practice that was more common during the Soviet period, and rarely occurs now.

In most cases, the child spouses who participated in this study admitted that they had made a mistake in agreeing to marry at an early age. In the interviews they stated that if they could repeat that part of their lives, they would definitely have insisted on marrying later. This view was also expressed by some representatives of minority ethnic groups, who stated that ‘times now have changed’. This is despite the fact that traditions are very strong in these communities, and child marriages are still practised.

According to data from interviews and focus groups in this study, child marriage has multidimensional impacts on adolescents. It can result in leaving school early, limiting access to education, as well unemployment and poor health. Child spouses reported being expected to take on a large burden of childcare and housework; in rural areas, they also had to do hard physical work, impacting negatively on their health and reproductive capacity. Child marriage also reinforces gender inequality and women’s social exclusion.

Child marriage among Yezidis

Rates of child marriage are much higher among the Yezidi minority than among the general population in Armenia; in addition, rates of unregistered marriages are also very high in these communities. The Yezidis migrated to Armenia from Turkey in the late 19th century. They live mainly in rural

“My daughter is 12 years old and she is engaged and will marry next year.”
(Focus group participant, Aragatsotn region)

communities and mostly engage in sheep- and cattle-breeding and farming. In summer time they generally move to remote pastures in the mountains.

Yezidis speak one of the Kurdish languages, but have their own unique religion. Although there are estimated to be between 40,620²¹ and 60,000²² Yezidis in Armenia, only one or two young women from this community go to university every year, because most of the rest are already married and raising a family

Focus group discussions with Yezidi women revealed that for Yezidis, marriage is considered more important than an education, particularly for girls and women. Participants felt that women should not work outside of the home, and that therefore there is no

need for them to continue to study. Commonly Yezidi women do not work, and can only do so if their husbands give permission; this is a tradition that is still strong today. Boys are also usually taken out of school after eighth grade; most Yezidis are self-employed farmers, and do not see the value of educating children beyond eight years of schooling.

Yezidi girls usually marry at 13-14 years old; a girl who doesn’t marry until 17 is considered ‘late and not worthy of respect’, according to focus group participants. Yezidi boys usually marry when they are aged 17-20. In most cases, marriages are arranged by parents.

“I have no profession and do not want [one], as my only duty is to take care of my family.” (Child spouse)

The main advantage of early marriage is that I am a young mother; the disadvantage is that it was hard to take care of my husband’s family (which was large and consisted of 10 people) when I was still a child. Besides, I would like to continue my study and have a profession. Now I have to do only low-paid work as I have no profession.

(Child spouse, Ararat region)

“Most of our Yezidi families have around 10 children. But now this tradition is changing and number of children in the family is three or four due to the socio-economic situation in the country. There are no income earning opportunities especially in the rural areas where we live.” (Child spouse)

For this group the key impact of child marriage is early child-bearing. Yezidi women want – and are expected – to have as many children as possible, as this is considered women’s main role. Older Yezidi women who took part in this study say that families used to have, on average, nine to 12 children, but now, faced by tough economic times, have to settle for fewer.

Focus group participants also reported that Yezidis are healthy people and visit doctors only in serious cases. They mostly live six to eight months out of the year in remote pastures, during which time it is difficult for them to access health facilities, including prenatal and neonatal care; women in particular have limited mobility when families are in the pastures, as they do not commonly drive. This can result in serious health problems both for mother and child. Child spouses are particularly vulnerable, as pregnancy and birth are dangerous for girls whose bodies are not yet physically mature.

“I do not want to advise my relatives to marry at an early age, it is hard for an adolescent. Though we have strong traditions to marry our children at early age, the tendency has changed as now it is very difficult to maintain a family when you have no job.” (Child spouse)

We found out that the boy comes from a good family and that he’s a good boy, so we decided to give our daughter away to him. What should my daughter say? She is only happy to find a good husband. For our children, the parents’ word is law. (Focus group participant, Aragatsotn region)

Responses to child marriage

Raising the minimum marriage age. Recently the Armenian government raised the legal age of marriage for women from 17 to 18 years old, the same age as for men.²³ The officials behind the change say they want to ensure gender equality, protect the health of young girls and women, and keep young women in full-time education, in light of a change to the rules which requires everyone to complete 12 years of schooling instead of ten.²⁴

Youth and adolescent reproductive health in Armenia. UNFPA has implemented a wide range of projects focused on the provision of basic health services delivered by trained healthcare providers in adequately equipped health facilities, targeting mostly young people and women, to the benefit of entire communities and their surroundings. Activities have included the following:

- Improving health facility infrastructure and the provision of medical equipment in remote areas.
- Setting up Travelling Gynaecologist Teams (TGT), each of these which serves a population of 25 to 40 villages, examining and screening pregnant women and providing counselling on reproductive health issues. The teams are equipped with mobile ultrasound machines, and portable Doppler and cardiotocograph machines.
- Establishing Youth-Friendly Health Service centres in Kasakh and Charentsavan communities of Kotayk region.
- Training various target groups and healthcare providers (family doctors; obstetricians and gynaecologists; nurses; TGT team members; Youth Centre staff; community leaders; and teachers).²⁵

Key points

There are few child marriages in Armenia, and overall, the average age of first marriage has increased since independence. High levels of poverty and unemployment are factors contributing to the rise in marriage age. At the same time, criminal sanctions in cases involving sexual relations with someone under the age of 16 act as a deterrent.

Child marriages are found mostly in rural and remote regions, where the employment opportunities are more limited than in Yerevan.

There are still problems with lack of enforcement mechanisms in Armenian legislation related to children's rights.

The origin of child marriage in Armenia is grounded in the lack of value placed on women's roles in society.

Key points (Yezidi-specific)

Child marriage among Yezidis is closely linked to lack of value placed on education. Women's role is seen solely as housework and child rearing.

Staying in the remote pastures for 6-8 months a year means most pregnant women have limited access to health services. The conditions in pastures are extremely poor for pregnant women and new-borns, negatively affecting maternal and infant health.

Parents are the ones who decide when a child should marry.

Quotes

No woman wants to marry and live in poor conditions like those of her parents. Men are also willing to get a job, manage a home and after that – to form a family. In most cases, in order to do that, they migrate to other countries, mostly to Russia, and do not return. Besides, men do not want to violate the law. (Legal expert)

I got married just after finishing school (at age 17) as there was nothing to do in our village – no jobs, no educational institutions nearby. The only thing to do was to help my parents in their farming activities. But I can do the same work for my husband's family. (Child spouse, Tavush region)

In Armenia, we need to establish special protection for child victims of violence by creating detection, referral, social, and psychological rehabilitation systems and services. (NGO representative)

Regarding the origins of child marriages in Armenia, I think that it has a long history and has been grounded in the underestimation of the role of adolescent women. The role of girls was considered mostly from the reproductive aspect and their ... role in ... education, work, public activities, and participation in decision-making process was ignored. (NGO representative)

Quotes (Yezidi-specific)

My first child was born when I was 15. I finished [8th grade] and left school. I became a housewife and stopped thinking about further education. We had a big family and I had to take care of the children and older people in my family. (Child spouse, Armavir region)

My son was born in the pastures as there was no transport to take me to the nearest medical facility. (Yezidi women, Ararat region)

... For our children, the parents' word is law. (Yezidi child spouse, Aragatsotn region)

Data overview

Total population (2013):	3,026,900 ²⁶
Average household size:	3.9 ²⁷
Life expectancy at birth (2012):	70.9 (males); 77.5 (females) ²⁸
Population under age 15 as of 2012:	17.98% ²⁹
Population aged 15-19 years (2012):	7.72% (males: 8%; females: 7.2%) ³⁰
Population below national income poverty line (2011):	35.0% ³¹
Unemployment rate (2012):	17.3 % ³²
Youth literacy ratio:	99.76% (males: 99.70%; females: 99.83%) ³³
Health expenditure per capita per year (2010):	US \$133.48 ³⁴
Main ethnic groups:	Armenians, Yezidis, Russians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Assyrians
Main religion:	Orthodox Christianity
Main languages:	Armenian, Russian
Number of marriages in 2012:	19,063 ³⁵
Average age at first marriage (2011):	Urban areas: 29.0 (males); 25.6 (females) Rural areas: 28.0 (males); 23.9 (females) ³⁶
Age-specific fertility rate for ages 15-19 (2012):	26.0 births per 1,000 women ³⁷
Age-specific fertility rate overall (2012):	51.9 births per 1,000 women aged 15-49 ³⁸
Total fertility rate for women aged 15-49 (2012):	1.58 ³⁹

Child marriage statistics

Table 1. Marriages by bride's age and groom's age^{40, 41}

Total number of marriages	Bride's age (years)		Groom's age (years)	
	Under 16	16-19	Under 16	16-19
19,706 (2011)	n/a	1,747 (9%)	n/a	104 (0.5%)
17,984 (2010)	n/a	1,764 (10%)	n/a	117 (0.6%)

Table 2. Age at first marriage, by age group⁴²

Current age	% of women married by exact age		Current age	% of men married by exact age	
	15	18		15	18
15-19	0.0	n/a	15-19	0.0	n/a
20-24	0.0	7.2	20-24	0.0	0.0
25-29	0.7	9.4	25-29	0.0	0.3
30-34	15.0	19.1	30-34	0.0	1.4
35-39	0.8	23.9	35-39	0.0	0.2
40-44	0.3	16.8	40-44	0.0	0.8

Table 3. Live births by mother's age⁴³

Total number of live births	Mother's age
	15-19*
32,065 (2001)	4,334 (13.5%)
43,340 (2011)	3,372 (7.8%)

* Calculated using data for all births to women under 20.

Age-specific data on stillbirths and number of abortions was not available.

Table 4. Median age at first marriage by location, level of education, and wealth quintile⁴⁴

	Women aged 25-49	Men aged 30-49
Location: Urban	22.0	26.3
Rural	20.0	24.9
Level of education: Basic	18.5	24.3
Secondary	19.5	25.4
Secondary special	21.1	25.1
Higher	24.0	27.4
Wealth quintile: Lowest	20.1	23.3
Second	20.0	24.7
Middle	21.2	27.4
Fourth	21.7	25.7
Highest	22.6	25.9

Notes and references

- 1 A child is 'every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> (accessed 29 May 2012).
- 2 A *marz* is a territorial administrative unit. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the RA Law 'On Administrative-Territorial Division of the RA' (4 December 1995), Armenia is divided into 10 *marzes* (regions) and the capital city of Yerevan, which is accorded regional status.
- 3 UNFPA (2012) 'Prevalence of and reasons for sex-selective abortions in Armenia', Report, UNFPA, Yerevan, p.3, available at: http://www.unfpa.am/sites/default/files/Sex-selective_abortions_report_Eng.pdf (accessed 15 November 2013).
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 5 Gender policy Strategic Action Plan for 2011-2015, http://www.un.am/res/Gender%20TG%20docs/national/2011-2015_Gender%20Policy_NAP-Eng.pdf (accessed 12 December 2013).
- 6 Family Code of RA, Article 41, available at: www.parliament.am (accessed 20 October 2013).
- 7 Civil Code of RA, Article 29 and 30, available at: www.parliament.am (accessed 20 October 2013).
- 8 Criminal Code of RA, Article 24 (Chapter 4), available at: <http://www.competition.am/uploads/resources/greakanENG.pdf> (accessed 20 October 2013)
- 9 Constitution, Article 35, available at: www.parliament.am (accessed 20 October 2013)
- 10 Family Code of RA, Article 10
- 11 Mkrtchchyan, Gayane (2012), 'Armenia: Minority Group Opposes New Marriage Rules', Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 28 September 2012, available at: <http://iwpr.net/report-news/armenia-minority-group-opposes-new-marriage-rules> (accessed 23 October 2013).
- 12 Criminal Code of RA, Article 141.
- 13 Law on Human Reproductive Health and Rights of RA, Article 1, available at: http://www.moh.am/?section=static_pages/index&cid=235&subID=60# (accessed 20 October 2013)
- 14 The Law on Medical Assistance and Services to the Population refers to 'parents' rather than 'parent', implying that the adolescent needs permission from both parents.
- 15 Law on Human Reproductive Health and Rights of RA, Article 10, point 4.
- 16 Armenia Demographic and Health Survey (ADHS), 2010, p.77, available at: www.armstat.am (accessed 20 September 2013).
- 17 *Ibid.*, p.76.
- 18 Law on Human Reproductive Health and Rights of RA, Article 1.
- 19 National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSS RA) (2013), 'Women and Men in Armenia', Statistical booklet, NSS RA, Yerevan, p.22, available at: <http://www.armstat.am/file/article/gender.pdf> (accessed 30 September 2013).
- 20 NSS RA (2012) 'The Demographic Handbook', NSS RA, Yerevan, p.72-73. NSS RA (2013) 'Economic Situation in Armenia in January-June 2013', NSS RA, Yerevan, p.143-145, available at: www.armstat.am (accessed 20 September 2013).
- 21 This is the figure from the 2000 population census. NSS RA (2001) 'Population Census', NSS RA, Yerevan, available at: <http://docs.armstat.am/census/pdfs/53.pdf> (accessed 13 November 2013).
- 22 This more recent figure is based on estimates made by the community themselves. See Mkrtchchyan (2012), *op. cit.*
- 23 Mkrtchchyan (2012), *op. cit.*
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 UNFPA representative interview data.
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Key messages

When a girl delays marriage, everyone benefits. A girl who marries later is more likely to stay in school, work, and reinvest her income into her family. Crucially, a girl who marries later is more empowered to choose whether, when, and how many children to have. When investments in girls are made, everyone benefits: their families, communities, and most importantly, the girls themselves.

There is a huge cost to inaction on child marriage. It is time for policy-makers, parliamentarians, communities, families, and young people to address this issue head on. Let's deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Let girls be girls.

Child marriage violates girls' rights, denies them of their childhood, disrupts their education, jeopardises their health, and limits their opportunities. No cultural, religious, or economic rationale for child marriage can possibly justify the damage these marriages do to young girls and their potential. A girl should have the right to choose whom she marries and when. Parents want the best for their children, and need to support their girls' choices and decisions to marry.

UNFPA is working with governments and partners at all levels of society to deliver comprehensive programmes addressing the needs of vulnerable and married girls, and providing access to livelihoods, social support, and health programmes, including sexual and reproductive health. The ultimate aim is to end child marriage in this generation and to shift cultural attitudes to protect girls' rights.

What must be done to break the silence on child marriage?

Bring greater attention to the situations faced by married girls and girls at risk of child marriage, and advocate strongly for their rights. Child marriage is not good for girls or development. The world cannot afford to see the rights, health, and potential of thousands of girls being squandered each day.

Promote investments that build up adolescent girls' capabilities and skills, especially education. Girls' education, particularly post-primary and secondary, is the single most important factor associated with age at marriage. Girls especially need social support and access to programmes that provide life skills, literacy, livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health information and services, such as family planning and life-saving maternal health services.

Invest in adolescent girls!

Investments should provide platforms for vulnerable girls to develop life skills and critical health knowledge, obtain access to social services including sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, gain vocational and employable skills for work, and have access to friends and mentors.

Married girls need special targeted strategies that provide access to education, life skills, and health including SRH and HIV prevention, and opportunities to participate fully in society. Maternal health programmes need to be reoriented with dedicated outreach for the youngest, first-time mothers, to enable them to use antenatal, essential and emergency obstetric care, and post-delivery services.

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