

Child Marriage in Turkey (Overview)



I have three children. I gave birth to my first child when I was 17. At the age of 19, I gave birth to my second child. Now, my third child is a 5-month-old baby. I never talked about contraception with my husband. I had several illnesses during my pregnancies.

—Child spouse

Child marriages

Child or early marriage is the union, whether or not official, 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 free and full consent, meaning that child marriages should be considered a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. In Turkey, child marriage occurs in all regions of the country, and is linked to patriarchal attitudes towards girls, among other factors.

Child marriage is a 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 the issue of child marriage in Turkey 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 marriage, 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 marriage in Turkey, and interviews with child spouses and experts working in the fields of children's and women's rights.

Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education, health, and long-term prospects. A girl who is married as a child is one whose potential will not be fulfilled. Since many parents and communities also want the very best for their daughters, we must work together and end child marriage.

—Dr. Babatunde
Osotimehin, Executive
Director, UNFPA



Recommendations

- Since the data collected by the Turkish Statistical Institute and General Directorate of Civil Registration and Nationality do not indicate the real numbers of child marriages, the number of marriages involving people under 18 years should be investigated through alternative research.² Moreover, Human Rights Committees in provinces and towns should take an active role in reporting unofficial religious marriages through alternative methods, such as by collecting information from village headpersons (*muhtar*) or local officials.³
- The discrepancy between the Child Protection Law, the Turkish Civil Code, and the Penal Code in the definition of the child should be reconciled, and 18 should be set as the minimum legal age for marriage in all related legislation.
- Health institutions should record and report child marriages, when they become aware of them. These institutions should also inform adolescent girls on the risks of child pregnancy and motherhood.
- A national agenda regarding child marriages should be set throughout the country and local officials and government representatives should work in collaboration with local stakeholders to implement this agenda.⁴ Moreover a strategy on the subject of child marriages should be determined by the Directorate of Religious Affairs and publicised among all religious officials.⁵
- Awareness should be raised in educational institutions by conducting special training with teachers and school directors.⁶ The training would involve modules on gender equality, women's rights as human rights, and girls' right to education. Gender equality, family planning, and reproductive health issues should also be included in school curriculum.

Legal and national context

Turkey has ratified both the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Child Protection Law, adopted in 2005, incorporates most of the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in line with the convention, identifies

children as 'individuals below 18 years of age' (Article 3).⁷ Article 11 of the Turkish Civil Code states that the 'age of majority is 18', but also states that on marrying, a person under the age of 18 assumes the same rights and responsibilities as an adult.⁸

“Although the legal marriage age in Turkey [appears to be] consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Child, early marriages cannot be prevented in practice.” (Women's rights advocate)

However, a common definition of a child as a person under the age of 18 does not exist in Turkey's laws. For instance, Article 6 of the Turkish Penal Code defines a child as anyone under 18, but in Articles 103 and 104 of the same law, which refer to 'child molestation', a child is defined as an individual below 15 years of age.⁹

“The best interests of the child should be protected in all stages of policy-making. Child marriages can be prevented by considering child rights in implementation.” (Child rights advocate)

Boys' and girls' equal right to education is supported in legislation. Article 42 of the Constitution regulates the right to education and states that 'no one shall be deprived of the right of learning and education', and 'primary education is compulsory for all citizens of both sexes and is free of charge in state schools'. However, in March 2012, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey passed legislation to amend the 'Primary Education and Training Act: 222', extending the length of compulsory education from eight years to 12 years.¹⁰ This includes a provision to divide the school system into three four-year stages. While the first and second four-year stages involve mandatory formal education, the third four-year stage can take the form of either formal or non-formal education. As 'non-formal education' includes distance learning, experts interviewed for this study voice the concern that some families may perceive this as an excuse for not sending their daughters to school, which may lead to an increase in child marriages for girls.

“With the latest education reforms that came into force in 2012, compulsory education is divided into three four-year stages. As home schooling is allowed within the law, girls will be affected by the law more than boys and the number of child brides may increase.” (Academic)

Who can contract a marriage?

Until 10 years ago, the statutory minimum age for marriage was 15 for women and 17 for men. The revised 2002 Turkish Civil Code raised the statutory minimum age to 17 years for women (Article 124), putting it on par with that of men.¹¹ The current minimum age (17) is not in keeping with international norms, however, which hold that 18 should be the minimum age for marriage.¹² The 2002 Civil Code also states that ‘marriage of a person (both men and women) of the age of 16 is allowed by the court decision based on exceptional circumstances’.¹³ It must be pointed out that even though the minimum age for marriage is now the same for women and men, in practice, early marriages continue to occur, and predominantly affect girls.

Under the Civil Code, if a woman has been forced into marriage, she can file a criminal complaint; she also has the right to file for an annulment within the first five years of marriage.¹⁴ The Turkish Penal Code does not include any specific sanctions against child marriages. Sexual assault committed against a child aged 15 or under is considered a crime, subject to a complaint from the victim. However, the right to make a complaint is only given to the child,¹⁵ who may fear the consequences of going to the police, or may be unaware that she has the right to do so.

In Turkey, only marriages registered at a state Register Offices (i.e. civil marriages) are legally recognised. According to Article 143 of the Civil Code, a religious ceremony can only be held after the civil marriage, while according to Article 230 of the Penal Code, if any man or woman holds a religious ceremony prior to conclusion of the civil marriage, he or she shall be liable to between two and six months’ imprisonment.¹⁶ Religious marriages are very common, and in some cases, couples do not go through a civil ceremony first. Religious marriages

have no official force, and women who have not also concluded a civil marriage have very few rights under the law. In the event of the husband’s death, a widow and her children cannot inherit his property, and if the couple separates, she cannot demand alimony payments.

“Unofficial religious marriages are [performed] as there is an age limit for marriage, officially. The method of religious marriages constitutes a juridical problem.” (Government official)

While civil marriages, registered at a Register Office, are held before the mayor or his or her authorised official, religious marriages are usually held before an imam or any other person who has religious knowledge. Most child marriages are conducted this way. As there is no official data on religious marriages, this means that accurate statistical data on child marriages in Turkey do not exist.

Family planning and reproductive rights

In Turkey, the right to access and use contraception and reproductive health services is emphasised in the Population Planning Law.¹⁷

According to the Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (hereafter TDHS) for 2008, 62.4 per cent of currently married women aged 15-19 years had used some family planning method at some time, while 38.5 per cent had used a modern method of contraception.¹⁸ At the time of the survey, 40.2 per cent of currently married women in the age group 15-19 years were using some family planning method, while only 17.6 per cent were using modern methods.¹⁹ The usage of both traditional and modern methods was lowest among the youngest age group of women (15-19 years).²⁰

The curriculum used in schools in Turkey does not provide adequate information on sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, both the curriculum and additional Ministry of National Education projects and initiatives focus only on the characteristics of the reproductive system, and therefore cannot meet the needs of adolescents in regard to knowledge about contraception and other reproductive health matters.²¹ According to

the Turkey Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Survey 2007, young people (age 15-24) mostly get information about sexual and reproductive health from their friends and written and visual media.²² As adequate information is not provided by the schools, information taken from friends and media may put young people at a greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, or of unwanted pregnancies.

Child marriages in Turkey

Child marriage was not a well-researched issue in Turkey. However, there has been increasing public awareness on the topic in recent years, and research has been conducted by nongovernmental organisations and academics. Initially, a comprehensive report was published in Turkey on early and forced marriages by a women's NGO, 'Flying Broom'. The visibility of child marriages in the Turkish media has also increased.

“There is no national agenda set throughout the country; however, nongovernmental organisations have increased public awareness on the prevalence of early marriages. As public officials [are] concerned about the issue, it is already time to develop an effective and comprehensive country strategy.”

(Women's rights advocate)

A review of the few available studies reveals that child marriage is practiced in all regions of Turkey, but that there is regional variation. Whereas teenage childbearing (taken as a proxy for child marriage) is highest in Central East Anatolia (10 per cent), it is lowest in the East Black Sea Region (3 per cent).²³ Teenagers in rural areas are more likely than teenagers in urban areas to have started childbearing (9 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively).²⁴

In 2009, The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey established a 'Subcommittee on Early Marriages', in order to shed

light upon the problem of child marriages in Turkey. The Subcommittee has published a report on 'Early Marriages' based on information from academics, public officials, and NGO activists, and studies carried out in four provinces in Turkey.²⁵ It was recognised in this report that the problem of child marriage is linked to gender inequality, and also to girls' education. Education enables girls to stand up to traditions and ensures the postponement of marriage. By contrast, families who do not send their daughters to school tend to arrange marriages for them while they are still very young. As marriages and engagements are considered as exceptional reasons for being absent from primary school for over 20 days, there are records to show how often such absences occur. These statistics show that girls are affected by child marriage more than boys: for the period March 2008 to March 2009, 675 girls and only 18 boys were recorded as being absent for this reason, according to e-school data.²⁶

“The reason for the difficulty [in transforming] societal mentalities is the fact that early marriages of girls are legitimised by the society. Since girls are in more disadvantageous positions than boys, we should take the necessary measures to protect them. As the rights of girls are more likely to be violated than the rights of boys with early marriages, we should also raise girls' awareness.”

(Government official)

According to the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly, Early Marriages Subcommittee Report, reasons for child marriage also vary, but economic deprivation, traditional and religious beliefs, lack of education, the desire to escape domestic violence at home, and social pressure are some of the main reasons.²⁷

Some families perceive girls as a socioeconomic burden. Families in poverty who have traditional and patriarchal attitudes are of the view that marrying off their daughter means they will have one less mouth to feed, and that they will also receive bride price/

dowry. Bride price is not legal in Turkey; however, the fact that according to the TDHS, 14.6 per cent of ever-married women's families were paid bride price indicates that the tradition still continues.²⁸ The prevalence of bride price is affected by the education level of the women. The highest prevalence of bride price payment (40 per cent) was found among women who did not have any education or who had not finished primary school.²⁹

“My family do not trust anybody. They believe that girls should marry earlier than boys. They think that girls need to be protected and marriage protects them.”
(Child spouse, 18)

The practice of child marriage of girls also originates from patriarchal understanding, customs, and traditions. Some families believe that child marriage preserves the girl's and family's honour, as it prevents her from losing her virginity before marriage, and having sexual relationships out of wedlock. Expressions that are used for the legitimisation of girl's marriage indicate how patriarchal understanding and social pressure to marry young is embedded in language and reproduces gender inequality.³⁰ Phrases such as '15-year-old girls either marry or die' and 'when girls are in their cradle, their dowry should be ready' indicate how the inevitability of girls' child marriage is reflected in language.³¹

Although the majority of child marriages are arranged and based on the decisions of the family, in some cases children themselves decide to marry. Experiencing domestic violence, discord, and pressure at home, the loss of a mother or father at an early age, and/or having a stepmother or stepfather can lead children to believe that marriage is a solution and a way out.³² In such cases, young girls may then agree to an arranged marriage, or choose to marry themselves to escape.

Due to the lack of knowledge on family planning and reproductive health, in most cases child marriage means adolescent pregnancy and motherhood. The TDHS for 2008 found that teenage mothers are more likely to experience miscarriages, stillbirths,

and maternity-related mortality than mature women.³³ Moreover, early childbearing hinders teenagers' ability to access educational and job opportunities.³⁴

Girls in child marriages in Turkey mostly marry men who are older than them. In Turkey, the mean age difference between women and their spouses is greatest among young women, particularly those under age 20 (6.6 years).³⁵ Older men are more likely to be carrying sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, than younger men, as they will most likely have more sexual experience. In addition, a large age gap weakens the woman's bargaining power to negotiate protected sex and contraception use.³⁶ By virtue of these two factors, the risk of young married girls aged 15-19 contracting HIV increases, and they are more likely to contract HIV than women in older age groups.

“My husband always listens to my mother-in-law within the household. Nobody considers my [wishes]. I know that my mother-in-law wanted her son to marry me because I was a child at that time. They thought that I would easily obey their rules. Early marriage is something harmful for girls not boys.” (Child spouse, 22)

Young married women are also more vulnerable to both physical and sexual violence than older women. According to the National Research on Domestic Violence Against Women (2008), the prevalence of physical and sexual violence experienced in the last 12 months by an intimate partner among ever-married women was highest (21 per cent) among the youngest age group (15-24).³⁷

Girls in child marriages usually live with their husbands' families. They rarely continue their education or find employment, as in most cases, the parents-in-law do not support this. In most of these marriages, their freedom is restricted. Decisions within the household are usually made by their parents-in-law and they do not have the power to influence these decisions.

Responses to child marriage

Eliminating gender inequality in legislation.

Changes to the Turkish Civil Code in 2002 (which followed efforts made by the women's movement in Turkey) removed the discrepancy between the statutory minimum age for women and men. While the previous version of the Civil Code stated that the statutory age limit for marriage was 15 and 17 for women and men respectively, under the new Civil Code, the age was changed to 17 for both women and men. Nevertheless, there are no sanctions against child marriage of girls, or against gender differences in implementation of the law in this legislation.

Recognition from the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

In 2009, the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey established a 'Subcommittee on Early Marriages', which published a report on 'Early Marriages', investigating the issue as a social problem. The Committee also published another report on 'Gender Equality in the Constitution' in 2012. In both reports, the necessity of reconciling the discrepancies between the Civil Code and the Child Protection Law on legal marriage age was mentioned, and the redefinition of the child in all related laws was suggested.

Improvement of gender parity in primary education.

The Girls' Education Campaign, which was established by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Turkey's Ministry of National Education (MONE) from 2003 to 2010, improved the gender parity in primary school enrolment in Turkey. While the difference in primary school enrolment rates of girls and boys was 7.15 per cent in 2003, the year the campaign was first launched, this dropped to 1.02 per cent between 2008 and 2009.³⁸ With the campaign, 200,000 girls were enrolled in primary school. Even if there are no data

available on the age at which girls who enrolled in school as a result of the campaign married, their marriages would at least have been held after the age of 14 (the end of primary school education at the time of the campaign).

Campaigns and projects by NGOs and child rights advocates.

The Social Democracy Foundation launched a campaign on child marriages in 2008-2010. Within the campaign, a petition was launched for the establishment of a research committee on child marriages in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Also, in collaboration with local officials and stakeholders, meetings were organised in İzmir, Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Batman, Mardin, and Balıkesir to increase public awareness on child marriages. In 2010, a project on child marriage was conducted in 54 provinces in Turkey by Flying Broom, an NGO working for women's rights. The name of the project was 'Child Brides: Victims of Destructive Traditions and a Social Patriarchal Heritage', and it included meetings with experts, film screenings on child marriages, interviews and discussions with women in child marriages, and participation in TV programmes.³⁹ In 2010, the International Children's Centre, an NGO working for human rights, the rights of women and children, and reproductive rights, created a 'Violence against Children Reporting and Monitoring Map'.⁴⁰ Among other news linked to violence against children, news on child and forced marriages have been collected through this map since August 2011. The Network Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children also initiated the 'Don't Send Child Brides' Campaign in 2012. The campaign launched a petition to end child marriage of girls and has focused on the fact that child brides are sexually and commercially exploited for the bride price payment. These campaigns and projects have helped to increase the visibility of child marriages in Turkey.

Key points

Although marriage can be contracted by two persons of 17 years of age according to the Civil Code, marriages occur before that age. Implementation of the laws is not influential in preventing child marriages.

The Grand National Assembly of Turkey has recognised the issue of child marriage as a social problem; however, discrepancies in the definition of the child between the Child Protection Law (which defines a child as anyone under 18), the Penal Code (which defines a child as anyone under 18 in some articles, and under 15 in others), and the Turkish Civil Code (which defines 17 as the legal minimum age for marriage) still exist.

Although legally, holding a religious marriage prior to the conclusion of the civil marriage is not allowed (Article 143 of the Civil Code), the practice is widespread in Turkey. Most child marriages are unofficial religious marriages. Since they are not registered, there are no accurate statistical data on child marriages.

Due to lack of knowledge of contraception, child marriages result in early motherhood in Turkey. The fact that the use of both traditional and modern methods of contraception was lowest among women aged 15-19 indicates the necessity of raising awareness of reproductive health among adolescent girls.

Child marriage is a social problem that is prevalent in all regions of the country and primarily affects girls. Gender inequality embedded in traditions and values rises with poverty and lack of education, and results in the child marriage of girls.

Quotes

Laws in Turkey [enable] early marriages. The Civil Code promotes the marriages of 16-year-old children with the court's permission. Since most of the judges have a masculine mentality, they permit the marriages of 16-year-old girls. Appropriate marriage age should not be [up to] the judges and legislation should be followed. (Women's rights advocate)

Owing to current laws child marriages cannot be prevented. The different definitions of the child should be removed. Marriage age should be 18 years of age in legislation as it is [in the] UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Engagement and marriage of a child should definitely be set as a crime in the Penal Code, as well. (Child rights advocate)

There are complexities in gathering data on marriages of people under 18 years. The Turkish Statistical Institution gets marriage statistics from Register Offices. As Register Offices do not register unofficial religious marriages, nobody can talk about the statistics on marriages of 14- to 15-[year-old] children. A way should be found to [record] unofficial religious marriages and accurate statistical data on early marriages should be collected. (Academic)

Raising the awareness of adolescents on reproductive health is one of the preventive measures [against] early marriages. Adolescents should [have access to] more qualified sexual and reproductive health services. For this purpose, 'Youth Counselling and Health Service Centres' were established in Turkey recently. (Government official)

I was willing to continue high school but my father did not let me go. He said to me that I should marry and stay at home. At that time, my brother was going to school. Why did I marry at the age of 15, while he married in his 20s? I know that it is because I am a girl. (Child spouse, 22)

Data overview

Total population (2011):	74,724,269 (2011) ⁴¹
Life expectancy at birth (2011 est.):	74.6 (overall) ⁴² ; 71.5 (males); 76.1 (females) ⁴³
Population under age 15 as of 2011:	25.3% (18,886,575 in total) ⁴⁴
Population aged 15-19 years as of 2011:	8.45% (6,317,583 in total) ⁴⁵
Population below national income poverty line (2010):	18% ⁴⁶
Unemployment rate (2012):	9% ⁴⁷
Youth literacy ratio (female rate as a percentage of the male rate, ages 15-24):	98% (2009) ⁴⁸
Health expenditure per capita per year (2010):	US \$678 ⁴⁹
Main ethnic groups:	Turkish, Kurdish ⁵⁰
Main religions (2009):	Islam, Christianity, Judaism ⁵¹
Main languages:	Turkish (official), ⁵² Kurdish ⁵³

Child marriage statistics

Table 1. Marriages by bride's age and groom's age (2010)⁵⁴

Total number of marriages in 2010	Bride's age (years)		Groom's age (years)	
	Under 15	Up to 19	Under 15	Up to 19
582,715	N/A	134,874 (23%)	N/A	14,824 (0.02%)

Table 2. Age at first marriage, for women (2008)⁵⁵

Age at first marriage	%	Number of women
<18	28.2	3,863,732
18	11.5	1,575,635
19-24	47.0	6,439,554
>25	13.3	1,822,257

Data for men at age of first marriage were not available.

- According to the TDHS, the median age at first marriage among women aged 15-49 is 20.8 years, which indicates that half of women in that age group married before that age.⁵⁶ The median age for men at first marriage is not available.
- The age-specific fertility rate for women aged 15-19 is 35.⁵⁷
- About 4 per cent of all women aged 15-19 have given birth to at least one ever-born child. About 40.8 per cent of married women in the age group 15-19 have given birth to at least one child.⁵⁸
- About 2.9 per cent of ever-married women aged 15-19 have had an induced abortion.⁵⁹

Table 3. Teenage pregnancy and motherhood (2008)⁶⁰

Age group	Have had a live birth (%)	Are pregnant with their first child (%)	Have begun childbearing (%)
15-19	4	2	6

Current age	Have had a live birth (%)	Are pregnant with first child (%)	Have begun childbearing (%)
15	0.4	0.0	0.4
16	1.7	0.5	2.2
17	1.3	3.1	4.4
18	6.6	3.1	9.7
19	9.4	3.5	12.9

Age-specific data on stillbirths are not available.

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 The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2009) *The Early Marriages Subcommittee Report*, Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Ankara, p.33.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Flying Broom (2011) *Early Marriages Policy Note*, Flying Broom, Ankara, p.8.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.9
- 7 Child Protection Law of the Republic of Turkey. Article 3.
- 8 Turkish Civil Code. Article 11.
- 9 Turkish Penal Code. Articles 6, 103, 104.
- 10 Amendments on 'Primary Education and Training Act:222' were published in Official Gazette number: 28261, published 11 April 2012.
- 11 Turkish Civil Code. Article 124.
- 12 In its General Comment No.21 (1994), the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 'considers that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both man and woman', <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom21> (accessed 30 July 2012). The Committee on the Rights of the Child also stated in 2003 (General Comment 4) that 18 should be the minimum age for marriage for women and men, <http://tb.ohchr.org/default.aspx?Symbol=CRC/GC/2003/4> (accessed 30 July 2012).
- 13 Turkish Civil Code. Article 124. Minimum ages for marriage could be reduced to 15 for men and 14 for women before the changes in 2002.
- 14 Turkish Civil Code. Articles 148-152.
- 15 Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit decision dated 01/05/2007, numbered 2007/3649 E. 2007/3120 K. Quoted in The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2009), *op. cit.*, p.8.
- 16 Turkish Civil Code. Article 143. Turkish Penal Code. Article 230.
- 17 The first Population Planning Law, adopted in 1965, was changed in 1983 and the new law included several measures to improve family planning services.
- 18 Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2009). *Turkey Demographic and Health Survey, 2008*, Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, Ankara, p.78. The TDHS was conducted on a representative probability sample of 10,525 households: 8,003 ever-married women of reproductive ages (15-49).
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.79.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Özcebe H. (2009) 'The Right to Health in Schools' Tüzün, I (ed.) *The Right to Education and Rights in Education: Evaluation of National Legislation in the Light of International Human Rights Documents*, Yelken Publications, İstanbul, p.249.
- 22 Özcebe H., Ünalın T., Türkyılmaz S., Coşkun Y. (2007) *2007 Turkey Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Survey: Main Report*, UNFPA, Ankara, p.167.
- 23 Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2009), *op. cit.*, p.74.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2009), *op. cit.*, p.1. These four provinces are Kırıkkale, İzmir, Şanlıurfa, and Diyarbakır.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p.17.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p.13.
- 28 Data cited in Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu İ, Ergöçmen B., (2011) 'Traditional Marriages', The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey *Committee Report on Psychological Violence towards women due to sex preference of children, bride-price and traditional marriages*, Publication No:5, Ankara, p.67.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.68.
- 30 Doğan S. (2011) *Child Brides*, Flying Broom Publications, Ankara, p.22.
- 31 Doğan S. (Flying Broom) Proceedings of the Subcommittee Meeting dated 08/06/2009, in The Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of Grand National Assembly of Turkey (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2009), *op. cit.*, p.73.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*, p.187.
- 36 Clark S., Bruce J., Dude A. (2006) 'Protecting Young Women from HIV/AIDS: The Case Against Child and Adolescent Marriage', *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol.32, No.2, p.79.
- 37 Turkish Republic Prime Ministry General Directorate on the Status of Women, Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, ICON Institut Public Sector GmbH, and BNB Consultancy (2009) *Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey*, Elma Teknik Publications, Ankara, p.48.
- 38 Otaran N., Uluç Ö.F. (2011) 'The Girls Education Campaign', in *Educating Women and Girls, E journal USA*, US Department of State/Bureau of International Information Programs, Volume 15, Number 12, p.23-24, available at http://photos.state.gov/libraries/america/475/pdf/EducatingWomenandGirls_Vol15_No12.pdf (accessed 12 August 2012).
- 39 Detailed information about the project can be found at <http://www.ucansupurge.org/english/index2.php?Id=44>.
- 40 This reporting and monitoring tool was created thanks to the reports collected in 'The Child Rights Monitoring and Reporting Website'. The website provides all stakeholders with information regarding the implementation of Convention on the Rights of Child in Turkey through media screening of daily events, and provision of relevant literature and good practices to the Turkish audience. <http://www.cocukhaklarizleme.org/>.
- 41 TURKSTAT (2011) Population according to age group and sex for the year 2011. Available at: <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr> (accessed 6 August 2012).
- 42 TURKSTAT (2011) Life expectancy at birth. Available at: <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr> (accessed 6 August 2012).
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 TURKSTAT (2011) Population according to age group and sex for the year 2011, *op. cit.*
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 TURKSTAT (2010) Income and Living Conditions Survey, available at: <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr> (accessed 7 August 2012).
- 47 TURKSTAT (2012) Labour Force Statistics, available at: <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr> (accessed 7 August 2012).
- 48 World Bank (2012) Turkey, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.IT.FM.ZS>. (accessed 7 August 2012).
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 Levinson D. (1998) *Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook*, Oryx Press, Phoenix, Arizona, p.291.
- 51 United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour (2011) *International Religious Freedom Report: Turkey*, available at: <http://turkey.usembassy.gov> (accessed 10 August 2012).
- 52 The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. Article 3.
- 53 Central Intelligence Agency (2012) *The CIA World Fact Book: Turkey*, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html> (accessed 31 August 2012).
- 54 TURKSTAT (2011) *Marriage and Divorce Statistics 2010*, Turkish Statistical Institute Printing Division, Ankara, p.18.
- 55 Data cited in Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu İ, Ergöçmen B., (2011), *op. cit.*, p.66.
- 56 Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2009), *op. cit.*, p.109.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p.60. The age-specific fertility rate is expressed as the number of births to women in a given age group per 1,000 women in that age group.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p.68.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p.97.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p.73.

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 lifesaving 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, 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.

Acknowledgements and contacts

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Contact Details:

Contact Details: UNFPA Turkey: Birlik Mahallesi 2. Cadde No:11, Cankaya Ankara; unfpa@un.org.tr

UNFPA EECARO: Hakki Yeten Caddesi, Selenium Plaza, No:10/C Kat 18-19, 34349 Besiktas, Istanbul, Turkey; eecaro@unfpa.org

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