



# Interventions to reduce forced marriage

*Iffat Idris*

*GSDRC, University of Birmingham*

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## Question

*What are the lessons learned from interventions to reduce the incidence of forced marriage? Focus on empirical studies and, where available, on the Roma community.*

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# 1. Summary

This review drew largely on academic papers as well as reports by international development organisations. Evidence and hence lessons on how to combat forced marriage are limited and sometimes contradictory. Overall, the literature points to a number of approaches that can be effective, notably: empowerment of girls; community approaches to change social norms and attitudes on child marriage, and economic incentives (for girls and families); and, alternative opportunities (notably education, and income generation). Legislative approaches appear to be the least effective in combating child, early and forced marriage. However, different approaches need to be implemented together in order to bring about sustained change.

Forced marriage is defined as marriage at any age that occurs without the free and full consent of one or both spouses (USAID, 2015: v). Child marriage is defined as a formal or informal union in which one or both parties are under the age of 18 (USAID, 2015: iv). Child and early marriages are viewed as forced marriages because child spouses are considered incapable of giving full consent. The literature predominantly uses the term child marriage or child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). This review found negligible literature using just the term 'forced marriage', and hence it too uses the term CEFM. While both males and females are affected by CEFM, the literature refers almost exclusively to combating CEFM in females.

CEFM occurs in many countries, but is most prevalent in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and disproportionately affects females. CEFM is a human rights violation and an impediment to sustainable global development. It is fuelled by diverse social and economic factors, the most common being poverty, gender inequality and conservative social norms.

**The literature describes five key approaches to tackling CEFM** (with some overlap between them):

- Empowerment - focus on giving girls the information, skills and support structures they need to advocate for themselves and improve their own status and well-being, e.g. life-skills training;
- Community – target parents and community members to influence attitudes to CEFM and change social norms, e.g. community education sessions;
- Economic – provide families with economic incentives or opportunities to offset the costs of raising girls and discourage them from marrying girls off, e.g. cash transfers;
- Schooling – enhance accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls, as girls' education is strongly associated with delayed marriage, e.g. provision of uniforms and school supplies;
- Legislative - aim to foster an enabling legal and policy framework to combat CEFM, e.g. raising legal minimum age of marriage.

**A number of challenges are faced in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions to combat CEFM:** lack of evaluations; lack of rigorous (randomised control trials, quasi-experimental studies) evaluations; failure to assess long-term impact of interventions; and programmes often comprising multiple components making it difficult to assess which one(s) contributed to impact.

This review looked at the findings of: a) multi-programme reviews, which collated the evaluation findings from a number of programmes to combat child marriage, and b) evaluations of individual programmes.

Key findings from the multi-programme reviews are as follows:

- **A 2011 review (Malhotra et al, 2011) of 23 programmes** targeting child marriage and implemented between 1973 and 2009, found that the weakest results were seen in programmes that worked only at the community or macro level – mobilising community members or changing laws and policies on child marriage. The strongest results were seen in those that worked directly with girls to empower them with information, skills and resources. Programmes focusing on two of the fundamental drivers of child marriage – lack of schooling and poverty – also showed promise, in particular to be scaled up.
- **A follow-on report in 2014 (Warner et al, 2014) conducted four case studies of promising programmes** that used, wholly or in part, girl-focused approaches. Taken together the four provided insights into three interdependent ‘pathways’ through which change can take place: internal transformation in the girl participant; access to alternatives to marriage such as education or economic opportunities; and increased influence over others through her internal transformation and participation in activities. However, the report stressed that girls alone could not transform their lives and change deeply entrenched norms and practices, and hence girls’ empowerment had to be accompanied by other activities.
- **A 2016 systematic review (Kalamar et al, 2016) of interventions that addressed child marriage in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC)** identified 11 high-quality interventions and evaluations. Of the four found to have had a significant positive effect (reducing the proportion of girls married or delaying marriage), three provided some form of economic incentive to remain in school. However, a further three studies, also of interventions providing economic incentives, found mixed impacts.
- **A 2017 review (Chao & Ngo, 2017) focused exclusively on rigorously evaluated interventions, identifying 22 interventions across LMIC.** The programmes took different approaches, which were grouped under empowerment, economic, schooling and community. Empowerment was the most popular approach and had the highest success rate (57%); schooling was the third most popular and second most successful (43%) (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 9). Economic approaches were found to be the least successful in preventing child marriage, especially when carried out as a single approach – they were more successful in combination with other approaches.

Key findings from the individual programme evaluations are as follows:

- **Berhane Hewan (Ethiopia)** – this was a holistic programme addressing social norms (through community meetings), girls’ lack of status and social capital (through mentoring, skills building, non-formal education), barriers to schooling (provision of uniforms and supplies) and economic factors (through cash transfers). It significantly reduced early marriage prevalence but it was difficult to assess which component had the most impact.
- **Kishori Abhijan (Bangladesh)** – this programme sought to empower girls through life-skills training and to increase girls’ independent economic activity through livelihoods training. Assessment of its impact in delaying marriage found statistically significant differences only among a subset of adolescent girl participants. It also found that respondents marrying at later ages had to pay higher dowries.

- **Empowerment vs. Cash incentive approaches (Bangladesh)** – a study compared the impact of an empowerment programme and a cash incentive programme (providing cooking oil) on reducing child marriage and teenage child-bearing, and increasing girls' education in rural Bangladesh. It found the cash incentive programme was more effective in delaying child marriage. Significantly, it benefitted out-of-school girls as well as those in school, and was relatively cheap. The empowerment programme did not reduce child marriage but increased the likelihood of girls being in school.
- **Tostan (Senegal)** – the NGO implemented a community empowerment programme with a strong community education component, leading to public declarations by community leaders and others to end female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage. While an evaluation of its long-term impact found a shift in perceptions towards recognising the benefits of delayed marriage, the average age at first marriage among women was the same in treatment and control villages.
- **Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) (India)** – this is a large-scale conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme in Haryana, India. Government bonds are issued for eligible girls within three months of birth, and are redeemable when the girls turn 18 - provided they are not married. An evaluation found ABAD had no effect on probability of marriage before 18 years, and that the proportion of girls marrying in their 18<sup>th</sup> year was higher among beneficiaries than non-beneficiaries – indicating that parents waited to receive the bond and then used it to marry their daughters off. Thus the programme did not profoundly shift attitudes towards child marriage.
- **Kenya Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC)** – this provided a monthly unconditional cash transfer to eligible households. An evaluation found that it reduced the likelihood of pregnancy by 5.5 percentage points, but there was no significant impact on likelihood of early marriage. The impact on pregnancy appeared to be through increasing the enrolment of young women in school and financial stability of the household.
- **Zomba Cash Transfer Programme (Malawi)** – families of female students were provided either unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) or conditional cash transfers (CCTs) tied to girls' education. UCTs proved more effective in delaying the age of marriage because they allowed those dropping out of school to support themselves without resort to marriage; CCTs increased school enrolment and attendance, but had little impact on child marriage.
- **Child marriage legislation** – in most countries child marriage is prohibited by national law, but there can be issues with this, e.g. legal age of marriage is less than 18 years; girls under 18 can be married with judicial or parental consent; no legal sanctions for child marriage. These issues mean millions of girls globally are unprotected against child marriage. In addition, there are large numbers (equivalent to 20,000/day in 2017) (Wodon et al, 2017: 5) of girls married illegally each year. An analysis calls for legal reforms, implementation and enforcement of child marriage laws, and additional interventions to prevent child marriage.

The findings from the multi-programme reviews and individual programme evaluations do not clearly identify one/some approaches as being particularly effective. In some contexts, interventions to promote empowerment had a positive impact on delaying marriage, but in others, they did not. Similarly, provision of economic incentives to families led to significant reductions in child marriage in some programmes, but had no impact in others. This highlights **the need for context-specific interventions**, and for **multiple component programmes, which combine different approaches**. Just as CEFM is driven by a range of factors, so programmes to tackle it must have components that address all the diverse factors.

The findings also suggest that interventions can sometimes have unexpected, negative consequences – delaying marriage age in Bangladesh, for example, led to families having to pay higher dowries. Again, this points to the need for context-specific programme design, taking into account all possible effects. Overall, the literature shows a **clear dearth of rigorous evaluations of programmes to combat CEFM**: much more effort and resources need to be invested in generating evidence to inform future policies and programmes.

This review found two reports on child marriage among Roma communities in Montenegro and Ukraine respectively. They highlight the high prevalence rates among the Roma, the fact that this is driven by several factors - poverty, gender inequality, patriarchal attitudes, marginalisation – and the need for a multi-pronged approach combining empowerment, sensitisation, economic incentives, schooling and legislative enforcement.

## 2. Child, early and forced marriage

### Scale, nature and causal factors

The global number of child brides is now estimated at 650 million, including girls under age 18 who have already married and adult women who married in childhood (UNICEF, 2018: 3). This represents a decline over the past decade in the proportion of young women who were married as children from 1 in 4 (25%) to approximately 1 in 5 (21%) (UNICEF, 2018: 3). While CEFM occurs in many countries, the prevalence varies considerably across and within regions and countries (USAID, 2015). It is particularly prevalent in South Asia and Africa: the larger population size in South Asia means it has the highest absolute number of married girls (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 2). Figures for 2018 put the number of child brides in South Asia at 285 million (44% of the global total) followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with 115 million (18%) (UNICEF, 2018: 3). There are significant gender differences in CEFM, with females being disproportionately affected: as of 2015, there were 720 million females alive who were married as children compared to 156 million men (USAID, 2015: 4).

CEFM is a human rights violation and an impediment to sustainable global development (USAID, 2015: 4). 'Child marriage marks the end of childhood and adolescence, forcing girls to assume adult roles and responsibilities even though they are not physically and emotionally ready to do so' (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 2). Negative consequences of CEFM include (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 2; Save the Children, 2018: 3-4; USAID, 2015: 9-11):

- Child brides are at risk of violence from spouses and in-laws: girls who marry before age 18 experience elevated rates of intimate partner violence compared to their peers who marry as adults (29% vs. 20% respectively);
- Child marriage also places girls at risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as early pregnancy when their bodies are not yet fully developed. Early pregnancy and child-bearing are the leading causes of death among girls aged 15-19 years;
- Babies born to women and girls married as children are more likely to suffer from malnutrition and underdevelopment, often perpetuating the cycle of poverty for another generation;
- Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home. Lack of education has harmful ripple effects, particularly for girls: lack of knowledge and skills to participate in the formal market,

confined to informal or home-based work with inferior working conditions and lower incomes. It also has negative effects on children, e.g. less likely to have proper nutrition, less likely to be immunised, more likely to die;

- Child marriage has negative effects on families, communities and societies. Global GDP could be US\$ 4 trillion higher for the period 2014 to 2030 if child marriage was eliminated.

CEFM is fuelled by many social and economic factors. Among the most common is poverty, with families using marriage as an economic strategy to free up limited resources for the rest of the family, or – in contexts where exchange of bride-wealth or dowry is practised – to either acquire the former or pay less as the latter (younger brides typically mean less dowry) (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 2). Patriarchal attitudes, whereby females are just seen as important to be wives and bear children, also drive CEFM (USAID, 2015). Related to this are lack of opportunities for females to go to school or to earn a living, i.e. alternatives to CEFM. Conservative, religious societies which associate notions of honour with female family members, and in which girls who have relationships or fall pregnant outside wedlock are seen as bringing shame and dishonour on their families, will often practice CEFM to avert this risk (Chao & Ngo, 2017). Rates of CEFM often increase during conflict or natural disasters such as droughts and famine, as this is seen as a form of social protection, and out of fear that daughters are at greater risk of sexual violence (USAID, 2015). Among Syrian refugees in Jordan, for example, rates of CEFM almost doubled between 2011 and 2015 (USAID, 2015: 13).

## Approaches to combating CEFM

The literature describes five key approaches to tackling child, early and forced marriage (CEFM): empowerment, community, economic, schooling and legislative. These are not completely distinct: there could be overlap between these. Provision of stipends for girls to go to school, for example, could fall under schooling approaches or under economic approaches to ending CEFM. The aims of each approach and common interventions are outlined below.

### *Empowerment*

Empowerment approaches focus on giving girls the information, skills and support structures they need to advocate for themselves and improve their own status and well-being (Chae & Ngo, 2017: 6). 'A related rationale is that girls with more human and social capital will aspire to jobs and enterprises as alternatives to marriage' (Malhotra et al, 2011: 11). Such approaches entail the following types of interventions (Chae & Ngo, 2017: 6; Malhotra et al, 2011: 11):

- Life-skills trainings – teaching girls about money, finance, nutrition, health, communication, negotiation, decision-making and other relevant topics;
- Livelihoods training – giving girls vocational skills to equip them for income-generation;
- Gender-rights awareness training;
- Information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns – using various platforms to convey messages about CEFM, schooling, rights, reproductive health and other topics;
- Sexual and reproductive health training;
- Social mobilisation and group formation by adult female mentors – peer group training and mentoring to provide ongoing information and support to girls; provision of 'safe spaces' or forums, clubs and meetings that allow girls to meet, connect and socialise outside the home.

## ***Community***

The decision to marry girls early is generally in the hands of family and community elders, and the stigma and sanctions for failing to meet social expectations are administered by the broader community (Malhotra et al, 2011). Hence, community approaches target parents and community members to influence attitudes to CEFM and increase knowledge about the negative consequences. Such approaches entail the following types of interventions (Chae & Ngo, 2017: 6; Malhotra et al, 2011: 13):

- One-on-one meetings with parents, community and religious leaders to gain support;
- Group and community education sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to CEFM;
- Information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns – using various platforms to convey messages about CEFM, schooling, rights, reproductive health and other topics;
- Public announcements and pledges by influential leaders, family heads and community members.

## ***Economic***

Poverty and the lack of viable income-generating options for girls and young women are important factors contributing to high child marriage rates (Malhotra et al, 2011: 18). Economic approaches involve providing families with economic incentives or opportunities to offset the costs of raising girls and to discourage them from marrying girls off (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 7). There are two main types of interventions under this strategy (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 7; Malhotra et al, 2011: 19):

- Microfinance and related training to support income generation by adolescent girls;
- Cash and non-cash incentives, subsidies, loans and scholarships to families or girls.

## ***Schooling***

Research shows that girls' education is strongly associated with delayed marriage (Malhotra et al, 2011). Schooling is protective against marriage in a number of ways: simply being in school helps a girl to be seen as a child, and thus not marriageable; schools are a socially acceptable place for girls to be; the experience and content of schooling helps girls acquire skills and information, and develop social networks, all of which help them to better communicate and negotiate their interests (Malhotra et al, 2011: 14). Enhancing the accessibility and quality of formal schooling for girls is therefore an important approach for combating child marriage. It entails the following types of interventions (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 7; Malhotra et al, 2011: 15):

- Preparing, training and supporting girls for enrolment or re-enrolment in schools;
- Building schools, improving facilities (especially for girls) and hiring female teachers;
- Cash, scholarships, fee subsidies, uniforms and supplies as incentives for girls to enrol and remain in school;
- Improving the school curriculum and training teachers to deliver content on topics such as life skills, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and gender sensitivity.

## Legislative

Such approaches aim to foster an enabling legal and policy framework to combat CEFM. They typically entail the following types of interventions (Malhotra et al, 2011: 20):

- Establishment or reform of legal minimum age of marriage;
- Advocacy among community members and government officials for new policies and enforcement of existing laws/policies. Raising awareness among these groups about the negative consequences of child marriage.

## Challenges with evaluation of CEFM interventions

A number of challenges are faced in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions to combat CEFM. The first is a lack of evaluations: a 2007 review of 66 child marriage-related programmes found that only 10% had been evaluated (Malhotra et al, 2011: 5). The second is a dearth of *rigorous* evaluation, defined as interventions evaluated as part of a randomised control trial (RCT), quasi-experimental study or a natural experiment (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 4). Chao and Ngo's 2017 review of the global state of evidence to combat child marriage found only 22 studies that met these and their other inclusion criteria.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of a control group, it is difficult to compare results for programme participants and non-participants, and observed changes cannot be conclusively attributed to the intervention alone (Malhotra et al, 2011: 25). At the same time, 'researchers increasingly acknowledge that interventions aiming for community-based social change are not ideally suited for traditional randomised methodology' (Malhotra et al, 2011: 25).

A further issue is that most programmes are implemented and evaluated within limited time horizons: for those showing no results (impact), it is possible that the evaluation occurred too soon after the intervention or the target age group did not have time to properly 'age in' to the outcome of interest (Malhotra et al, 2011: 25). Conversely, for programmes showing positive results in a short time frame, it is unclear whether such results would be sustainable over time (Malhotra et al, 2011: 25). Another limitation is that evaluations of unsuccessful interventions may not have been published or documented (Chao & Ngo, 2017).

Interventions are increasingly comprised of multiple components involving one or more approaches. But, the move towards multiple component interventions has not always been accompanied by evaluations of the individual components, making it difficult to assess whether an intervention succeeded because of a particular component or the combination of multiple components (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 11; Malhotra et al, 2011).

These diverse challenges point to the need for more creative evaluation approaches to effectively understand and appreciate the extent to which the desirable change in relation to CEFM has materialised (Malhotra et al, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> They limited their review to studies that measured the prevalence of child marriage and/or age at first marriage, either in the study population or community, and excluded studies that only measured knowledge and/or attitudes toward child marriage; and they only considered interventions that were implemented since 1997 (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 4).

### 3. Findings from multi-programme reviews

**Malhotra, A. et al (2011). *Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows.***

This report presents the findings of a review carried out by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) of 23 programmes targeting child marriage and implemented between 1973 and 2009 (Malhotra et al, 2011: 6). Only a few programmes focused exclusively on child marriage: for most this was a goal entwined with achieving other health, welfare or empowerment outcomes for adolescents and youth. Evaluated child marriage programmes were heavily concentrated in South Asia, with Bangladesh and India topping the list, and countries in Africa and the Middle East such as Ethiopia and Egypt, also contributing to the evidence base. However, geographic spread of evaluated programmes did not correlate to geographic prevalence of child marriage: West Africa, for example, with very high child marriage rates, had few evaluated programmes.

The programmes reviewed deployed the following five core strategies to prevent child marriage: empowerment of girls, sensitising family and community members, enhancing access to schooling, offering economic incentives, and fostering an enabling legal and policy framework. Success was assessed in terms of: increased knowledge about the negative consequences of child marriage; increase in the ideal age of marriage for girls; more supportive attitudes for girls having a say in decision-making; increase in age at marriage for girls (and boys); and smaller proportions of girls marrying before the age of 18 (Malhotra et al, 2011: 21).

The evaluation results indicate that, contrary to the general impression that this would be easier, bringing about change in knowledge and attitudes can be difficult, and harder than bringing about behaviour change (delayed marriage) (Malhotra et al, 2011: 21). The programmes that documented the weakest results were those that worked only at the community or macro level – mobilising community members or changing laws and policies on child marriage. The strongest results were seen in programmes that worked directly with girls to empower them with information, skills and resources. Typically these programmes were developed from the ground up and continuously modified and refined by local and international organisations with extensive experience in child marriage prevention. Programmes focusing on two of the fundamental drivers of child marriage – lack of schooling and poverty – also showed promise, in particular to be scaled up, which has been difficult for community-based, girl-focused programmes.

**Warner et al (2014). *More Power to Her: How empowering girls can help end child marriage***

Following on from its 2011 review of programmes targeting child marriage (Malhotra et al, 2011), ICRW conducted case studies of four promising programmes that used, wholly or in part, girl-focused approaches. The four were (Warner et al, 2014: 3):

- Ishraq – prepares girls in rural Upper Egypt for re-entry into formal schooling using group-based programming;
- Social and Financial Empowerment of Adolescents (SoFEA) – provides social and economic development opportunities for girls in Bangladesh using peer-led, group-based programming;
- PRACHAR – provides group-based reproductive health training within a comprehensive behaviour change programme among adolescents and young couples in Bihar, India;

- Toward Improved Economic and Social/Reproductive Outcomes for Adolescent Girls (TESFA) – promotes sexual and reproductive health and economic empowerment for married adolescent girls using group-based programming in Amhara, Ethiopia.

Taken together the four case studies provided insights into three interdependent ‘pathways’ through which change can take place:

- Internal transformation – in the girl participant, wherein she builds self-awareness about her rights to opportunities and alternative choices and absorbs new skills and information about herself and the world around her;
- Access to alternatives to marriage – such as education or economic opportunities;
- Increased influence over others – through her internal transformation and by virtue of her participation in activities, she can act to influence others’ perceptions about her (and other girls) and influence strategic decisions about her life, such as the timing of her marriage.

Taken together, the case studies suggest that as girls follow these pathways they make multiple, successive achievements. Based on the case studies (and earlier reviews) the report identifies the following core components of girl-focused empowerment programmes (Warner et al, 2014: 27):

- Providing information that will build knowledge of one’s self and environment, including sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Enhancing girls’ critical thinking, interpersonal and communication skills, and other practical skills that will benefit them and their households both in the short and long-term;
- Providing ongoing social support through group-based programming in safe spaces;
- Promoting girls’ agency by emphasising goal-setting and self-efficacy;
- Facilitating alternatives to marriage, especially school and livelihood opportunities;
- Integrating girl-focused activities with those that enhance communication with and support from their family and community; and
- Using gender-transformative approaches, which seek to reshape gender roles and promote more equitable relationships among women, men, boys and girls.

However, the report also stresses that it is neither realistic nor desirable that girls alone can transform their lives and change deeply entrenched norms and practices. Girls’ empowerment activities should be accompanied by other activities that engage and mobilise gatekeepers, shift norms, alleviate economic drivers of child marriage and improve institutions, laws and policies (Warner et al, 2014: 27). It also stresses that, while delaying the age of marriage is a positive outcome, ‘a slight shift in the age of marriage alone will not necessarily transform gendered roles and expectations within marriage, or within the broader community’ (Warner et al, 2014: 27). Ending child marriage requires a long-term vision of success, focused on gender equality.

The report calls for more research, one on each individual context to inform programme design, and two on evaluation of programmes. With regard to the former, it notes that the specific factors that make girls vulnerable to child marriage are complex and variable, and hence no ‘one size fits all’ programme model will work. Understanding the specific social, cultural, economic, religious and political factors contributing to child marriage is a critical first step for building effective programmes (Warner et al, 2014: 27). On the latter, in order to better understand what works and

why, it is important to invest in rigorous, mixed-method evaluations that track change in multiple dimensions over time (Warner et al, 2014: 27).

**Kalamar, A. et al (2016). 'Interventions to prevent child marriage among young people in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of the published and gray literature'.**

This paper describes the findings of a systematic review of published literature from 2000 onwards, to identify interventions that addressed child marriage in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). The initial search yielded 4,000 articles, which after applying inclusion/exclusion criteria and quality assessment, were whittled down to 11 high-quality interventions and evaluations (Kalamar et al, 2016: S15-S17).

Of the 11 programmes included in the review, four were found to have had a significant positive effect (reducing the proportion of girls married or delaying marriage). Three of the four provided some form of economic incentive to remain in school, such as cash transfers conditional on school attendance or payment of school fees, while the fourth implemented a life-skills curriculum (Kalamar et al, 2016: S18). However, a further three studies, also of interventions providing economic incentives (support to remain in school, conditional or unconditional cash transfers), found mixed impacts. Four studies found no measurable impact of interventions on child marriage: the interventions were life-skills curriculum, vocational training, youth groups; peer education; provision of school uniforms; teacher training; and unconditional cash transfers to ultra-poor households (Kalamar et al, 2016: S18).

While some of the cash transfer programmes had a positive impact on child marriage, the review noted that they might be unsustainable in terms of cost; and it was unclear whether long-term change would be sustained after the intervention (Kalamar et al, 2016: S20).

The review also found that, of the programmes that had no statistical impact on child marriage, most of the interventions had defined goals that were broader than child marriage (e.g. HIV, sexual and reproductive health more generally); in contrast, the interventions that did have statistical impact focused directly on child marriage (Kalamar et al, 2016: S20).

**Chao, S. & Ngo, T. (2017). *The Global State of Evidence on Interventions to Prevent Child Marriage*.**

This review focused exclusively on rigorously evaluated interventions. A total of 22 interventions across low- and middle-income countries met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 1). The programmes took different approaches which were grouped under empowerment, economic, schooling and community. Empowerment was the most popular approach, included in 14 interventions, followed by economic (10 interventions), schooling (7 interventions) and community (6 interventions) approaches (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 7). However, it should be noted that 11 interventions focused on a single approach, while 11 incorporated two or more approaches (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 7).

With regard to impact, the empowerment approach had the highest success rate (57%) while schooling was the second most successful (43%) (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 9). Economic approaches were the least successful in preventing child marriage: it had the highest failure rate (67%) when used as the sole approach, but interventions that used it with another approach had a higher success rate (57%) (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 7).

The findings suggest that interventions incorporating an empowerment approach, either as the sole approach or in conjunction with another approach, demonstrated the greatest success in reducing child marriage (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 1). While the success of empowerment interventions echoes previous reviews, Chao and Ngo's finding that economic approaches alone were unsuccessful contradicts some previous studies (Chao & Ngo, 2017: 10). Acknowledging the difference, Chao and Ngo (2017: 10) explain that this could be due to their focus on rigorously evaluated interventions, and the fact that they only considered changes in behaviour and not changes in knowledge and attitudes (which previous studies considered).

## 4. Findings from individual programme evaluations

### Berhane Hewan (Ethiopia)<sup>2</sup>

Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of early marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Amhara region of the country has the highest prevalence of child marriage (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009: 6). In the early 2000s, the Ethiopia Ministry of Women Children and Youth Affairs (WCYA), the Amhara Regional Bureau of WCYA, the Population Council, and UNFPA collaborated on the first rigorously evaluated programme in Africa with the explicit objective to delay the age of marriage and support girls who were married as children.

The *Berhane Hewan* (meaning 'Light for Eve' in Amharic) programme targeted married and unmarried girls aged 10-19 years in rural areas of Amhara. The intervention addressed the determinants of early marriage, including social norms, girls' lack of status and social capital, barriers to schooling and economic factors. The programme's four components, described below, were based on formative research and consultations with communities and local leadership (Population Council, 2014: 2):

- Community conversations to raise awareness and address cultural and social norms in relation to child marriage and other issues affecting the well-being of adolescent girls. Community dialogue was used to explore problems and devise solutions, in community settings. Meetings, conducted over several months, included a cross-section of community members, spanning both males and females, multiple age groups, and various social roles.
- Provision of school supplies to remain in school - Girls who were in school, and those who wanted to return to school, were supported with school supplies such as notebooks, pens, and pencils. This was done to address the economic barriers to schooling and to take advantage of the protective effect schooling has against early marriage.
- Conditional asset transfer to address economic incentives to marry girls - Families who did not marry off girls during the two-year period were promised a goat at the end of the period, jointly presented to the girl and her family. At the beginning of the project, families registered for the scheme in a public event, with household heads signing up in the presence of local leaders and other community members.
- Girls' mentoring groups, including non-formal education - Female mentors, who were leaders in the community, led girls' groups to build skills and address social isolation

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<sup>2</sup> This write-up is largely based on Population Council (2014: 1-2).

and lack of social capital. Girls who were out-of-school during recruitment were encouraged to join formal school, with provision of school supplies. However, girls who were already married often did not want to join the formal school. These girls were formed into girls' groups to receive non-formal education, life skills, and mentoring.

*Berhane Hewan* included a quasi-experimental research design, with population-based surveys before and after implementation, in intervention and control sites. The results demonstrated significant changes in the status of girls. Girls aged 10-14 years in the project area were one tenth as likely to be married compared to those in the comparison site, and three times more likely to be in school (Population Council, 2014: 2). Not one girl aged 10-14 years in the project site was married during the pilot phase. Among married girls, those residing in the *Berhane Hewan* project site were three times more likely to be using family planning compared to their counterparts in the control site (Erulkar & Muthengi, 2009: 12).

Erulkar and Muthengi (2009: 7) note that the programme design acknowledged the complexity of factors driving child marriage and that: 'interventions should simultaneously address girls' low status and social isolation, educational and livelihood opportunities, economic drivers of the practice, and societal norms and pressures'. The evaluation demonstrated that it is possible to have an effect upon girls' age at marriage and school status in a relatively short period of time. Moreover, it showed that marriages for the youngest girls - below the age of 15 - are extremely susceptible to being delayed.

However, questions were raised as to whether the programme was scalable, given the complexity of the multi-component design and the absence of cost data. Moreover, the high level of participation in all components of the project made it difficult for evaluators to ascertain which strategy was the most influential in bringing about the positive impacts witnessed.

### **Kishori Abhijan (Adolescent Girls' Adventure) (Bangladesh)**

In 2001, UNICEF initiated a pilot intervention to test whether livelihoods opportunities could ameliorate the situation of early marriage and other adverse outcomes for girls in rural Bangladesh (Amin, 2011: 1). 'Kishori Abhijan' (Adolescent Girls' Adventure) aimed to lower school dropout rates, increase girls' independent economic activity, and raise the age at which girls marry (Amin, 2011: 1). Life-skills training consisted of enhancing self-esteem and leadership skills and providing education related to gender roles and discrimination, health and nutrition, and legislation and legal rights, particularly early marriage and girls' and women's rights. Livelihoods training included specific vocational skills such as poultry care, handicrafts, sewing, photography, and teacher training. The intervention, conducted over three years in 14 rural districts, was a joint effort involving (among others) UNICEF, UNFPA, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) (Amin, 2011: 1).

Assessment of the impact of the programme in delaying marriage among girls (drawing on a baseline survey of 6,000 married and unmarried boys and girls aged 13-22, and follow-up survey of 2,500 girls) found that only a subset of adolescent girl participants showed statistically significant differences (Amin, 2011: 2). While most project participants delayed marriage, these findings were not statistically significant. However, the evaluation also found that respondents (both participants and non-participants) who married at later ages often paid higher dowries to their husband's family (Amin, 2011: 2). The report recommends that projects aiming to delay marriage in areas where dowries are paid should take into account the relationship between marriage payments and girls' age, especially among girls from poorer families (Amin, 2011). With

fewer economic resources, such girls are less able to afford the increased dowry payments that accompany delayed marriage.

### **Comparison of empowerment and cash incentives programmes (Bangladesh)**

A study by Buchmann et al (2017: 5) conducted a clustered randomised trial in rural Bangladesh to evaluate the impact of two very different policy approaches to reducing child marriage and teenage child-bearing and increasing girls' education: an adolescent empowerment training programme and a conditional incentive programme. Communities were randomised into three treatment and one control group in a 2:1:1:2 ratio. From 2008, girls in treatment communities received either: i) a six-month empowerment programme; ii) a financial incentive to delay marriage; or iii) empowerment plus incentive.

Under the empowerment programme a community mobilisation phase was carried out to inform parents and community members about its activities and mobilise their support; 'safe spaces' were set up for girls to meet; and girls were provided education support (basic literacy, numeracy and oral communication) and social competency training (life skills, nutritional and reproductive health knowledge) (Buchmann et al, 2017: 6). In addition, in randomly selected communities (50%) financial literacy and encouragement to generate own income were added to the curricula. The conditional incentive programme was an in-kind transfer of cooking oil to encourage parents to postpone daughters' marriage until the legal age of consent (18 years) (Buchmann et al, 2017: 7). Cooking oil was chosen as an incentive because it is purchased regularly by every family in Bangladesh and thus has close to cash equivalent value, yet it is less susceptible to theft and graft than cash because of its bulk.

Data from 15,739 girls 4.5 years after programme completion showed that girls eligible for the incentive for at least two years were 25% less likely to be married under 18 years, 16% less likely to have given birth under 20 years, and 24% more likely to be in school at age 22 years (Buchmann et al, 2017: 1). They found insignificantly different effects on child marriage and teenage childbearing outcomes for girls in and out of school at baseline (Buchmann et al, 2017: 16). The empowerment programme did not decrease child marriage or teenage childbearing, but did encourage unmarried and older married girls to stay in school (girls eligible for the empowerment programme were 10% more likely to be in school).

The authors note that, unlike other incentive programmes that are conditional on girls staying in school, an incentive conditional on marriage alone has the potential to benefit out-of-school girls. 'This is important because the most popular incentive programmes focus on keeping girls in school and thus are unavailable to out-of-school girls. This focus may stem from the assumption that once out of school a girl will inevitably marry and there is little that policy can do to change this. Our results suggest this vulnerable population can still benefit from incentives' (Buchmann et al, 2017: 17). Moreover, the cash incentive provided was very cost-effective, and was able to work even in settings with high rates of underage marriage. By contrast, the well-crafted and quite intensive adolescent girls' empowerment programme did not decrease child marriage or teenage childbearing but was effective in increasing schooling.

### **Tostan (Senegal)**

Tostan is a non-governmental organisation, based in Senegal, which aims to empower African communities to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation. In 1998-1999 it implemented a village empowerment programme in the Thies, Fatick and Kolda regions

of Senegal (Diop et al, 2008: i). The programme comprised an education component, in which participants were taught through community classes, held about three times a week over a period of one to two years, about a range of topics including: basic hygiene; oral rehydration therapy and vaccination; problem-solving; resource and financial management; women's health; and child development (Diop et al, 2008: 1). It mainly targeted adult women, though later refinements to the approach led to men being targeted as well. The ultimate goal of the programme was to mobilise communities to hold public declarations in support of abandoning harmful traditional practices, notably female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage.

An evaluation of the long-term effects of the programme was conducted in 2006. This compared treatment villages (Group A) with those which hadn't had the programme but had made public declarations (Group B) and with control villages in which neither had taken place (Group C). The results for early marriage were as follows (UNICEF, 2008: 48):

- The average age at first marriage among women aged 20-24 years – those who were aged 10-14 years during the intervention period – was the same (16 years) in Group A and C villages. An older average age was expected in the villages where Tostan intervened (Group A).
- Early marriage was most prevalent in Group B villages, where 35% of women were married before the age of 15, versus 20% in Group A villages. This partly reflected the different ethnic customs of the communities: most Group B villages (Kolda region) were inhabited by Poulars, known for their early marriage practice, and among whom nearly all women were married before age 20.
- Most marriages (54% in A and B villages, and 58% in C villages) occurred in the 15-19 years age group regardless of the village type. Almost no marriages occurred after the age of 20 in Group B villages, while in the other two groups the percentage of first-married women over age 20 reached or exceeded 12%.

A comparison of Group A and Group C villages following intervention revealed that public declarations and the Tostan programme may have combined to slightly lower the prevalence rate of marriages under age 15 (UNICEF, 2008: 24). However, when one examines the overall marriage rate for girls under 18, the difference between the Group A villages and the control villages disappears.

While the age at first marriage had remained young in the programme areas, the qualitative data pointed to a shift in perceptions towards recognising the advantages and necessity of not marrying girls too young or marrying them without their consent (Diop et al, 2008: 23). Diop et al (2008: 24) note that Tostan's influence in this could be seen to some degree, because of its emphasis on the consequences of pregnancy among young girls. But other influences should also be recognised: school attendance by girls; greater emancipation of girls as they come into contact with other cultures; awareness raised by the media; and the fear of legal sanctions. Overall the evaluation found that child marriage had become a topic of conversation in the villages.

### **Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) (*Our daughters, our wealth*) (India)**

India has the highest number of child brides in the world, accounting for one-third of the global total (Nanda et al, 2016: 1). To help reduce child marriage the Government of India has launched several large-scale conditional cash transfer (CCT) initiatives to incentivise families to delay their

daughters' marriages. One of the first of these was the Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) programme, launched in Haryana in 1994.

Under the scheme households belonging to disadvantaged subgroups in the population (Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes) or those living below the poverty line were eligible to enrol in the programme if they had a daughter born between 1994 and 1998 among their first three children. The programme offered two points of transfer (Nanda et al, 2016: 2):

- 1) a small cash disbursement to mothers (500 Indian Rupees) within 15 days of delivering an eligible girl;
- 2) a savings bond of 2,500 Indian Rupees purchased by the government in the name of the girl on enrolment within three months of her birth. The bond was expected to grow to about 25,000 Indian Rupees (approximately USD 384 at today's rate) redeemable at age 18, provided the girl was not married.

Three change pathways were hypothesised through which the CCT could enhance the value and status of girls, thereby enhancing their educational attainment and delaying their marriage (Nanda et al, 2016: 3):

- Attitudes of parents would become more gender-equal.
- Parents and girls would intensify their aspirations for a better future.
- Girls would stay longer in school and have higher educational attainment.

The first beneficiaries turned 18 in 2012, presenting an opportunity to assess the programme's success in delaying child marriage. ICRW carried out an evaluation in which they looked at marital status as the main outcome, and educational attainment as the secondary outcome. The evaluation found (Nanda et al, 2016: 5-6):

- Participation in the ABAD programme had **no effect** on the probability of being currently married (irrespective of age at marriage) or on the probability of marriage before age 18;
- The proportion of girls marrying during their 18<sup>th</sup> year was higher for beneficiaries (59%) than non-beneficiaries (45%);
- Beneficiary girls had a higher probability of completing 8<sup>th</sup> grade by 12 percentage points and of aspiring to study beyond 12<sup>th</sup> grade by 19 percentage points.

The evaluation report attributed the absence of a programme effect on marital status as reflecting an overall trend toward later age of marriage in the state of Haryana. Over the last 20 years, the proportion of women of age 20-24 who married before age 18 in Haryana fell from around 57% in 1992-93 to 41% in 2005-06, and the pace of decline has been faster than the average of all states across India (Nanda et al, 2016: 4). This decline has been attributed to a higher rate of schooling and educational attainment among both girls and boys and to the growing importance of education in the society overall (Nanda et al, 2016: 4).

The higher rate of marriage in the 18<sup>th</sup> year among beneficiaries indicates that the cash benefit had an instrumental effect. In other words, it suggests that parents of beneficiary girls waited to get their daughters married only until receipt of the benefit (Nanda et al, 2016: 5). This was further corroborated by the data on cash use, which suggested that participants both intended and actually used the cash incentive for marriage purposes. More than 50% of respondents who had cashed out reported using the funds for marriage expenses (Nanda et al, 2016: 5). Additional qualitative data showed that some parents may have enrolled because they

considered that the benefit could help defray the cost of their daughter's marriage: some even thought mistakenly that this was the purpose of the benefit (Nanda et al, 2016: 5).

The results for education suggest that schooling until 8<sup>th</sup> grade and girls' own aspirations to study at higher levels may have had a strong influence on their delayed marriage beyond 18 years. However, these mechanisms were not strong enough to show a programme effect on girls' marital status because of the instrumental effect of the cash benefit that motivated beneficiary parents to marry off their daughters at 18 years on receipt of the benefit (Nanda et al, 2016: 6). The report also highlights the larger context in which families primarily see girls' education as valuable for enhancing their marriageability, rather than as a pathway to new opportunities (Nanda et al, 2016: 6). Hence, increased education to 8<sup>th</sup> grade had little transformative effect in the absence of socially acceptable alternatives to marriage.

The authors conclude from the findings that the ABAD CCT enabled beneficiary households to delay the age of marriage of their daughters to 18 years, but did not profoundly shift their attitudes about child marriage. This shows that (Nanda et al, 2016: 7):

“while CCTs have the potential for bringing about certain desirable behavioural changes among the economically most vulnerable population, they alone are not sufficient for the changes to be transformative for girls. Along with conditional cash transfers, there is a need for other layered approaches that challenge norms and help change parental attitudes and aspirations for girls.....Crucial to this process will be providing opportunities and infrastructure that help girls to become economically active agents”.

### **Kenya Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC)**

The Kenya Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CT-OVC) was started in 2007, implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development, and covered approximately 240,000 households nationwide as of 2014 (Handa et al, 2015: 39). The programme began with a small pre-pilot in 2004 followed by an initial expansion in 2006, which included seven districts. The CT-OVC programme provides a monthly cash sum to eligible households of 1,500 Kenyan Shillings (Ksh, USD 21), comprising nearly 20% of monthly total household expenditure; the level of the transfer was increased to Ksh 2,000 per household in the 2011/2012 fiscal year to adjust for inflation (Handa et al, 2015: 39). The CT-OVC is an unconditional cash transfer, and thus imposes no conditions for households receiving benefits, although at the time of enrolment, beneficiaries were told that they were expected to use the money for the care and development of the OVC resident in the household. To foster gradual independence from the programme, households with an OVC over the age of 18 are no longer eligible.

An evaluation of the programme looked at its impact on pregnancy and early marriage among females aged 12 to 24, four years after programme initiation. The evaluation was designed as a clustered randomized controlled trial and ran from 2007 to 2011, capitalising on the existence of a control group, which was delayed entry to the programme due to budget constraints. Findings indicate that, among 1,549 females included in the study, while the programme reduced the likelihood of pregnancy by 5.5 percentage points, there was no significant impact on likelihood of early marriage (Handa et al, 2015: 36). Programme impacts on pregnancy appear to work through increasing the enrolment of young women in school, financial stability of the household and having first sex at a delayed age. Handa et al (2015) note that the Kenyan programme is

similar in design to most other major national cash transfer programmes in Eastern and Southern Africa, suggesting a degree of generalisability of the results reported for Kenya CT-OVC.

### **Zomba Cash Transfer Programme (Malawi)<sup>3</sup>**

The Zomba Cash Transfer Programme (ZCTP) was a World Bank funded initiative that provided both unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) and conditional cash transfers (CCTs) to the families of female students aged 13-22 years (Kidd & Calder 2012). The initiative ran over a period of two years (2007-2009). An experimental study of Zomba found that the unconditional cash transfers were more successful than conditional cash transfers in reducing the age of marriage (Baird et al, 2011). Conditional transfers increased enrolment rates and improved regular attendance at school; however, they had little impact on reducing the likelihood of teenage pregnancies or marriage. Unconditional cash transfers, however, were 'very effective' in delaying marriage by 44% and childbearing by 27% after two years (Baird et al, 2011: 747). These impacts were almost entirely experienced among those who dropped out of school after the start of the two-year intervention. The likelihood of marriage and pregnancy was negligible among those who stayed in school regardless of whether they received a conditional or unconditional transfer (Baird et al, 2011).

The study concludes that UCTs may be more effective than conditional transfers in countries where decisions about the marriage of adolescent girls are influenced by poverty. The unconditional transfer allowed those who dropped out of school to support themselves without relying on a husband or engaging in transactional sex. However, in countries where dowry payments are made, UCTs may have no effect, or perhaps have even the opposite effect on the timing of marriage (Baird et al, 2011).

### **Child marriage legislation**

The threshold to define a child and thereby child marriage internationally is 18 years of age (Wodon et al, 2017: 2). In most countries child marriage is prohibited by national law but there are a number of issues (Wodon et al, 2017: 2-3):

- most countries have adopted 18 years as the legal age of marriage for girls (and a few have a higher age), but there are countries with a lower legal age for marriage;
- many countries still allow girls to be married before 18 if their parents or judicial bodies give their consent;
- in many countries there is no legal sanction for those involved in child marriage;
- in some countries, the minimum age for marriage is lower under customary or religious laws than national laws.

For all the above reasons, the law often provides limited protection against child marriage for girls. Save the Children and the World Bank conducted analysis for 112 countries on laws for the minimum age for marriage, and prevalence of child marriage for the period 2015 to 2017 (Wodon et al, 2017: 3). Key findings were (Wodon et al, 2017: 3):

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<sup>3</sup> This write-up is based on Hinds (2015: 3).

- Nine countries made changes to their laws leading to higher minimum ages, typically by eliminating or reducing exceptions with parental or judicial consent;
- In Bangladesh, the minimum age with a combined parental and judicial consent was lowered;
- Globally, when considering only the legal age and not exceptions with parental or judicial consent, the number of girls not protected increased from 11.3 million to 11.5 million between 2015 and 2017;
- When considering parental consent exceptions, the number of girls not protected was much higher, rising from 52.5 million to 58.0 million between 2015 and 2017;
- Data for number of girls not protected with judicial authorisation was only available for 2017: that year 82.8 million girls were not protected

A key reason for the increases seen between 2015 and 2017 is population growth. Legal protections tend to be weakest in the Middle East and North Africa where three in four girls (73.3%) between 10 and 17 years of age were not protected against child marriage in 2017 while in South Asia the proportion was one in two girls (47.7%) (Wodon et al, 2017: 4).

The study also assessed trends in illegal marriages – defined as a marriage taking place before a girl reaches 18 and before the minimum age for marriage in her country, accounting for exceptions linked to parental and judicial consent – for a subset of 74 countries. The number of girls married illegally was estimated at 10.3 million in 2015 and 10.6 million in 2017; allowing for the possibility of either parental or judicial consent, this figure fell to 7.5 million girls married illegally in 2017 – equivalent to 20,000 each day (Wodon et al, 2017: 5).

Overall, the analysis suggests that many countries still do not effectively legally protect girls against child marriage, but also that legal reforms are not sufficient to end the practice as many girls marry illegally in countries where legal protections are in place (Wodon et al, 2017: 1). It stresses that, while protecting girls against child marriage through legislation is an important first step, additional interventions are needed to prevent child marriage.

## 5. Tackling CEFM among the Roma community

### Understanding the problem

This review found two reports looking at child marriage among the Roma community, one in Montenegro (Soni, 2017) and the second in Ukraine (UNFPA, 2014).

In both contexts, child marriage among the Roma is far higher than the national average. Prevalence of child marriage in Montenegro nationally is around 1%, but within the Roma and Egyptian communities, according to the 2013 MICS<sup>4</sup>, it was 28.1% among females aged 15-19 and 16.5% among men aged 15-19 (Soni, 2017: 8). In Ukraine lack of reliable statistics on the Roma is a major problem, stemming from their reluctance to apply for identity documents (UNFPA, 2014). Nonetheless, it is estimated that the Roma population in the country is between 120,000 and 400,000, with high rates of child marriage (UNFPA, 2014: 5). Some evidence for this comes from official birth statistics: in 2011, 141 girls under the age of 15 gave birth in

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<sup>4</sup> Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey

Ukraine, of whom 51 were from Zakarpatska oblast, which has the largest population of Roma in the country (UNFPA, 2014: 6). Levels of domestic violence among Roma communities are also high (Soni, 2017: 8). One study in Ukraine which interviewed 240 Roma women found that 112 of them (46%) had experienced domestic violence, including both physical and psychological abuse (UNFPA, 2014: 7).

High rates of child marriage among Roma populations are linked to early school dropout. Roma girls face many barriers to education, including: poverty which leads to girls being pulled out of school to work or look after younger siblings so parents can work, as well as directly being a driver of early marriage (e.g. for bride price); lower expectations within the community on Roma girls to complete education; and social norms which see early marriage as traditional, and value virginity (UNFPA, 2014). Other factors are lack of opportunities (especially for girls), and marginalisation of Roma by wider society (Soni, 2017).

### **Approaches to combat child marriage**

Soni (2017) highlights the legislative reforms that have been carried out in Montenegro to prevent violence against women and children, including child marriage, and promote human rights. These have been followed with the development of strategies and action plans under diverse ministries, and guidelines for multi-disciplinary response mechanisms. Many strategies specifically target the Roma and Egyptian population and address their vulnerabilities. For example, the strategy for social inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2016–2020 acknowledges the poor socio-economic status of the Roma and Egyptian communities and aims at their social inclusion and at the promotion of better education, health, safety, housing, and livelihood conditions (Soni, 2017: 9).

However, Soni (2017: 9-10) also highlights many of the challenges:

- In spite of the progress achieved with respect to the legal and policy framework, implementation gaps exist at different levels in the execution of the laws, which create barriers for women and girls who are victims of violence and child marriage in accessing justice and services.
- There is no clear definition of child marriage, and most child marriages are customary, i.e. not registered, and thus evade the existing legal safeguards. The age of consent for sexual activity of 14 is lower than in most EU countries and other countries in the region.
- There is very low prosecution and conviction of perpetrators of violent crimes against women, including child marriage. In addition, victim protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration continue to be a weak link in the system.
- At the strategic development level, the dearth of statistical data based on evaluations or research makes evidence-based planning very difficult.
- Multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs), constituted of representatives of different service providers, are promising because they have the potential to deliver a cohesive and coordinated response in early identification, reporting and prevention of CEFM, but they face challenges such as poor inter-departmental coordination and lack of capacity, especially on victim-centric approaches.
- While there are community mobilisation initiatives to transform negative social norms, this is something that requires continuous efforts and considerable time.

The UNFPA report lists a number of initiatives to combat child marriage among Roma communities in Ukraine (UNFPA, 2014: 7):

- Some projects in Roma communities are being implemented to ‘build knowledge of Roma girls on reproductive health, family planning, and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies’.
- The ‘Chirikli’ Roma Women’s Fund runs projects for Roma women targeting issues of reproductive health and sexuality. For example, in one project, ‘Room for mother and child’, Roma girls and women can come and discuss issues that are ‘taboo’ in their community, such as sexuality, reproductive health, and family planning.
- Roma social-medical mediators are drawn from Roma communities, and act as intermediaries between people living mainly in Roma settlements and social and medical services. Since 2010, there have been successful examples of Roma mediators working in different parts of Ukraine, and they are in general one of the best examples of reaching out to the Roma community. Roma mediators are/could be used to raise issues related to early marriage.

## Recommendations

The report on prevention of child marriage in Montenegro makes the following key recommendations (Soni, 2017: 57-61):

- Generate an enabling legal and policy environment which will represent an expression of strong commitment by the state to ending child marriages – this includes raising the minimum age for marriage to 18 years, irrespective of judicial or parental consent;
- Enhanced institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of the legal and policy frameworks – including strengthening multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs);
- Improve girls’ and boys’ access to formal education, paying special attention to the academic (under-)achievements of Roma (and Egyptian) children in order to make formal education meaningful and putting in place special measures to effectively prevent dropout;
- Empower girls and boys by strengthening their agency through the development of their skills and the enhancement of their social assets;
- Improve the economic situation of girls and their families to achieve emancipation and access wider choices for advancement in life;
- Mobilise communities to transform negative social norms and increase the value of girls;
- Work on reducing the social distance between the general population and Roma (and Egyptians);
- Strengthen programmes and evidence base – including investment in monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge management.

Recommendations to end child marriage specifically among the Roma population in Ukraine are as follows (UNFPA, 2014: 2):

- Integrate the already existing, small-scale programmes of Roma social-medical mediators into national government programmes, and institutionalise the profession of Roma mediator.
- Provide social workers with better training, so that they can work more effectively on resolving issues facing Roma, and can work cooperatively with Roma mediators.

- Develop and implement measures to improve the level of literacy among adult Roma, reduce school drop-out rates among Roma children, and improve the standard of housing and infrastructure in Roma settlements.
- Provide information to Roma community members (especially young women and men) on sexual and reproductive health and on the health consequences of child marriage.
- Establish women's consciousness-raising groups, to empower young Roma women who face multiple forms of discrimination. In addition, provide young Roma women with practical help with employment, education, and changing their qualifications, and assistance in opening small businesses.
- Enable Roma to obtain identification documents, and encourage the registration of births, marriages, and deaths (even if late).

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## Key websites

- International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW): [www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org)
- Population Council: [www.popcouncil.org](http://www.popcouncil.org)

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## About this report

*This report is based on six days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact [helpdesk@k4d.info](mailto:helpdesk@k4d.info).*

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