

**Forum: The Commission on the Status of Women**

**Question of: Counteracting forced marriages especially concerning minors**

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*“The scars of torture, forced conversion and forced marriages of minority girls are the scares that will never heal.”* – Qamar Rafiq, human rights advocate and writer.

### **I. Description of the Issue**

Forced marriages are between two individuals who do not give their full consent into their marriage and do not have the power to prevent it. Forced marriages are a human rights violation due to the restricted freedom called for in the *Declaration of Human Rights*. Both men and women are forced into marriages, however, there are statistically more women pressured to marry. The outcome concerns sexual, and gender based domestic violence and abuse. Forced marriages are extremely frustrating and difficult to combat because they're socially accepted. The individuals have difficulties acting against the pressure of their own relatives. Furthermore, the enforcement of laws concerning entering a marriage without full consent is quite weak. Forced marriages are executed by family members for different reasons. For example, to continue a bloodline, control sexuality or secure an immigration status. Many forced marriages are also supposed to prevent poverty when the children are married off to a wealthier family. It would guarantee a higher living standard for the next generation. Arranged marriages are also an aspect of the culture and tradition. For example, in India marriages are arranged between two individuals from the same religion to enforce strength through unity. Fifty-six percent, therefore most of all forced marriages, are entered into in Asia and the Pacific. Africa holds 13% of all victims of forced marriage and Niger is the country with the most forced marriages. In the pie chart the percentages of other regions

are also depicted (cf. Fig. 1). This shows where immediate action is needed.

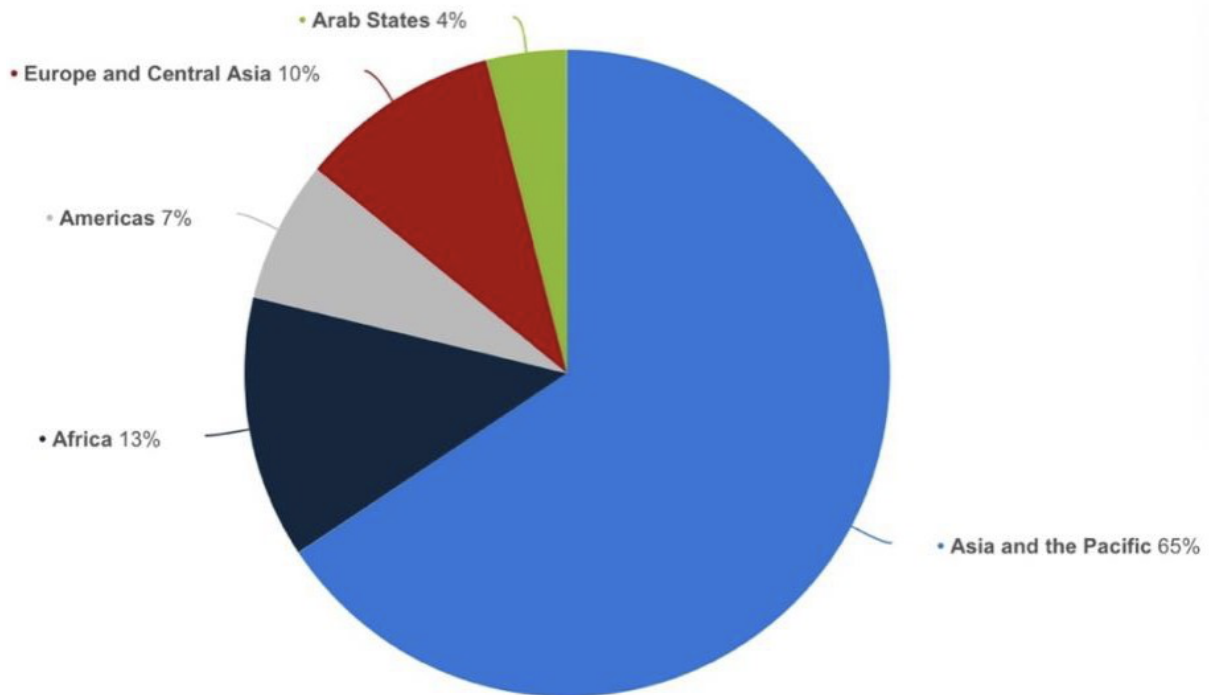


Fig. 1: Regions with the highest percentage of forced marriages.

The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* is an international convention including hundred nations agreeing to the foundation of it. It concentrates on member states fulfilling the responsibility of enforcing women's rights and equality in every sector, such as in education or politics.

## II. Definition of Key Terms:

**Forced marriage:** A marriage not both individuals are content with and did not give their consent

**Child marriage:** Child marriage is often also forced marriage and applies for minors, people under 18

**Arranged marriages:** The individuals are having a partner suggested which might improve the family's relations or social status. However, the individuals still must consent to their weddings and are not forced by other family members or society.

**Minimum age:** The legal minimum age is the age at which individuals can be involved in activities such as marriage, working or voting. Only in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands it is not possible to get married before the age of 18. In other countries

there is also a minimum age of 18 required to get married, however, there are nations such as Equatorial Guinea or São Tomé in which children can get married at the age of 14 with the approval of their guardians.

**National Strategy:** A national strategy often includes an action plan to solve a national issue. There are financial plans and goals included to combat the issue.

**MEDCs:** More Economically Developed Countries (Canada/United States/Denmark)

**LEDCs:** Less Economically Developed Countries (Bangladesh/Niger/Mali)

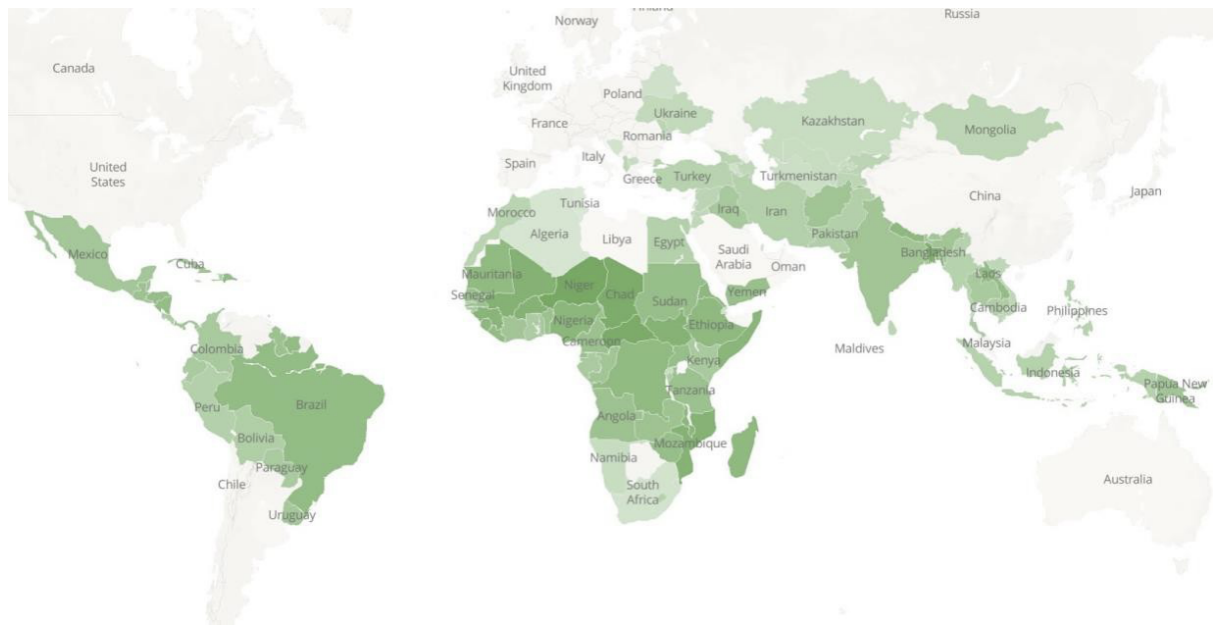
**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Also known as Global Goals, have the intention to call for action and end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace by 2030.

**Girls not Brides:** A non-governmental organization concerning human rights violations especially child, early and forced marriages.

**UN Women:** UN Women is a non-governmental organization which works with the goal of bringing women across the globe together and fighting for more equality.

### III. Background information:

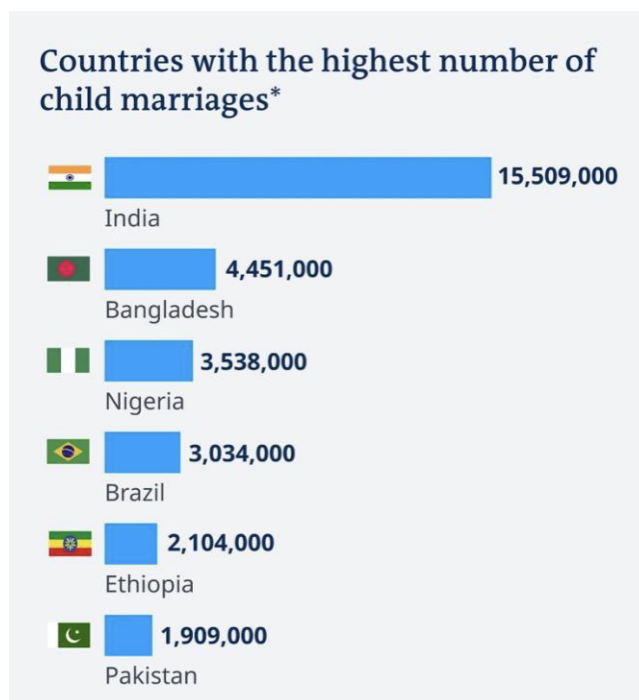
A forced marriage differs from an arranged marriage. When planning an arranged marriage the family members are suggesting the husband or wife, however, the individuals have the choice to cancel that arrangement at all times and consent from both sides is needed to contract the marriage. As soon as one person feels pressured or forced by their family members it is a forced marriage. Child marriages apply to minors, people under the age of 18, and influence mental health and education, which is interrupted. Child marriages go against child rights due to the individuals not having a choice and happening without consent. Forced marriages and child marriages are violating human rights due to the lack of freedom and free will. Furthermore, forced marriages go against the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, article 16. It states that everyone should have the right of only entering a marriage with their full consent. In 2021 most victims of forced marriages belonged to the group of the 18–24-year-olds and 24% were 15 and younger. The map below emphasizes the number of minor girls being married, whereas the countries in a darker shade of green are more affected by child marriages than the ones with the lighter shade.



*Fig. 2: Overview of minor girls being married.*

It is very difficult for the individuals to act against their own marriage or to prevent it from happening because society's norms prohibit them from disagreeing with the older generation. Also, society expects newlyweds to be pregnant soon and start a family. Child marriages lead to teenage pregnancies, which need special treatment and focus. Many countries have laws creating a minimum age for marriage to prohibit child marriages. However, minor girls are still forced to marry without their consent (see *fig. 3*). Reasons can include the strictness of laws and how they are implemented in different regions. In corrupt countries lacking legal systems and unaware officers it is almost impossible to act against forced marriages. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty and lack of access to education can contribute to the difficulty of ending forced marriages. Forced marriage is also favored by certain cultures and communities. Some traditions emphasize the unity that is founded when marrying two individuals from the same religion or culture. The importance of tradition and community is sometimes very impactful and can overrule laws. These aspects are often to be found in LEDCs and therefore forced marriage is more likely to appear there. Current studies show that one in five girls is married off without their consent. In 2016 about 15.4 million girls were married off without their consent. Furthermore, in 2021 about 22 million girls were victims of forced marriages. The numbers are rising and are directly linked to the *United Nations*. The 17 *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* are focusing on human rights and aim to improve our world by calling for action. However, eight goals of 17 cannot be reached if there is no end to forced or child marriages. Combating forced and child marriages are

conducive to goals which mean to promote education, poverty or health aspects. Therefore, countries such as India, Bangladesh, or others which are highly affected by child marriages (cf. *fig. 3*), have impact on the achievement of the *SDGs*.



*Fig. 3: Statistics of marriages concerning minors.*

Forced marriages are also enforced in the Horn of Africa (cf. *fig. 4*). Often to prevent poverty or because of the lack of future prospects. However, social and cultural aspects impact the normalization of forced marriages. They promote the reinforcements of gender inequality. It leads to discrimination and exclusion of women from social and political interaction. It is fundamental to act now because every additional generation that experiences forced marriages leads to a deeper anchoring of this tradition in their society.

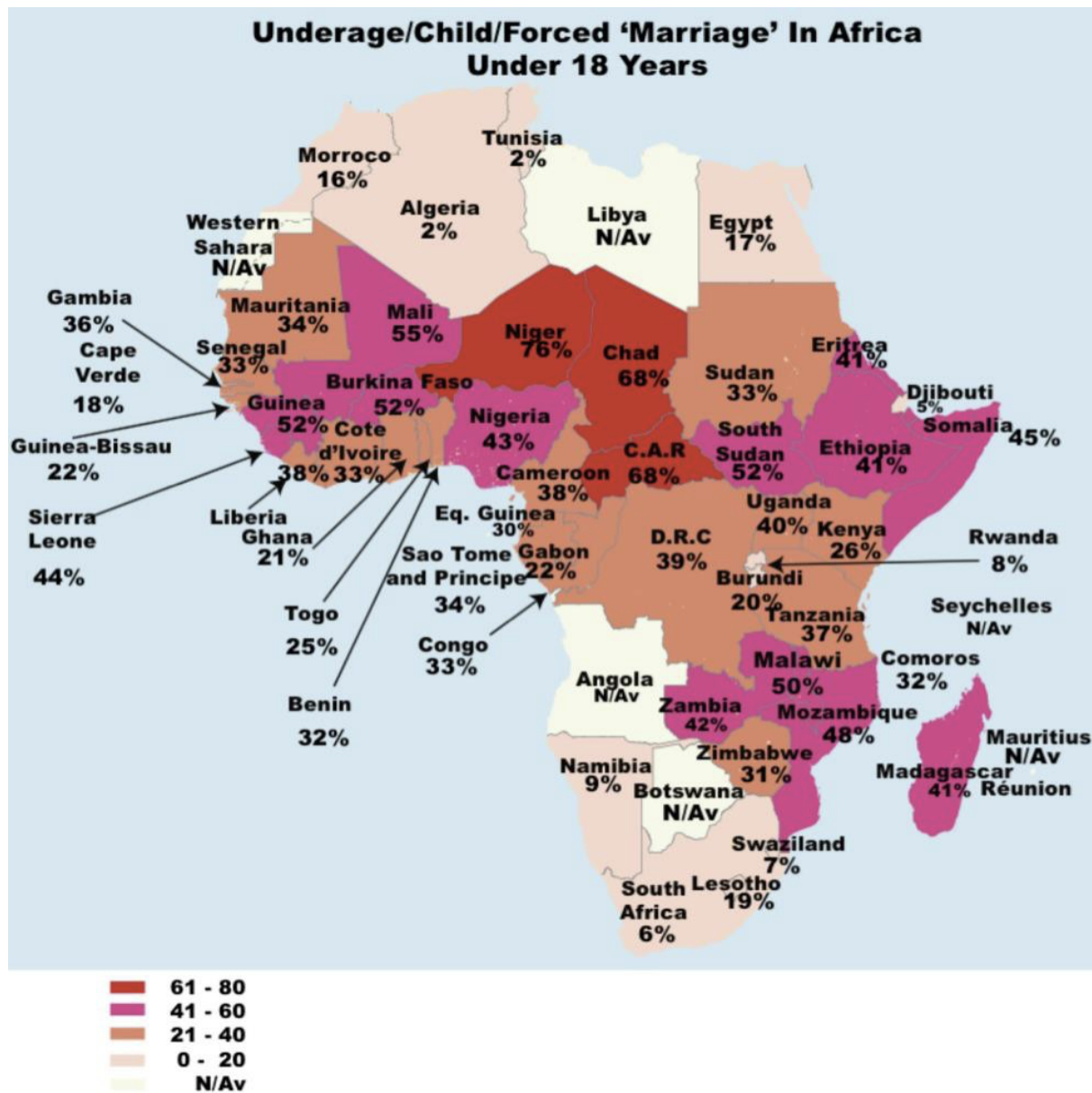


Fig. 4: Overview forced/child marriages in Africa in percentage of the population.

#### IV. Timeline of events:

Women's rights started to be fought for in the 19th century. Before women were subjects to their husbands and had no big role in politics. It was very rare for them to become a doctor or to go into law. The women's rights movement gained influence from 1848-1998 and developed to have an impact on many countries and their citizens. The movement started 175 years ago and referring to *The World Bank's* data there are still about 2.4 billion women in this world, who do not have the same rights as men and are facing domestic violence and discrimination. In 1962 the *Convention on Consent to Marriage* was issued in the General Assembly and is now the foundation of laws concerning marriages in multiple countries. *The*

*International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP)* has the goal of diminishing all sorts of discrimination for women since 1993. This organization has improved women's lives in Asia and the Pacific, especially by working with the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* and raising awareness about the content. The first resolution against child and forced marriages was adopted in 2013. It states that child, early and forced marriages are a violation of human rights and prevent children from being free and contributing to a healthy education. After the resolution there were more UN resolutions and reports adopted such as in the report from Human Rights Council *A/HRC/26/22* in 2014. This report focuses on strategies and measures to end forced marriages. For example, it calls for raising awareness. The resolution *A/HRC/RES/29/8* also by the Human Rights Council was discussed in 2015 and states that child and forced marriages are a violation of human rights and calls for the UN high commissioner to spread more awareness by implementing a workshop to overthink strategies. This resulted in the report *A/HRC/35/5* in 2017. Furthermore, the *Sustainable Development Goals* are working towards solving the world's most challenging problems such as climate change and equal rights for men and women.

#### **V. Previous Attempts to solve the issue:**

There are multiple NGOs involved in ending child and forced marriages. Many of those believe education is a fundamental issue for many victims and must be improved. The NGO *Breakthrough* works globally and locally in the counties to support children by using the media and art to raise awareness. There are some projects located in India, in regions where child marriages are the highest. Another organization is the *Forum of African Women Educationalist (FAWE)* which focuses on the education of girls and women in Africa and is located in Kenya. The organization includes human rights activists and chancellors. In 2003 a program was introduced in 29 African countries to finance girls' education such as school fees. Many countries which are involved in forced marriages have already enforced national strategies or plans or are still developing ones to improve the situation. These plans are in cooperation with the organization *Girls not Brides* and include a document which calls for action against forced marriages and has the goal to diminish it. Furthermore, it includes specific steps and details. For example, by providing education and access to support if needed.

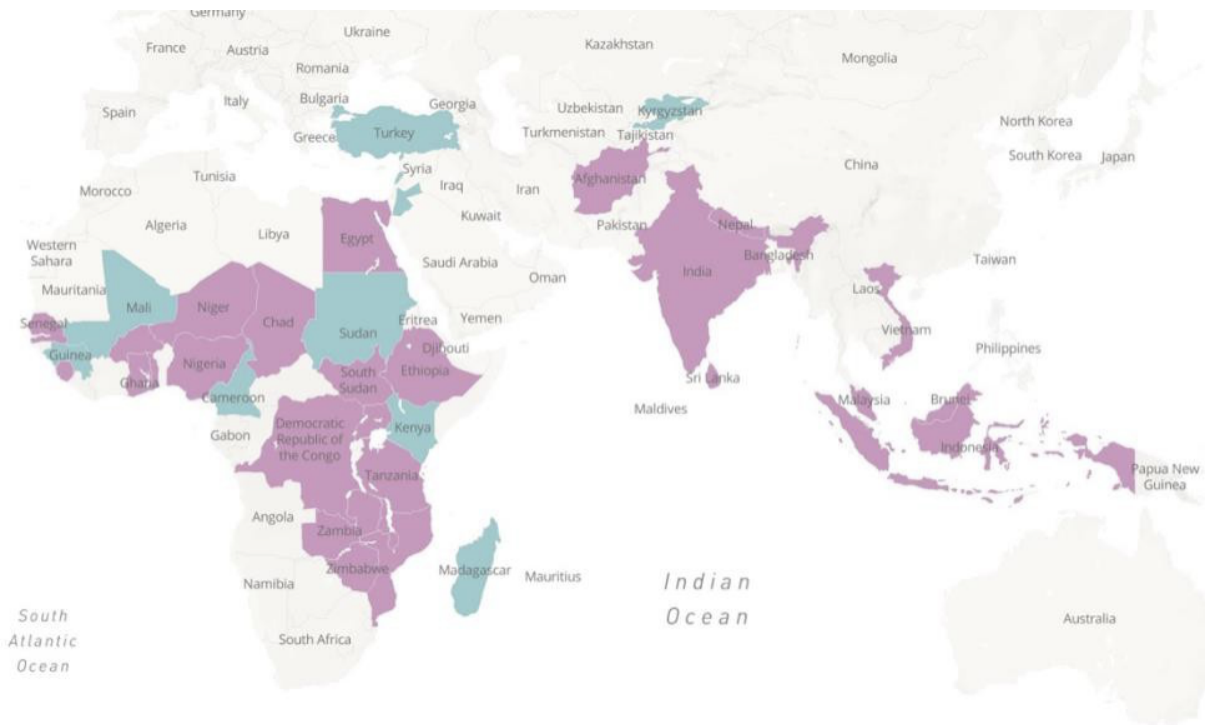


Fig 5: Countries enforcing a national strategy (purple) or developing one (blue).

To be more specific, the program *Girls not Brides Uganda* has implemented communication strategies and worked with the goal to improve the execution of laws concerning girl's safety. Additionally, they supported the idea of enforcing an upgraded National Strategy on child marriage and teenage pregnancies. When searching for help the organization "*Girls not Brides*" works over social media to connect with girls in need, provided home school essentials and food to implement a safer environment. As seen in Fig. 3, India plays a big role in child marriages as well as Niger clearly visible in Fig. 4. However, in India it is illegal to wed two people without their consent and Niger wants to ban forced marriages by 2030 to align with the *Sustainable Development Goals*. The institution *UN Women* are involved in 57 countries helping to enforce national strategies to combat violence. In 2020 *UN Women* has supported women and children in 26 countries in Africa and Asia. They are investing in legal frameworks to ensure better child protection.

## VI. Possible solutions:

The *United Nations* calls for action and mentions legislative measures and action plans as helpful solutions against child marriage. Furthermore, leaders of countries should be engaged with as well as education improved, and awareness raised. Also, girls must be protected from not having the right to speak freely. It is fundamental to work locally in



schools to educate children about their rights and always have free access to support. Additionally, punishments for forcing a wedding should be implemented or amplified.

## **VII. Relevant UN resolutions and treaties:**

- Convention on *Consent to Marriages, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages* by the General Assembly, 07 November 1962
  - Foundation of today's women's human rights
- Report from the Human Rights Council *A/HRC/26/22*, 2014
  - Report on preventing early and child marriages including strategies to end forced marriages.
- Resolution *A/HRC/RES/29/8* by the Human Rights Council, 2015
  - Call for a workshop by the *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* to discuss previous achievements.
- Resolution *A/HRC/RES/41/8* by the Human Rights Council, 2019
  - Calls for two regional workshops by the *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* on child, early and forced marriages.
- *Sustainable Development Goal 5.3*: Eliminate forced marriages and genital mutilation by 2030, established 1 January 2016

## **VIII. Questions delegates should consider:**

Are forced marriages an issue in your country?

What has already been done in your country to act against forced marriages? What effects do forced marriages have?

What solution could be agreeable with all member states? Does your country implement controversial ideas?

Are there local issue solving projects going on in your counties?

Every delegate should prepare at least two position papers and a resolution as a debating foundation. It would make sense to prepare a resolution to the topic most relevant for your country. These should be handed in to your chair by September 8. The handed in versions will be part of the evaluation of the best and most distinguished delegate. Feel free to ask your chairs any questions, the e-Mail address can be found at the top of this paper. I advise you to prepare your work conscientiously and put effort in because your research will have

an impact on the debate. Conducting your research thoroughly will lead to fruitful debates and make MUNoH memorable and fun.

## **IX. Helpful links:**

Forced marriages overview in different countries:

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/> UN page with documents and general information:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings> Annual report:

[https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1504/Girls\\_Not\\_Brides\\_Impact\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1504/Girls_Not_Brides_Impact_Report_2020.pdf)

Convention on consent to marriage:

[https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1964/12/19641223%2002-15%20am/ch\\_xvi\\_3p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1964/12/19641223%2002-15%20am/ch_xvi_3p.pdf)

Numbers and Video:

<https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/types-of-gbv/forced-marriage/> UN Report:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/RecommendationsForActionEbook.pdf>

## **Sources:**

Figures:

- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/974756/distribution-victims-forced-marriage-region/>
- <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/>
- [https://www.dw.com/en/child-marriages-in-germany-present-a-challenge-for-authorities/a-](https://www.dw.com/en/child-marriages-in-germany-present-a-challenge-for-authorities/a-50540043)

[50540043](https://www.dw.com/en/child-marriages-in-germany-present-a-challenge-for-authorities/a-50540043)

4. <http://www.afri-dev.info/forced-child-marriage/>

5. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/>

Information:

Arranged marriages in different countries:

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/arranged-marriage-countries> Forum for

African Women Educationalists:

<http://fawe.org>

Our Girl- Forced Marriages prevention and awareness:

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13940/forced\\_marriage\\_-\\_our\\_girl\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/13940/forced_marriage_-_our_girl_factsheet.pdf)

National Women's History alliance:

<https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/history-of-the-womens-rights-movement/> apigbv-

Forced Marriage: <https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/types-of-gbv/forced-marriage/> Channel foundation (IWRAP-AP): <https://www.channelfoundation.org/grants/iwraw/>

Forced marriages in Africa:

<https://www.walkfree.org/news/2019/forced-and-child-marriage-in-africa-as-a-manifestation-of-gender-based-violence-and-inequality/>

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

OHCHR-Recommendations for actions against child and forced marriages:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/RecommendationsForActionEbook.pdf> Women's rights (OHCHR):

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings> United Nations (OHCHR) stories of violence against women:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2023/01/forced-marriage-violation-human-rights>

Convention on consent to marriage:

[https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1964/12/19641223%2002-15%20am/ch\\_xvi\\_3p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1964/12/19641223%2002-15%20am/ch_xvi_3p.pdf)

Impact report "Girls not Brides":

[https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1504/Girls\\_Not\\_Brides\\_Impact\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1504/Girls_Not_Brides_Impact_Report_2020.pdf)

Girls not brides map:

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/>