

Child Marriage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Overview)



I was 12 when I had my first child; it was a girl, a very tiny one, and she died after the first month. I was very skinny and I was constantly beaten by my husband; when the girl died, I left him.

—Child spouse

Child marriages

Child or early marriage is the union, whether official or not, of two persons, at least one of whom is under 18 years of age.¹ By virtue of being children, child spouses are considered to be incapable of giving free and full consent, meaning that child marriages should be considered a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, child marriages occur in all sections of society.

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 the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 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 the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 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

- Adopt a standardised definition of a child as a person under 18 years of age. Furthermore, child marriages should only be possible in exceptional cases. Additional and comprehensive measures must be incorporated into the legislation in order to establish a statutory duty on the part of state institutions to provide continuous support, counselling, care, and guidance to child spouses after the marriage is contracted. The visibility of child spouses should be raised in national strategies and action plans related to gender equality, family violence, social inclusion, and safe motherhood. At the same time, the criminal justice response to illegal marriages with children should be genuine and all stakeholders should complete an in-service training course on the dangers of ethnic profiling and stereotyping. Full and complete cooperation and coordination between the criminal justice, social welfare, and healthcare systems should be legally binding.
- Organize in-depth research and population surveys alongside awareness-raising campaigns on the consequences of child marriages. Develop databases and a system of constant data collection on child marriages and common-law marriages. In particular, awareness-raising campaigns should focus on rural areas, taking into account cultural diversity, and involve addressing traditions of ethnic groups in order to overcome harmful consequences on the health and development of girls and rights violations. In parallel, introduce sexual and reproductive health education in primary schools in order to enable children and youth to gain accurate knowledge about sexual and reproductive behaviour.
- Ensure availability and accessibility of healthcare services, especially gynaecological and paediatric services, counselling on family planning and free access to contraceptives in communities most affected by child marriage and in rural areas.
- Develop mechanisms to reduce the phenomenon of lack of personal identification documents among Roma, as well as to register existing common-law marriages. In particular, such mechanism needs to include measures to address the issue of street Roma children and their vulnerability to child marriages, both registered and unregistered.

- Ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.

Legal and national context

In the last three decades, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has faced considerable economic and social change, in addition to an armed conflict. The on-going process of economic transition has resulted in economic decline, high unemployment rates, the growth of poverty, and a deteriorating standard of living.

In its concluding comments on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's combined initial, second, and third periodic report in 2006, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women expressed concern about 'the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society. These stereotypes present a significant impediment to the implementation of the Convention and are a root cause of the disadvantaged position of women in a number of areas.'²

Child marriage in the country is legally possible, subject to certain requirements, and has a long history and tradition. The issue is largely marginalised by society, a state of affairs that is further enforced by a lack of sufficient interest on the part of the government and civil society to address properly the causes and consequences of the phenomenon of child marriages.

International standards

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the two Optional Protocols, as of 1993.³ The country is also a member state of the Council of Europe, and is party to the International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (and the Optional Protocol); the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; and the Revised European Social Charter.

“There is a need for clearly defined [legal] articles and clear protective measures. There is a significant gap in the treatment of the child as a subject of rights instead of as an object of protection, and there are not sufficient articles that would enable the meaningful participation of children in the decisions that are influencing their lives.” (Legal expert)

The Constitution stipulates that ‘the international agreements ratified in accordance with the Constitution automatically become part of the internal legal order and cannot be changed by law’.⁴ The principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are incorporated in the national laws that define the duties of all relevant state authorities, in regard to the guaranteed rights of children and the best interests of the child. Alas, the necessary secondary legislation, policy documents, and mechanisms have not been put into place to realise these duties.

Who is a child?

The Law on the Protection of Children defines a child as a person under 18 years of age.⁵ The law regulates the system, organisation, and manner of providing protection to children, primarily in the context of institutions in the field of social protection. This law obliges all institutions in this system to undertake all necessary measures to protect children from abuse.

According to the Constitution, mothers, children, and minors have a right to special protection from the state. The difference between a child and a minor is not specified.⁶

The Family Law does not provide a definition of a child, but interchangeably uses the terms ‘child’ and ‘juvenile’, without making a clear distinction between the two terms.⁷ The law provides for the protection of the family, children, juveniles, and children without parents. The Criminal Code does

not provide a definition of a child, but does define a child crime victim as a juvenile under 18 years of age.⁸

Elsewhere, the Law on Juvenile Justice defines a juvenile as ‘any person up to the age of 18 [years] who, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is considered a child’.⁹ This law introduced additional terms, such as ‘children at risk’, and for the first time defined the status of risk and the obligations of all institutions within the juvenile justice system in regard to children at risk.

In general, there is a discrepancy in terminology used in different laws regarding the status of a child. What is common for all laws is that persons under 18 years of age do not enjoy full legal capacity, subject to certain exceptions. The terminology problem affects the implementation of the laws pertaining to the protection of children, juveniles, and minors.

Who can contract a marriage?

According to the Family Law, ‘marriage is a community [...] of a man and a woman within which [the] interests of spouses, family and society are carried.’¹⁰ For the marriage to be legally valid, both future spouses must freely express their consent in front of a state registrar. The law stipulates that a person under 18 years of age cannot contract a marriage. However, in certain circumstances, the court may, in an out-of-court procedure, allow a person who has reached

16 years of age to contract a marriage. This order can only be made if the person has the physical and mental capacity necessary to fulfil the rights and duties of matrimonial life, subject to prior medical opinion from a health institution and pursuant to professional assistance rendered by the social welfare centre.¹¹ By contracting a marriage, a child older than 16 years of age gains full legal capacity.

The Criminal Code stipulates that the act of an adult living in common-law marriage with a juvenile aged 14-16 years is a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term of between three months and three years.¹² The same punishment

One big problem is the different terminology used in different laws and the lack of explanations of the terms used.
(Legal expert)

is applicable to parents or guardians who allow or induce a juvenile who has reached 14 but not 16 years of age to live in a common-law marriage with another person. However, the courts have adopted a lenient approach towards the perpetrators of this criminal offence. A study undertaken by UNICEF in 2010 on child sexual abuse found that ‘for the crime of extramarital life with a juvenile between 14 and 16 years of age, a conditional sentence has been issued in 78.5 per cent of the cases.’¹³ The lenient approach does not come as a surprise given that even more grievous criminal offences are dealt with in an offhand manner, due to an erroneous perception of tradition, especially Roma traditions.

“Excerpt from judicial verdict:

Criminal offence: Sexual assault of a child, Article 188(1); Age of victim: 13 years and 10 months; Year of judicial conviction: 2006; Sanction: Conditional sentence

...the victim came to visit the defendant alone, offered herself to him, and was the one who asked to stay with him, and that, owing to great love, the defendant accepted. In addition, the Court took into consideration the fact that the defendant had no prior record and that this was his first offence, his level of education as well as the fact that he did not know that intercourse with children was prohibited, since he knew that amongst the Roma population there are many young persons who live in marital union although they are below 14 years of age. Therefore, the Court, on the basis of these circumstances established the existence of exceptional mitigating circumstances....”

Source: Caceva, V., Mirceva, S. (2010) ‘Research Report: Forlorn and Scared-A Situation Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse’, UNICEF, Skopje, p.51.

Of particular concern are common-law marriages involving children under 16 years of age, which constitute a crime, but which occur throughout the country. In the case of common-law marriages, child spouses are left without any institutional support and protection.

Family planning and reproductive rights

Under the Family Law, every person has the right to establish a family. Regarding family planning, the Law on Health Protection guarantees the right to health protection to all citizens.¹⁴ The Law on Pregnancy Termination provides for the freedom of choice regarding termination of pregnancy.¹⁵ The right to termination of pregnancy can only be limited for health reasons.

“Although Shuto Orizari is a settlement in the capital, Skopje, about 5,000 women there have no family doctor or gynaecologist. There are no paediatricians either. The most vulnerable groups, women and children, have no access to health protection.”

(Roma NGO)

Access to contraception is limited for groups with a low standard of living, since modern contraceptives are subject to out-of-pocket payment. Women from rural areas have limited access to family planning counselling, since it takes place in gynaecological facilities, which are predominantly located in urban areas.

There are no relevant data on the number of pregnancies in the age group of 15-19 years. The use of modern contraceptives is generally low in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Adolescents and young adults make even less use of family planning services. According to a UNICEF report, only 1.1 per cent of women under 19 years of age used contraceptives in 2007.¹⁶

At the same time, the number of adolescent girls giving birth is in decline (from 6.7 per cent in 2008, to 6.5 per cent in 2009, and 5.9 per cent in 2011¹⁷). The average age at first birth in 2011 (26.2 years) is slightly higher compared to the previous year (26.0 years), but it is still lower compared to a number of countries across Europe.¹⁸

In regard to the sexual health of young people there are no available statistical data. Most of the analysis is based on research carried out by the Institute for Public Health, which points to the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour, lack of information among young people on sexual and reproductive health, and low use of services.¹⁹ According to the National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health, 32 per cent of adolescents under 19 years of age are sexually active (40 per cent of boys and 21 per cent of girls).²⁰ Fifty per cent of young people expressed a need for more information regarding modern contraceptives. Only 1.6 per cent of girls aged 15-19 years used oral contraceptives and only 34.8 per cent of young people questioned had used condoms during their most recent experience of sexual intercourse.²¹

According to another survey conducted by the Institute for Public Health, 11.9 per cent of school students already had experience of sexual intercourse.²² The percentage of school students, aged 13-15 years, who had had sex was 8.9 per cent (14.4 per cent of boys and 3.1 per cent of girls), while 4.6 per cent of school students had had sex before they reached 13 years of age.²³

“Before they [parents] married me, my mother didn’t allow me to go to school any more. Since my oldest sister ran away to get married, me and my other two younger sisters were prohibited from going to school.” (Child spouse)

Sexual education is not part of the curricula of either primary or secondary schools. The absence of an organised framework for the dissemination of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health to adolescents results in poor and, to some extent, inaccurate knowledge about sexual and reproductive health.

Child marriage in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

There are numerous reasons given to justify the contracting and existence of child and common law marriages. The most frequent are the girl’s pregnancy, the need to preserve the family’s ‘honour’,

and ‘a better life in Western countries’. The ‘better life’ justification particularly applies to cases where the groom, who is employed abroad, comes back home to find a bride to take back with him. This is a particularly desirable outcome for families experiencing economic hardship. Particularly associated with child marriages is school dropout. According to the interviews with child spouses, as well as NGO activists, the decision to drop out of school at an early stage of education is made by the parents, predominantly among the Roma population. This attitude towards girls’ education is rooted in the belief that a girl’s place is at home, to ensure that she receives a proper preparation for marriage and to preserve her virginity. The patriarchal values and attitudes of parents towards family honour, morality, and girls’ virginity perpetuate the discrimination of Roma girls within the Roma population.

“Child marriages are most frequently found among Roma. In general, child marriages are associated with low economic and social standing of the family.”

(Child rights protection NGO)

“In my opinion, child marriages are present in families with a lower cultural level, educational and social status; they are more present in poor families.”

(Representative of a government institution)

“Child marriages predominantly occur among the poorest families, because such families have many children, they live on the edge of poverty, they cannot support all their children in education, and regretfully there is still a persistent belief, in certain families, that education and support should be provided only to boys, but not to girls.”

(Roma NGO)

Roma in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

According to data from the 2002 Census, there are 53,879 Roma living in the country (2.7 per cent of the total population).²⁴ Almost half of the total Roma population in the country (23,475) reside in the capital, Skopje, while 13,342 reside in the Shuto Orizari settlement. According to the available statistical data, 95 per cent of Roma reside in urban settlements, usually in the more deprived areas (ghettos) or in suburban areas. In general, housing conditions among Roma are very poor and below the standards of adequate housing.²⁵ According to some informal estimates, 70 per cent of Roma have no title deeds to prove ownership of their property.

“A survey conducted by UNICEF and WHO in 2000, in the Municipality of Shuto Orizari in Skopje, on a sample of 3,100 Roma families, revealed that more than half of the families lived in a household with another family. Around 60 per cent of families had indoor plumbing as opposed to 40 per cent who used water pumps in the yards or in public places; 15 per cent used improvised toilets.”*

*Shuto Orizari is one of the ten municipalities of the City of Skopje. It is inhabited mostly by Roma.

Source: Lakinska-Popovska, D., (2000), ‘Study project: Vulnerability of the Roma Children in the Municipality Shuto Orizari’, Skopje. UNICEF and World Bank.

“It is a rarity in Shuto Orizari to meet a couple who have contracted a formal marriage. Formal marriages are present only among couples from older generations. The reasons given by younger couples for living in a common-law marriage include the fear of legal proceedings for divorce if they cannot live together, property rights, poverty, and unemployment. Many young couples also see their future abroad and believe if they are not formally married that they stand a better chance of contracting a formal marriage with someone abroad for the purpose of obtaining ‘papers’ for to live in a foreign country.” (Roma NGO)

As elsewhere, the basic problem with the official figures is that they do not coincide with the actual number of Roma living in the country. Roma NGOs estimate the number of Roma in the country at 135,490, or 6.7 per cent of the total population.²⁶ Other sources from the Roma community (Roma NGO Centar za edukacija ‘Darhija’ Zoon) estimate this number at 80,000 or 3.9 per cent of the total population.²⁷ The reason for such a huge discrepancy between the official figures and unofficial estimates is that many Roma are not registered anywhere in the system, and do not possess any personal identification documents, even though their families have lived in the country for generations. The mobility of the Roma population further aggravates the problem of determining the accurate number of Roma. Another important aspect is the number of Roma refugees from Kosovo who entered the country during the Kosovo crisis without any personal identification documents, and stayed.

The current practice among Roma is not to register marriages officially. It is a distinct feature of young Roma to live in common-law marriages, which are regarded as valid marriages in their community. The issues underlying this pattern are numerous, most pressing being the lack of personal identification documents, poverty, low level of education, unemployment, the fact one (usually the girl) or both members of the couple are too young to contract a marriage legally, and the costs associated with obtaining all the necessary documents for contracting a marriage.

Speaking of the roots of child marriages among Roma, I wouldn't say that it is due to tradition. Similar traditions exist among other ethnic groups in the country. [Child marriages are] largely related to the patriarchal values [and] family honour [that] depends on the virginity of the girl. These values are more emphasised among Roma. *(Roma NGO)*

There is a similar situation in regard to the registration of live births. Among some Roma, the lack of personal identification documents is passed on to the next generation. Predominantly, such patterns are prevalent among Roma with lower levels of education and skills, who are living in poverty and whose children gradually become, as a Roma NGO activist pointed out 'phantom children' deprived of access to healthcare, education, and social care. These children see child marriage as a way out of such a precarious situation.

Key points (general)

The definition of a child is different under different laws.

National legislation is not completely harmonised with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The relevant national legislation does not protect children adequately and does not address efficiently the problem of child marriages.

There is a lack of efficient prosecution of perpetrators in cases involving an adult living in a common-law marriage with a child under 16 years of age, and the relevant authorities fall short of identifying and providing protection and support to child victims.

Neither the state institutions, nor the general population, have recognised child marriage as a problem that requires a systematic approach.

Despite the existence of a legal obligation for parents to enrol children in primary and secondary education, children are still dropping out of school - even primary school. This problem is present mostly among girls. It is usually linked to the economic situation of the family and tends to be found in conjunction with child marriage of girls.

The high school curriculum does not include education on sexual and reproductive health. As a result, adolescents lack proper information on the subject.

Key points (Roma-specific)

Among the Roma population, many people still do not have personal identification documents. This in turn generates greater poverty and limits the prospects for a better life for the younger generations. Such a situation perpetuates the omission of new-born Roma children from birth registers.

The living and housing conditions of the Roma population are poor and do not meet the prescribed housing standards.

Roma children, mainly girls, still often drop out of school at an early stage of education, which could be perceived as an indicator of common-law and child marriages.

Quotes (general)

Gradation, such as juvenile, child, is used in different laws [. . .] I believe that we need one comprehensive term. (Representative of government institution)

National laws are not internally harmonised, and, [. . .] there are huge discrepancies between national laws and international documents. (Legal expert).

Such legal provisions are not sufficient for the protection of children, since one assessment by the psychiatrist and the expert opinion of the Social Welfare Centre is maybe sufficient for the court to reach a decision, but children who are getting married or having children need more continuous support, care, and supervision. They need guidance to understand the meaning of the marriage, to behave as parents. Additional support must be foreseen for child spouses. (Representative of government institution)

I was 14 when the matchmakers came to our house. It was all arranged by my grandmother, and when my mother asked me if I wanted to get married with that boy, I just remained silent. They didn't marry me forcibly; I just didn't know what to say. (Child spouse)

Unfortunately, if an NGO is to implement a particular child marriages project, than there will be activities for the duration of the project, and that is it. (Child protection NGO)

Child marriage usually means an absence of girls from the educational process [and an] ongoing reproduction of the traditional relations in the family. It is also, in part, [the result of] multiple discrimination [against] some ethnic communities, such as Roma. (Legal expert)

In my opinion, sexual and reproductive education should start earlier, in primary [school], and age-adjusted content on human reproduction should even be included in kindergartens. (Representative of government institution)

Quotes (Roma-specific)

[. . .] we have an adult mother who was a child at that time and her parents failed in securing personal identification documents [for her], so they [she and her spouse] are following the same pattern. They have no birth certificates and it is the same with their children. That is how we create 'phantom children', and this becomes a trans-generational pattern. (Roma NGO)

Housing conditions [among] Roma, especially those residing in ghettoised settlements, in the 21st century are a catastrophe. They live in improvised homes, with no water supply, no electricity. Mortality among Roma is still the highest in the country, and the diseases [they suffer from] are related to [poor] housing [and] nutrition. (Roma NGO)

Having dropped out of school or having completed primary education, Roma girls remain at home [where they] help their mothers with housework or babysit younger children. They become a risk group for child marriage or common-law marriage, since we are speaking about girls aged 13-17 years. Due to these reasons and social isolation imposed by the parents, girls, having no [other] option or a way out, accept to marry. (Roma NGO)

Data overview

| | |
|--|---|
| Size of population (31 December 2011): | 2,059,794 ²⁸ |
| Life expectancy at birth, female (2010): | 77.2 ²⁹ |
| Life expectancy at birth, male (2010): | 72.9 ³⁰ |
| Unemployment rate (2011): | 31.4% ³¹ |
| Population under age 15 as of 30 June 2011: | 17.3% ³² |
| Population below national income poverty line (2006): | 19.1% ³³ |
| Youth literacy ratio (female rate as a per cent of male rate, among ages 15-24) (2010 est.): | 99.7% ³⁴ |
| Health expenditure per capita per year (2010): | US \$317 ³⁵ |
| Main ethnic groups (2002): | Macedonians (64.2%), Albanians (25.2%), Turks (3.8%), Roma (2.7%) ³⁶ |
| Main languages: | Macedonian and Albanian ³⁷ |

Child marriage statistics

Fifteen cases of stillbirth were registered as born to girls aged under 19 years in 2011 (7.1 per cent of all stillbirths). If we compare the share of this age group in live births (5.9 per cent) with that of stillbirths (7.1 per cent) it is noticeable that this age group is represented in greater proportion in stillbirths than in live births. Such data is indicative of greater health risks for young mothers and their babies. The data on maternal mortality are not disaggregated by age. The age-specific fertility rate for girls aged 15-19 years is 18.1,³⁸ which is relatively high in comparison to the EU average (15.2 in 2008³⁹). On the other hand, in comparison with the national average over the last five years, there has been a noticeable and constant decrease from the fertility rate of 20.5 in 2007.

Table 1. Marriages by bride's age (2011) and groom's age (2011)⁴⁰

| Total number of marriages in 2010 | Groom's age (years) | | Bride's age (years) | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | Under 15 | 15-19 | Under 15 | 15-19 |
| 14,736 | 0 (0%) | 312 (2.1%) | 0 (0%) | 1,926 (13.1%) |

Table 2. Live births by mother's age (2011)⁴¹

| Total number of live births in 2011 | Mother's age (years) | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|------------|------------|----------------|
| | Under 15 | 15 | 16 | 17 | Total under 18 |
| 22,700 | 23 (0.1%) | 69 (0.3%) | 137 (0.6%) | 203 (0.9%) | 432 (1.9%) |

Table 3. Live births by mother's age and marital status (2011)⁴²

| Marital status | Mother's age (years) | | Total births to mothers under 19 | Total number of live births in 2011 |
|----------------|----------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Under 15 | 15-19 | | |
| Married | 0 | 730 | 730 | 20,119 |
| Unmarried | 23 | 580 | 603 | 2,651 |
| TOTAL | 23 | 1,310 | 1,333 (5.9%) | 22,700 |

Table 4. Stillbirths by mother's age and marital status (2010)⁴³

| Marital status | Total number of stillbirths | Mother's age (years) | | Total stillbirths to mothers under 19 |
|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| | | Under 15 | 15-19 | |
| Married | 164 | 0 (0%) | 8 (4.9%) | 8 (4.9%) |
| Unmarried | 47 | 1(2.1%) | 6 (12.8%) | 7 (14.9%) |
| TOTAL | 211 | 1 | 14 (6.6%) | 15 (7.1%) |

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 Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2006), paragraph 118, available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw25years/content/english/CONCLUDING_COMMENTS/The_former_Yugoslav_Republic_of_Macedonia/The_former_Yugoslav_Republic_of_Macedonia_CO-1-3.pdf (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 3 Following independence in 1991, the Republic of Macedonia ratified the most important international instruments regarding human rights and freedoms by way of succession (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 57/1993).
- 4 Article 118 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 52/91), available at: http://www.pravo.org.mk/documentlaws.php?id_doc_group=41, (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 5 Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No.98/2000, 17/2003, 65/2004, 113/2005, 98/2008, 107/2008, 46/2009 and 83/2009, available at: www.pravo.org.mk (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 6 Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, *op. cit.*
- 7 Family Law of the Republic of Macedonia (1992), 'Official Gazette of RM', No. 80/1992, 9/1996, 19/2000, 79/2001, 38/2004, 60/2005,33/2006,84/2008, 67/2010; 156/2010; 39/2012 и 44/2012, available at: www.pravo.org.mk (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 8 Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia, (1996), 'Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia' No.37/1996; 80/1999; 4/2002; 43/2003; 19/2004; 81/2005; 60/2006; 73/2006; 7/2008; 139/2008; 114/2009; 51/2011; 135/2011; and 185/2011, available at: www.pravo.org.mk (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 9 Law on Juvenile Justice (2007) 'Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia', No. 87/2007; 103/2008; 161/2008; and 145/2010, available at: www.pravo.org.mk (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 10 Article 6, Family Law.
- 11 Article 16, Family Law.
- 12 Article 197 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia.
- 13 Caceva, V., Mirceva, S. (2010) 'Research Report: Forlorn and Scared-A Situation Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse', UNICEF, Skopje, available at: http://www.unicef.org/tfyr Macedonia/media_16515.html (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 14 Law on Health Protection of the Republic of Macedonia (2012) 'Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia', No.43/2012, available at: www.pravo.org.mk (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 15 Law on Pregnancy Termination, 'Official Gazette of SFRY' no. 22/1972; 18/1976; and 'Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia' no. 15/1995, available at: www.pravo.org.mk (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 16 Improving Maternal and Infant Health: Safe Motherhood Strategy in The Republic of Macedonia 2010–2015, available at: <http://www.unicef.org/tfyr Macedonia/8597.html> (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 17 State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (2009), 'Natural population change: 2008', p.16, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPublikacija.aspx?id=10&rbr=171>, (accessed 12 August 2012). State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (2010), 'Natural population change: 2009', p.16, available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPublikacija.aspx?id=10&rbr=172>, (accessed 12 August 2012). State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (2012), 'Women and Men in Macedonia', p.17, available at: http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPublikacija_1_en.aspx?rbr=334, (accessed 30 June 2012).
- 18 State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (2011) News Release No: 2.1.11.14, 'Nativity in the Republic of Macedonia, by municipality, 2010', p.1, available at: http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie_en.aspx?id=8&rbr=434, (accessed 12 August 2012).
- 19 Ministry of Health, Republican Institute for Public Health (2008) 'Report of the behavioural study among the young population at greatest risk of HIV infection in the Republic of Macedonia in the year 2006', Skopje, RIPH; Tozija, F. (ed) (2008) 'Strategic assessment of the policy, quality of access to contraception and abortion in Republic of Macedonia', Ministry of Health, RIPH; Tozija, E., Kjosovska, E., Gjorgjev D. (2008) 'Health of the Population in the Republic of Macedonia', Skopje, RIPH.
- 20 National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Republic of Macedonia, 2010-2020, *op. cit.*, p.16.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p.16.
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Key messages

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Invest in adolescent girls!

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

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

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