Resolution on ending child marriage

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by its Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on ending child marriage.

It began by recalling that **one in every three girls in developing countries is married before turning 18** , and one in nine before 15. Girls are most at risk, representing 82 % of the children affected. Complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death in girls aged 15-19 in low- and middle-income countries, and Members pointed out that child brides are under intense social pressure to prove their fertility, which makes them more likely to experience early and frequent pregnancies. Furthermore, **60 % of child brides in developing countries have had no formal education,** which is a form of gender discrimination. Parliament pointed out child marriage denies children of school age the right to the education they need for their personal development, their preparation for adulthood and their ability to contribute to their community.

Accordingly Members **condemned child marriage** as a violation of the rights of the child and a form of violence against women and girls. They called on the EU and the Member States to;

- work together with UN agencies and stakeholders to bring attention to the issue of child marriage by focusing on **women's empowerment**, including through education, economic empowerment and enhanced participation in decision-making, as well as on the protection and promotion of the human rights of all women and girls;
- increase access to **health services**, including sexual and reproductive health and rights services, for women and child brides;
- apply **unified legal standards** with regard to the procedure for dealing with child marriages, also in view of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention;
- work with **law enforcement authorities and judicial systems in third countries**, and provide training and technical assistance to help with legislation prohibiting early and forced marriages, including a minimum age for marriage;

Parliament went on to emphasise that **specific procedures must be put in place in refugee and asylum seeker reception centres** to ensure the protection of children among refugees and asylum seekers.

Members strongly condemned the reinstatement and expansion of **the global gag rule**, which cuts funds to organisations, such as UNFPA, that provide girl victims of child marriage with family planning and sexual and reproductive health services to help reduce the risk of contracting HIV and complications in early pregnancies. They called on the EU and its Member States to **fill the financing gap left by the US** in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, using both national and EU development funding.

Lastly, Parliament highlighted the **big discrepancy between officially registered cases and cases of potential victims asking for assistance**, indicating that many cases of child marriage might be going unnoticed by authorities. It stressed the need for disaggregated data as well as proper and harmonised monitoring of cases of child marriage in EU Member States, with special raining for social workers and teachers on how to identify victims.