

Position Paper

Committee : UNICEF

Agenda Item: Abolishing Child Marriages

Country: Republic of Nigeria

As the Republic of Nigeria we are in recognize of child marriages being a violation to human rights. We acknowladge this issue which we believe is rooted in cultural, religious and economic reasons especially in the northern parts. We look forward to discussing these topics in the upcoming conferance.

According to UNICEF, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with over 43% of girls married before the age of 18. This limits their access to education, increases maternal mortality rates, and exposes them to abuse and poverty. Although we are a signatuarie to several international conventions and treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) we remain inconsistent due to diverse regional laws. We have taken steps to adress child marriage like The Child Rights Act 2003 which sets the minimum legal age for marriage to 18, is a milestone to us. However, only 25 of the 36 Nigerian states have domesticated this law due to Nigeria’s federal system. Levels of education, rates of marriage, and sexual activity all vary by region. In the southern regions of Nigeria, girls tend to be educated and marry quite late, with median age at marriage being over age 24 in two of the southern regions. The median age at first sex for girls in southern regions is in the late teens. In contrast, Northern girls have low levels of education, marry very early, and, consequently, experience sexual initiation at earlier ages. Fifty-four percent of North West girls aged 15-24 were married by age 15, and 81 percent were married by age 18. Early marriage is particularly prevalent in rural areas; two thirds of rural North West girls married by age 15. The majority of girls in the North experience first sex in the context of marriage, with only 5 percent of girls in North West and 11 percent of girls in North East reporting sex before marriage. Families arrange the majority of early marriages, with some girls resisting the arrangement and others acquiescing, often considering it the will of Allah. Girls’ spouses are much older than them, with an average age difference of 12 years between husband and wife. In polygamous unions (about one third of adolescent marriages), this age difference increases to an average of 18 years. These age differences may contribute to married girls’ low levels of decision making power within the household. Men made most of the decisions in the household, not only on major issues such as large purchases, but also on more mundane matters such as purchases for daily needs and meals. Girls in northern regions have considerable age differences with their spouses, with a mean age difference in the two regions of 12 years. Contrary to patterns in other regions, girls who marry at young ages do not have larger age differences with their husbands compared to those who marry later. The mean age difference between a girl and her spouse is 12.2 years for girls who married before age 15 and 12.3 years for girls who married at age 18 or older. Similarly, level of education or urban-rural residence was not associated with spousal age difference. Thirty-two percent of girls with no education have a spouse who was 11 to 20 years older than themselves compared to 35 percent of girls with secondary education.

Nigeria believes that education, especially for girls, is a powerful tool in ending child marriages. Child marriage can be stopped in the northern Nigeria through enlightenment, embarking on media campaign. Another way is through education, encouraging girl child education and finally , through legislation and appropriate sanctions for violators such as 12 months imprisonment for parents and the grooms concerned.  People need to be educated and reeducated continually until a change happens. Girls should be educated and given the chance to choose the trajectory they want their life to take. The physical, emotional, and psychological damage that comes with child marriage is a major human rights issue that needs addressing. We suggest a UNICEF-backed program that offers **conditional scholarships, vocational training, and family incentives** to **delay marriage** and **support education** for girls aged 8–18 in high-risk regions. Every girl who is in risk of being a child bride will recieve a **yearly fellowship** covering school fees, uniforms, books, and menstrual health supplies. A **yearly fellowship** is a form of **support that’s renewed every school year**, as long as the girl remains in school. It gives girls a reason to stay in school and families a reason to delay marriage not out of punishment, but through opportunity.

In conclusion we stand ready to collabarate with countries to protect the rights of every child and ensure a future where no child is forced into marriage.

Referances:

[National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria](https://www.nigeriarights.gov.ng/)

<https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-03-04/>

[Vanguard Nigeria](https://www.vanguardngr.com/), [Daily Trust](https://www.dailytrust.com/)

<https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/child-marriage>

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/PopulationCouncil24.pdf>

<https://www.worldpulse.org/story/the-child-marriage-controversy-in-nigeria-38896?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22223920980&gbraid=0AAAAADykbRJsLNYXrs5_Et7DpqE3cMv7s&gclid=Cj0KCQjw0qTCBhCmARIsAAj8C4Z9y-MDoShS2YC3BaREEp8AVgVtq5Daqpaly21KGKYOQFfNEmP5_wsaAqJAEALw_wcB>

<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/10990/>

<https://www.actionhealthinc.org/publications/docs/hidden.pdf>