

2.12.3. Forced and child marriage

Common analysis

Last updated: September 2020

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Situation of women](#), 1.1.3]

Forced and child marriages are harmful traditional practices intertwined in culture and tradition and associated with the belief that women need protection by men. For women and girls, it is not generally possible to make an autonomous decision whom and when to marry, and 'honour' violence can be a consequence of such decisions (See [2.12.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour](#)).

Early marriages were reportedly fairly common before the outbreak of the civil war. However, a huge increase in the share of marriages among female minors have been reported since then (from 7 % to around 30 % between 2011 and 2015, not including a supposedly high number of unreported cases), as one of the negative coping mechanisms to alleviate the financial burden for families caused by the conflict. It was also stated that child marriage might be a response to the fact that women, and girls in particular, face sexual harassment and threats of abduction and sexual violence, and child marriage is considered to provide protection for them.

Girls are reportedly being married younger. They have been married to combatants, foreign fighters and family members, with some married to adolescent boys and others to adult men much older than their brides. Abduction of women and girls as well as rape (where victims are forced to marry perpetrators) are also associated to forced marriage. Widows and divorced women are considered to be at particular risk of gender-based violence including the risk of forced marriage. Many of these women were reportedly re-married, for example to family members, such as the brother of a deceased husband, in order to increase their protection and to safeguard their honour.

Many early and/or forced marriages were reported to end in divorce, with the young women (possibly with children) stigmatised, because divorce is not socially accepted regardless of the underlying reason for it. This can contribute to further risk of gender-based violence, with the women possibly becoming isolated and/or ostracised by their family and community and/or sexually exploited to meet daily needs.

In February 2019, the Syrian People's Assembly approved amendments to tens of articles of the Personal Status Law. The amendments raised the age of marriage from 17 to 18 for both men and women, entitled women to marry without their guardian's approval if they are 18 years old, and provided women with the right to invalidate a marriage if imposed by her guardian without her overt consent. However, different religious minorities such as Druze and various Christian sects follow their

own laws of personal status, which, for example, permit child marriage. State protection is also not considered to be available due to the general weak rule of law in Syria [[Situation of women, 1.2.3](#)].

Risk analysis

Forced and child marriage amount to persecution. They could, furthermore, be linked to other forms of violence, such as abductions, domestic violence, sexual abuse/exploitation. Refusing to enter into a forced or child marriage can lead to honour-based violence.

Not all women and girls would face the level of risk required to establish well-founded fear of persecution in relation to forced or child marriage. The individual assessment of whether or not there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: young age, personal status, area of origin and residence, ethnicity, religion, perception of traditional gender roles in the family, poor socio-economic situation of the family, living in IDP situation, etc.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group. For example, refusal to enter into forced or child marriage may result in honour-based violence for reasons of membership of a particular social group in relation to a common background which cannot be changed (refusal to marry) and/or a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it (the right to choose whom to marry) and the distinct identity of such women and girls in Syria (as they would be considered as violating the honour of the family).

See other topics concerning women:

[2.12.1. Violence against women and girls: overview](#)

[2.12.2. Women perceived to be associated with anti-government armed groups](#)

[2.12.3. Forced and child marriage](#)

[2.12.4. Women perceived to have violated family honour](#)

[2.12.5. Single women and female-headed households](#)
