



CHILD MARRIAGE

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES,
AND PERCEPTIONS AMONG
AFFECTED COMMUNITIES
IN ALBANIA



Child marriage

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions among affected communities in Albania

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Key concepts

Adolescent

While there is no internationally agreed definition of adolescence, the UN defines an adolescent as a person aged 10-19. The complexities of defining adolescence relate to: the different rates at which young people reach physical and emotional maturity; wide variation in national laws setting minimum ages for 'adult' activities, such as voting, consuming alcohol, or getting married, and; the fact that many adolescents are engaged in 'adult' activities, such as working or caring for others, regardless of whether they have reached the legal threshold for adulthood.¹

Age of consent

The age of consent is the age at which a young person is legally considered capable of consenting to sexual relations. This is based on the assumption that children need special protection from sexual abuse, and that there is a certain age under which children are incapable of giving their consent to sexual activity². In many countries, the age of consent and the minimum legal marriage age are different.

Attitude

The term 'attitudes' is used by UNICEF to encompass the broad domain of social norms, ethics, morals, values, rights, culture, tradition, spirituality and religion, and feelings about self and others.³

Child marriage

Child marriage is any formal or customary marriage or informal union (registered or unregistered) where one or both spouses or partners are under the age of 18.⁴

Child protection

Child protection refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children, including from harmful practices such as child marriage.⁵

Domestic violence

Domestic violence refers to violence by a spouse or intimate partner and by other family members, wherever this violence takes place and in whatever form.⁶

Early union

Early union refers to unregistered marriages, cohabitation, and 'de facto', informal, or 'social' unions which may be recognised by families and communities, but have no legal standing, where one or both partners is under the age of 18. Early unions are included in the definition of child marriage.⁷

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Gender

Gender is a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). This concept is also useful in analysing how commonly shared practices and norms legitimise discrepancies between sexes.⁸

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence refers to any act of violence or abuse that targets an individual or a group on the basis of their gender. Gender-based violence can affect women and men, but is most often used to refer to violence affecting women and girls, as unequal gender relations and women's and girls' lower status in society puts them at far greater risk of violence than men and boys. The UN defines violence against women as 'gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'.⁹

Option

An option is 'The set of available courses of action ... somebody can actually chose from' in order to satisfy their preferences.¹⁰ It is important to consider people's beliefs about the options available to them. In some cases, people's beliefs about certain options will be so strong that they effectively remove that particular course of action as an option.

Preference

For this study, people's preferences (in this case, for or against child marriage) are categorised as 'conditional', i.e. based on social expectations (what they believe other people do and think, rather than what they themselves believe) and 'unconditional'. Unconditional preferences may be based on what someone thinks is best for them or for their child, or might be based on a 'moral rule' (i.e., that this course of action is the morally right thing to do).¹¹

School dropout

Drop out is withdrawal from an education or training programme before its completion.¹² While compulsory education in Albania is up to the end of grade 9 (age 15), here, we refer to 'school dropout' as meaning a child/adolescent withdrawing from school before reaching the age of 18.

Social norm

In this report, a social norm is 'a collective practice sustained by empirical and normative expectations and by preferences conditional on both these expectations'¹³. The concept of the 'social norm' centres on the idea that people's knowledge, attitudes, and preferences toward a collective practice (such as child marriage) are strongly influenced by what other people around them are doing, and by what they think other people think should be done.

Violence against children

All forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.¹⁴ The 2002 World Report on Violence and Health further expands on the definition of violence, noting that violence is 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation' Specific types of violence against children include neglect, abuse and harsh discipline. Neglect is a form of child abuse that involves deficient attention to a child's basic needs. Abuse is often used to refer to physical and/or sexual maltreatment of a child. Harsh discipline often refers to violent or abusive parenting practices justified as disciplinary measures or tactics. Harsh discipline is sometimes referred to as corporeal punishment.¹⁵

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Abbreviations

Observatory	Observatory for Children and Youth Rights
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
ECARO	Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
WHO	World Health Organization
CESS	Centre for Economic and Social Studies
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
ICHRP	International Council on Human Rights Policy
Beijing PfA	Beijing Platform for Action
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MDG_s	Millennium Development Goals
SDG_s	Sustainable Development Goals
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
II	Individual Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview

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1. Executive Summary

Child marriage – the formal marriage or informal union of any person under the age of 18 – is a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. Child marriage places child spouses – and in particular, married girls – at risk of domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape, and denial of access to education. The practice has lifelong impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing that stretch into adulthood, contributes towards higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, and serves to perpetuate gender inequality, poverty, and social exclusion. Up to 12 million girls marry or enter union before the age of 18 each year; figures for boys are much lower. Child marriage is an extremely complex issue, influenced by, and influencing, the particular social, economic, and cultural conditions in a given country. That said, a set of key drivers of child marriage have been identified at the global level, including: gender inequality and restrictive gender norms; poverty and social exclusion; inconsistent or poorly implemented legislation; conflict and other ‘shocks’; and adolescents choosing to marry. In terms of impacts, the following are identified as common outcomes of child marriage: school dropout; early motherhood; vulnerability to complications of pregnancy and delivery, higher risks of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and other issues, related to sexual and reproductive health; greater vulnerability to gender-based violence than other groups of girls and women; entrenchment of poverty and gender inequality; and poor emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Child marriage in Albania

Albania has a strong legislative framework to tackle child marriage, however, earlier research by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights has found that laws are not effectively or consistently implemented. Official data from 2017 indicates that 16.9% of marriages that year involved a female spouse aged under 19, and 0.5% involved a male spouse under 19, but this does not include unregistered marriages, meaning that the real prevalence rate is unknown. Rates of child marriage are also known to be much higher in Roma communities, but accurate statistical data is unavailable.

Qualitative research to date by the Observatory and other agencies has found that, echoing findings at the global level, child marriage in Albania seems to be linked to restrictive gender norms and to poverty and social exclusion. In terms of impacts, qualitative research and data from the most recent Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (from 2008-9) indicates that school dropout, early motherhood, and lack of autonomy and decision-making power in the household are all features of child marriage in Albania. However, studies to date have been small-scale, case-study based, and limited to a particular population (Roma, and certain locations).

Study rationale and objectives

This qualitative study was commissioned to collect data on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, social expectations, incentives, sanctions and norms relating to child marriage in Albania. Importantly, the study covers both Roma and non-Roma from regions across the country.

The qualitative findings will complement the quantitative data on child marriage due to come out of the forthcoming DHS (being conducted during 2018), and will better guide mainstreaming of child marriage issues into the country strategies and programmes of government and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as UN agencies.

Methodology

This study uses a conceptual framework to understand 'social norms' as developed by Bicchieri et al. to study child marriage as a collective practice. Within this framework, Bicchieri et al. propose that people's preferences for or against child marriage are either conditional – based on what other people think and / or do – or unconditional – based on 'factual realities' or personal, moral beliefs.

The study used qualitative methods, selected as the best way to capture data on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, social expectations, incentives, sanctions and norms relating to child marriage. Focus group discussions were conducted in Durrës, Korça, Lezha and Tirana with younger (18-24) and older (25-50) people from four communities: Roma and Egyptians living in de-facto segregated communities; Roma and Egyptians living in integrated communities; non-Roma living in rural areas; and non-Roma living in urban areas.

Researchers also conducted interviews with young people who were married before the age of 18, or older people who had married their own children before the age of 18, and with key informants. All of the communities selected had high rates of poverty, given the link between poverty and child marriage.

Findings

The findings are not representative, but rather provide a 'snapshot' of what people in the communities covered think and believe about what drives child marriage, and its impacts on children.

Knowledge

Participants from all population groups were knowledgeable about the legislation relating to child marriage, prevalence in their communities, and impacts. In particular, participants spoke extensively of the negative impacts of child marriage on gender equality, education, health and wellbeing, and poverty. This included in communities where child marriage was practised, judging by the content of the discussion.

Preferences for and against child marriage

All four groups spoke of conditional and unconditional **preferences for child marriage**, however these were **strongest among Roma participants**. There were few significant gender differences, or differences between the different age groups. Participants talked of **fear of social sanction** (e.g. rumours about a girl's 'honour') being an important factor in pushing girls towards early marriages.

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While people from all four population groups mentioned this, this fear of social sanction was strongest among Roma participants. Participants – from all four groups – also spoke of **poverty** as a ‘factual reality’ pushing girls (and boys) into marriage, whether it was the parents or the adolescents themselves who took the decision to marry. Roma participants also spoke extensively about **both personal beliefs in the importance of ‘honour’,** and of child marriage being seen as an **important custom or tradition.**

Preferences against child marriage for Roma and non-Roma participants were unconditional, i.e. based on ‘factual’ realities – that adolescents **were not ready for marriage,** and / or that child marriage **negatively affected education and employment.** Non-Roma participants also expressed individual beliefs about **the importance of ‘self-realisation’** and how child marriage was a barrier to this.

Options

Research participants discussed what options were available to young people in relation to marriage, and the findings show that these are **heavily restricted,** particularly for girls and young women. This is the result of a **lack of viable alternatives to marriage** (e.g. few employment opportunities), but also to the overriding belief that **marriage is the only acceptable option for women,** in some cases to the exclusion of all other activities, including completing schooling. There were differences regarding the point at which marriage becomes the best or ‘the only option’ for a girl or woman. For Roma participants from segregated communities, marriage becomes the best or ‘the only option’ for girls by mid-adolescence. By contrast, some non-Roma participants from urban communities spoke of university and careers as being acceptable options for girls and young women, prior to marriage.

Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal that in Albania, people’s preferences for child marriage – particularly among Roma – are complex and deeply rooted in a mesh of social expectations, deeply held personal beliefs, and the realities of living in poverty. Any policy and programmatic responses to child marriage need to take the complexities of this reality into account. Interventions aimed at encouraging changes in attitudes and behaviours will have little impact unless poverty and social exclusion are also addressed, and unless options beyond marriage are opened up for girls and young women. These changes will need to happen in the realm of gendered social norms and what are considered as acceptable life courses for women, as well as in terms of improving the accessibility of education at secondary level and beyond, and improving economic conditions and employment opportunities.

Recommendations

The overall recommendation stemming from this study is that the government should address child marriage through policy measures at the central and local level, determining the interventions, related budgets as well as roles and responsibilities of various public entities. These policy measures need to approach the issue from these directions:

Sensitising and educating

Work on changing attitudes and norms around child marriage requires sustained and consistent work at the community level, involving a range of actors including teachers, health employees, social workers, heads of communities, and others. All need to be sensitised and trained in their roles and responsibilities. Work to empower girls to challenge gender inequality and to value alternative life options is vital, as is work with boys to encourage them to speak out against child marriage. Schools have an active role to play in raising awareness among parents and students about child marriage, and in helping to shift attitudes.

Creating alternatives for children other than marriage

For there to be lasting change, parents and adolescents need to value alternatives to marriage, especially for girls. Providing greater opportunities for education beyond the compulsory level, and for employment and housing are important in this regard, as well as providing practical assistance to enable girls to remain in school or to access non-formal education. Improving access to information on family planning is also vital.

Prevention and support for children affected by child marriage

For there to be lasting change, parents and adolescents need to value alternatives to marriage, especially for girls. Providing greater opportunities for education beyond the compulsory level, and for employment and housing are important in this regard, as well as providing practical assistance to enable girls to remain in school or to access non-formal education. Improving access to information on family planning is also vital.

2. Understanding child marriage

UNFPA, UNICEF, and other UN agencies define child marriage as any marriage or union (registered or unregistered) between two people, where one or both partners is under the age of 18.¹⁶ This includes in countries where the legal age of marriage is set below 18.

Child marriages represent a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. This is because children – defined as anyone under the age of 18 under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – are considered not sufficiently mature to give their ‘full and free’ consent to marriage, as recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁷,¹⁸. While boys are also married as children, at the global level, child marriage overwhelmingly affects girls, quantitatively but also qualitatively. For girls, marriage typically marks the end of childhood; they are usually prohibited from continuing with their education, are expected to assume a full domestic workload, often face pressure to become pregnant as quickly as possible, may experience complications in pregnancy and during delivery, are at risk of domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape, and may be isolated from their friends and birth family. The practice has lifelong impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing that stretch into adulthood, contributes towards higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, and serves to perpetuate gender inequality, poverty, and social exclusion.¹⁹

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A global and regional phenomenon

Child marriage is a global phenomenon. Prevalence rates are highest in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, but the practice affects children in every region, including Europe. Globally, as of 2014, UNICEF estimated that one in five girls aged 15-19 were currently married or are living in union with a male partner²⁰. While there has been significant progress in reducing prevalence of child marriage across the world over the last ten years, UNICEF estimates that a total of 12 million girls marry before the age of 18 each year. If this continues, more than 150 million additional girls will be married before their 18th birthday by 2030.²¹

For the region 'Eastern Europe and Central Asia', which includes Albania, UNFPA gives a figure of 11% of women aged 20-24 married or in union before the age of 18 (2001-2011).²² Research by UNFPA on 12 countries in the Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, as well as Turkey²³, and Ukraine, found considerable variation in prevalence rates across the region, from 23% in Turkey to 0.9% in Kazakhstan²⁴.

Prevalence rates do not, however, capture the whole picture. The bulk of child marriages are in fact early unions, and are not officially registered, meaning that they often do not show up in official national statistics on marriage²⁵. Data collected in the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)²⁶ and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) does record unregistered unions, but still may not capture the true extent of the practice, as there may be inconsistencies that make cross comparison difficult, including different understanding of what actually constitutes marriage and / or union. Clark et al. note that '... whether an adolescent reports herself as being married depends on her interpretation of marriage, which in many cultures is a complex, sometimes fluid arrangement open to considerable ambiguity and variation'²⁷.

Child marriage is an extremely complex issue. It is a practice that is not uniform, and which is influenced by, and influences, the particular social, economic, and cultural conditions in a given country. Child marriage is also strongly influenced by cultural, social, and religious attitudes to sexuality, relations between parents and children, gender roles, and what is considered to be the appropriate age to have children. The decision to marry before the age of 18, whether made by parents or the adolescent herself or himself, will not just be down to one reason: it will be made under the influence of different, intersecting factors shaping both the beliefs around what age is considered appropriate for marriage, and practical economic and social realities.²⁸

In any analysis, it can also be difficult to separate the factors that drive the practice from those are being perpetuated by it. For instance, in Europe, poverty and social exclusion are key risk factors for child marriage, and at the same time, child marriage serves to perpetuate poverty and social exclusion.²⁹

With this in mind, the main factors driving child marriage and the impacts of the practice, as identified at the global, regional, and national level, are the following:

- Gender inequality, including lack of value placed on girls' education, desire to control women's and girls' sexuality (often due to concerns around 'honour'), and marriage being seen as the 'only option' for women and girls;³⁰
- Poverty and social exclusion, with families marrying off a daughter to ease pressure on resources in the household, and adolescents agreeing or choosing to marry to escape poverty and social exclusion;³¹
- Inconsistent or poorly implemented legislation, for instance laws that allow marriage at a younger age with court or parental permission;³²
- Conflict and 'shocks' (such as natural disasters), with parents marrying daughters for their 'protection', particularly from sexual violence,³³ and
- Adolescents choosing to marry.

Marrying in adolescence can have a profound, negative impact on a young person's health, safety, and future prospects. These include:

- Early motherhood, with married adolescents often having little or no control over whether and when to get pregnant;³⁴
- Maternal and infant health complications as adolescents' bodies are not physically mature enough for pregnancy and birth;³⁵
- Entrenched poverty and social exclusion;³⁶
- School dropout;³⁷
- Perpetuation of gender inequality;³⁸
- Gender-based violence, with married girls at much greater risk of domestic violence from husbands and in-laws than unmarried girls and older married women;³⁹ and
- Poor emotional and psychological wellbeing.^{40,41}

Child marriage in Albania

Child marriage remains an under-researched phenomenon in Albania. Statistical data from the national statistics agency (INSTAT) and from the most recent DHS (2008-9) and the small number of qualitative studies that have been carried out, including by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, indicate that:

- a) child marriage is a significant but under-explored issue, affecting predominantly girls from different social groups;
- b) it is driven primarily by gender inequality as well as by poverty and social exclusion; and
- c) it has a range of harmful effects.

Albania has a strong legislative framework to protect adolescents from child marriage; however, in practice, the laws in place are not effectively and consistently implemented.

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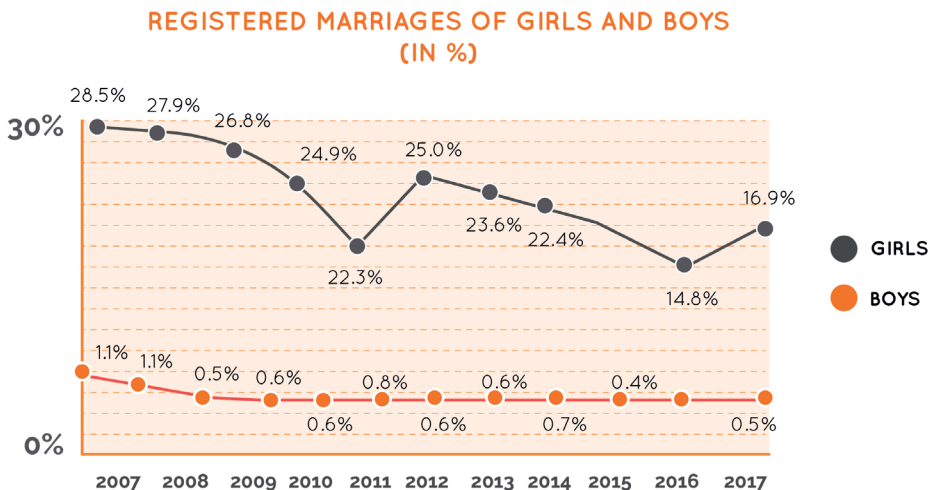
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The minimum age for marriage under the current Family Code (2003) is 18 years of age for both men and women (Article 7). The Family Code states that a '[m]arriage is concluded in front of the civil registration office clerk, upon the free consent of the future spouses' (Article 8). Marriage requires the presence of both spouses and cannot be concluded by third parties, such as the parents of the future spouses.

The court in the location where the marriage is to be concluded may, for sufficient reasons, allow marriage prior to the legal minimum age. This is decided on a case-by-case basis. Research undertaken by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights found that Courts allowed marriage for girls before the age of 18 on the following grounds: pregnancy; childbirth; and cohabitation. The findings of the Observatory's research indicate that often, courts are not making these decisions in the best interests of the children concerned or on the basis of a thorough examination of the case.⁴²

The Albanian Criminal Code stipulates that the age of consent for sexual relations is 14. Any sexual activity with a child under the age of 14 is classed as statutory rape⁴³. There is also legislation on forced marriage that is covered by the Criminal Code (article 130). There have been no studies in Albania on forced marriages and there have been no attempts to correlate child marriage with forced marriage.⁴⁴

According to INSTAT, in 2017 16.9% of marriages that were registered involved a female spouse under the age of 19, and 0.5% involved a male spouse under the age of 19. Analysis of INSTAT data indicates that there is a noticeable trend for the marrying age to rise in Albania⁴⁵.



Source: INSTAT Figures, Marriages by sex and age group, 2007-2017, Author's calculations

Registered marriages including girls under 18 are recorded to have increased from 10 in 2016 to 34 cases in 2017, while the number of boys married under 18 remains 0⁴⁶. However, this official data does not provide an accurate picture of child marriage prevalence in Albania, as it only records marriages that are registered with the state. It does not record couples who are living in union.

The most recent comprehensive data to include unregistered unions comes from the DHS, completed in 2008-2009. This found that:

- 9.6% of women and 0.8% of men aged 20-24 had been married before their 18th birthday;
- 7.4% of girls aged 15-19 and 1.0% of boys aged 15-19 were at the time of the survey married or living in union⁴⁷.

The data from the DHS and INSTAT also does not include information on prevalence of child marriage among the Roma and Egyptian minorities (hereafter referred to collectively as Roma), where prevalence rates are believed to be higher.

The most recent official figures for the number of Roma in the Albanian population are very old, as they come from the 2001 census. The Council of Europe estimates that the Roma population may be between 80,000 and 150,000, out of a total population of 3.2million.⁴⁸ Egyptians are a separate ethnic group, who state that they are descendants of people from Egypt who settled in Albania in the past. They are not recognised as a distinct ethnic group by the Albanian government, which means that they are not protected from discrimination under the Constitution, unlike other minority groups, including Roma. There are no reliable estimates of the number of Egyptians in Albania.⁴⁹ Rates of poverty and unemployment are much higher among Roma and Egyptians than among other groups in Albania, and they often have very poor living conditions. Both groups also experience significant discrimination from the wider society.⁵⁰

A research report by the World Bank published in 2005 reported that in 2002-3, the average age of marriage for Roma women was 15.5, lower than any other ethnic group in Albania; the average age for marriage of women in the general population was 23.3.⁵¹ A survey conducted among Roma (sample size: 661) in 2011 found that 31% of Roma girls aged 13-17 were married.⁵² Roma men also appear to marry young, but at a later age than Roma girls. The World Bank study cited above indicates that the average marriage age for Roma men was (in 2002-3) 18.2, compared to 28.3 for men in the general population.⁵³ These studies, however, are not statistically representative, and the data is already out of date. The Open Society Foundation in Albania undertook a Roma Census in 2014 about the Roma population and housing but this provided no indicative data on early or child marriage.

The Observatory for Children and Youth Rights has produced three publications on child marriage starting with the phenomenon among the Roma population. This study found that child marriage was linked to lack of value placed on girls' education and the importance attached to protecting a girl's 'honour', but that poverty was also an important factor.⁵⁴ The Observatory's research continued with case studies of child marriage in non-Roma communities in Korça and Vlora. These studies assessed the status of women who have experienced child or early marriage and its consequences on socio-economic life, identifying a link between lack of education and child marriage.⁵⁵ The third publication considered the legal aspects, and analysed decisions on applications for child marriage made in courts in a five-year period, together with the social aspects of child marriage.⁵⁶

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UNFPA undertook a small-scale, qualitative research project on child marriage in Albania, supplemented by a desk review, and produced a 'country factsheet' (2012).⁵⁷ This research found that rates of child marriage were high in remote, mountainous communities, as well as in the Roma minority, and that the practice was driven by traditional gender roles, poverty, and social exclusion.

While limited, the findings from these studies provide valuable insight into the phenomenon of child marriage in Albania. The findings of the current study will add to this growing body of research, broadening our knowledge of what drives parents and adolescents to seek out, or agree to, marriage before the age of 18, in Roma communities and other communities affected by poverty.⁵⁸

3. Study scope and objectives

The aim of this qualitative study was to collect information on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions and explore traditional and social norms relating to child marriage among Roma and non-Roma in different communities in Albania.

This study is a timely and necessary intervention, providing analysis that explores in-depth the phenomenon of child marriage in Albania. A Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) is currently being conducted and this qualitative study will support and enrich the quantitative DHS data. Together, the two studies will provide an improved evidence base on the phenomenon of child marriage in Albania. The qualitative study provides valuable insight into what people think and believe about child marriage and its impact on children and whether child marriage in Albania is sustained by conditional or unconditional preferences, and the extent to which the practise is supported by social expectations. Findings and recommendations will better guide mainstreaming of child marriage issues into the country strategies and programmes of government and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as UN agencies. The findings will help stakeholders to understand the issue of child marriage better and build common ground to take action.

This study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences about child marriage in the population groups under study.
2. To explore whether child marriage is driven/reinforced by social norms in the population groups under study, or whether it falls into another category of collective practice (rational response, custom, moral rule, descriptive norm).
3. To explore the gender differences within each population group under study in regard to knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences relating to child marriage, and the gender implications of child marriage (the specific impact on boys and girls).

At the request of UNICEF and UNFPA, this study is framed by Bicchieri et al's conceptual framework of 'social norms' and how these determine decision making in relation to collective practices, such as child marriage.⁵⁹ This conceptual framework has guided the development of research questions, data collection instruments, and the data analysis.

Bicchieri et al.'s concept of the 'social norm' centres on the idea that people's knowledge, attitudes, and preferences toward a collective practice are strongly influenced by what other people around them are doing, and by what they think other people think should be done. So, in relation to child marriage, people in a particular community might say that they would prefer their daughters (and their sons) to marry early because they believe both that: a) most other parents in that community marry their children off while they are still young (an empirical expectation); and b) most other parents and important community members believe that they should marry their girls (and boys) early (a normative expectation). In this way, parents' preferences for child marriage are conditional on social expectations, i.e. what they believe other people do and think, rather than what they themselves believe. In contexts where child marriage is sustained by social expectations in this way, Bicchieri et al. define the practice as a 'social norm', i.e. 'a collective practice sustained by empirical and normative expectations and by preferences conditional on both these expectations'⁶⁰. Real or imagined sanctions (for instance, shunning by other community members) for breaking social norms may act to reinforce them further.

Bicchieri et al. also note the existence of unconditional preferences relating to child marriage, which are not dependent on what other people in a community are doing or thinking. Unconditional preferences may be based on what parents think is best for them, e.g., having 'one less mouth to feed' at home by marrying off a child (a 'self-regarding preference') or what they think is best for their child, e.g. marrying off a daughter to protect her reputation (an 'other-regarding preference'). Unconditional preferences can also be based on 'moral rules', when parents support child marriage for their own children because they think it is the morally right thing to do (for instance, because they believe that girls / women should be virgins when they marry). These unconditional preferences are supported by what Bicchieri et al. term 'non-social beliefs', i.e. that are not dependent on social expectations (what everyone else is doing and / or assumed to be thinking). 'Non-social beliefs' can be normative ('I believe my daughter should marry young because this is the morally right thing to do') or factual ('Our financial situation will be better if we marry off our daughter').

Within Bicchieri et al.'s framework, options consist of 'The set of available courses of action ... somebody can actually choose from' in order to satisfy their preferences (whether these are conditional or unconditional) and that 'people's options are limited'. For instance, they may be limited by few opportunities to make money, so one of their options for meeting their preference for improving the financial wellbeing of the whole family would be to marry off a child. Their analysis of beliefs about options includes the idea that delaying marriage might simply not be an option, because parents believe that if their daughters are not married off young, they will have sexual relationships, something which parents consider to be unacceptable.

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Finally, Bicchieri et al. state that having assessed whether preferences for or against child marriage in a given population group are conditional or unconditional, it is then possible to determine whether child marriage constitutes a social norm in that population group. To recap, a social norm is defined by Bicchieri et al. as ‘a collective practice sustained by empirical and normative expectations and by preferences conditional on both these expectations.’⁶¹ Or, to put it another way, a social norm is: ‘A rule that people follow because they believe that others follow it (empirical expectation) and that others think it should be followed (normative expectations).’⁶²

If a collective practice, such as child marriage, cannot be characterised as a social norm, then Bicchieri et al. propose alternative categories of collective practice, summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Child marriage as collective practice

	Definition	Examples
Rational response	A rule that people follow because they reason it maximally satisfies their preferences	‘I will marry my daughter off young because she is a financial burden’
Custom	A rule that people follow more or less blindly but which would be abandoned if no longer in their own interest	‘I will marry my daughter off young because that is our tradition’
Moral rule	A rule that people follow because they believe that it should be followed (personal normative belief)	‘I will marry my daughter off young because I believe that girls should be pure and chaste’
Descriptive norm	A rule that people follow because they believe that others follow it (empirical expectation)	‘I will marry my daughter off young because I believe everyone else marries their daughters off young’
Social norm	A rule that people follow because they believe that others follow it (empirical expectation) and that others think it should be followed (normative expectation)	‘I will marry my daughter off young because everyone else thinks girls should be married young and I will be sanctioned if I do not’

Source: Adapted from Bicchieri, Cristina, Ting Jiang, and Jan Willem Lindemans, ‘A Social Norms Perspective on Child Marriage: The General Framework [DRAFT: Commissioned and to be published by UNICEF]’, (Philadelphia: Behavioural Ethics Lab, University of Pennsylvania, 2014) table 4 (p.14-15).

4. Methodology

Methodological approach

Qualitative approach

The findings of this study are based on qualitative research, namely: focus group discussions (FGD), individual interviews (II), and key informant interviews (KII).

Qualitative methods were the obvious choice for capturing data on social norms, knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions relating to child marriage. In addition, a quantitative study would have unnecessarily duplicated the findings from the forthcoming DHS. Focus group discussions and interviews allowed research participants to express themselves more freely and intuitively than a closed-question survey would have allowed, and enabled them to explore the issues and consider their own views through their conversation with others. This has provided rich data on attitudes at the community level. Previous studies by UNFPA and by the Observatory have focused on those directly affected by child marriage or working on the issue, providing important insights from these perspectives on the drivers and impacts of child marriage among specific groups (Roma⁶³ and girls living in two districts of the country⁶⁴), as well as highlighting the inadequacies of the legal system's response⁶⁵. With the current study, capturing the views of people who are not directly affected by child marriage provides insight into what aspects of wider community members' knowledge, attitudes, and preferences are helping to sustain the practice (or, conversely, helping to reduce support). In addition, the study captures the views of people living in different regions of the country, and illuminates significant differences in attitudes (both for and against child marriage) between Roma and non-Roma communities. The findings will be invaluable for policy makers and programme workers looking to design effective interventions to further reduce support for child marriage in Albania.

Data collection sites

Previous qualitative research by UNFPA and the Observatory indicated that child marriage in Albania is strongly associated with belonging to a Roma community, poverty, and living in a rural or marginalised urban community⁶⁶. Therefore, for the selection of data collection sites, the triangulation of three dimensions was considered: Poverty rates⁶⁷ (high), concentration of Roma population⁶⁸ (high), and geographical location (north/ south/central, border/non-border area).

Within each of the regions identified (Durrës, Korça, Lezha and Tirana), two-three municipalities were selected, based on the concentration of Roma (high), rates of poverty (high), and whether the municipality is located in a rural area or in an urban area populated by people who are socially marginalised.

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Target populations

Within each municipality, focus group and interview participants were selected from the following population groups, within which previous research has indicated that child marriage is practised:

1. Roma and Egyptians living in segregated communities
2. Roma and Egyptians living in non-segregated communities
3. Non-Roma living in rural areas
4. Non-Roma living in marginalised urban areas.

Extensive research at the global and local level indicates that social exclusion is a strong factor driving child marriage.⁶⁹ For this reason the category 'Roma'(which also includes Egyptians – see discussion in Section 2) was further broken down into Roma living in segregated and non-segregated communities, on the basis that those living in segregated communities are likely to experience a greater degree of social exclusion than those who live in other communities. It was anticipated that comparing these two groups would reveal differences in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences (along with information on their individual and community practices) relating to child marriage between the two population groups.

Data collection methods

Focus group discussions

Altogether, 34 FGDs made up of a minimum of five participants up to a maximum of 12 participants were carried out separately with Roma and non-Roma participants in each data-collection site:

- with young women aged 18-24;
- with young men aged 18-24;
- with female parents/ caregivers aged 25-50; and
- with male parents/caregivers aged 25-50.

This division between different groups based on age was made in order to test if there are differences in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences between the younger generation and an older generation (young adults and parents/caregivers).

Individual interviews

Thirteen (13) unstructured interviews were also conducted with young adults who were married before the age of 18 from across the different data-collection sites. In addition, two interviews were conducted with women who had married off their children before the age of 18, and with an unmarried Roma woman over the age of 18. These interviews provide 'life stories' that are included in this report, as well as further data on knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences. Data from these individual interviews is presented in text boxes throughout this study.

Key informant interviews

In addition, 15 semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants (KIs) which enable triangulation of the data collected during focus group discussions and individual interviews with young adults married before the age of 18, and include more in-depth discussion of particular issues. KIs were carried out with at least one important local actor in each municipality, identified with the assistance of local facilitators.

Focus group and interview guides

Bicchieri et al.'s framework was used to draw up prompt questions for FGDs to elicit the following information:

- Participants' knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences about child marriage and the impacts of child marriage.
- Participants' expectations and preferences in regard to child marriage, and whether these preferences are conditional or unconditional.
- The options participants perceive to be available to them, and their beliefs about those options, including social sanctions and/or reinforcements for following or not following the practice.

Interview protocols for use with key informants and prompt questions for interviews with young adults married before the age of 18 were also informed by this framework, particularly in regard to determining what social expectations are prevalent in the communities under study, and the options open to adolescents at risk of child marriage.⁷⁰

Study implementation

In each project area, a team of three people was engaged to coordinate and carry out the work in the field. An initial two-day training was held with the field workers covering:

- 'Getting to know each other'
- Introduction to the project
- Discussion of child marriage: what is it; why does it happen, what are the impacts
- Ethical considerations: consent, confidentiality, 'do no harm'
- Dealing with distressing issues that come up in your research
- Introduction to focus group interviewing
- Refining FGD questions.

Following this training, the data collection instruments were pre-tested in the field. Once the data collection instruments were revised and finalised, the fieldworkers participated in a second one-day training, introducing them to the final versions of the FGDs guidelines and questionnaires, and guiding them on how to manage group dynamics.

The identification of participants and invitations to them to participate in FGDs and interviews was facilitated by service providers and/or influential persons in each community, including heads of communities, health centre employees, school staff, municipality staff, social workers, psychologists, etc.⁷¹

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Data analysis

Bicchieri et al's framework was employed during the data analysis stage. Interview and focus group discussion transcripts were coded by hand using codes drawn from the framework, capturing, among other factors as they relate to child marriage:

- Empirical expectations
- Normative expectations
- Factual non-social beliefs
- Normative non-social beliefs
- Options
- Beliefs about options
- Conditional preferences
- Unconditional preferences
- Sanctions

Codes also covered:

- Knowledge about prevalence in the respondent's community
- Knowledge about the impacts of child marriage
- Knowledge of legislation relating to child marriage

The researcher developed a schema for recording the coded data that captured how these factors interrelate (for instance, whether a belief about available options is based on normative expectations, or factual non-social beliefs). First, the researcher used highlighter pens to mark-up hard copies of the transcripts, highlighting relevant excerpts and noting which of the categories above they fell into ('empirical expectation', 'beliefs about options', 'knowledge about the impacts of child marriage', etc.). The excerpts were then copied and pasted into an excel workbook, which had one sheet for each population group. Once the data was coded and written up in narrative analysis, the researcher drew conclusions to determine what category of collective practice (rational response, custom, moral rule, descriptive norm, social norm) child marriage falls into for the population groups under study.

Study limitations

This study does not deal in-depth with the impacts of child marriage, although participants did reflect on the practice's impacts as they discussed their own knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences. The research will supplement and complement the DHS quantitative data that is due to be released in 2018, but is in no way designed to be representative. Rather, it provides a 'snapshot' of knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of child marriage in the communities included in the research. The findings may be relevant for other communities, and are a starting point for further research and investigation of this topic, but it would be very ill-advised to generalise from them.

The conceptual framework used for this study, Bicchieri et al's social norms framework, was developed to analyse quantitative data on child marriage.

Here, it has been adapted for use for a qualitative study, and one which sought to capture both data on social norms (as narrowly defined by Bicchieri et al) and on wider knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions on child marriage.

This led to some challenges, for instance in coding the data from the focus group and interview transcripts, given that the questions posed were open ended and participants were invited to express themselves freely. For instance, a response to a question on decision-making relating to child marriage might include a statement indicating that both non-factual social beliefs (e.g. economic necessity) and normative social expectations (e.g. fear of what the extended family would think) had played a role in the decision. In addition, in relation to discussions about 'honour' and reputation, it proved difficult at times to determine whether a respondent's preference that girls should retain their 'honour' was based on a personal, individual belief (which would make it an unconditional preference based on a 'non-social belief' under Bicchieri et al's framework), or based on concern for what others would say about the girl if she did not retain her 'honour' (which would make it a conditional preference based on empirical or normative social expectations). The assumption inherent in the framework that in a given community, child marriage would fit neatly into one of the categories of social practice identified by Bicchieri et al was also problematic: at the analysis stage, it became evident that for all of the population groups included in the study, child marriage fell into more than one category of social practice.

This study did not include any participants younger than 18. Including children in the study would have enhanced the richness of the data. In particular, individual interviews with married adolescents / adolescents living in union would have provided a better insight into the realities of life for married adolescents in Albania today, as well as 'real time' information about their reasoning for wanting to marry or for agreeing to an early marriage.

A few difficulties were also recorded during the data collection process. By engaging service providers or persons who were well-known by the community as facilitators, in a few cases, the focus group participants came to the meeting with other expectations. One example was recorded in Durrës Municipality where the focus group facilitator was the Child Protection Unit employee within the Municipality. Even though the participants were informed about the purpose of the meeting, they still had expectations that they could receive help from the Municipality. To overcome this, the facilitator made clear the purpose of the meeting once more, the Observatory's engagement, and the engagement expected from the participants. In the end, none of the focus group participants withdrew their consent to participate.

In some groups, at the beginning of the discussion, participants hesitated to express themselves. This was noticed in a focus group with mothers and in a focus group with fathers in rural areas. The focus group moderator continued the conversation by asking general questions about the life style in the area, and by going step by step into the issue of child marriage.

Even though the questions were adapted to be easily understood, in a few cases participants from Roma communities seemed not to understand specific questions. In these cases, the moderator tried to repeat the question by formulating it differently until the participants were able to understand it.

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Interviewers in some cases also noted a tendency of young girls married before 18 years old, especially in the cases of non-Roma girls living in rural areas, to highlight the positive aspects of their marital life. In these cases, the interviewer had to try harder to win their trust and to convince them that the information is for study purpose only and that her identity wouldn't be linked to any of the information included in the study report.

Ethical considerations and procedures

Throughout the research, the Observatory has adhered to the UNICEF procedures for ethical standards in research, evaluation, data collection and analysis (2015). Ethical issues have been discussed extensively right from the onset of the study, taking into consideration that a study about child marriage could imply sensitivity for the participants and researchers. This section details the measures and actions taken to mitigate/address core ethical issues and ensure the highest ethical standards.

Harms and benefits

The scope and methodology of the study were built upon an analytical review of secondary data, which revealed that primary data collection remained essential to build on the limited body of knowledge around the subject. The decision on inclusion and exclusion criteria for the participants/ respondents of the study relied on: a) the right of vulnerable groups to participate and be represented (e.g. Roma and rural communities); b) assessment of any potential harm for the participants

To minimise negative effects on the participants, FGD guides were structured to elicit overall discussion on the subject matter, and did not encourage the sharing of sensitive personal information or personal experiences. The individual interviews followed the 'life narrative' pattern, aiming to encourage a story line rather than in-depth enquiry on the topic. Both guides, for FGDs and interviews, contained clear questions, adjusted to the characteristics of the participants.

As detailed above, at the start of this study, all members of the research team were trained in ethical research standards, covering Informed consent, the principle of 'do no harm', and confidentiality. FGD facilitators and interviewers received two rounds of training. The first covered an introduction to the project and to the issue of child marriage, and ethical research. The second covered working with the data collection instruments (following testing), reinforcement of the principles of ethical research, and best practices for recording the FGD and interview data.

All respondents were made fully aware of the risks and benefits prior to providing their consent to participate in the study. As part of the fieldwork manual, FGD facilitators and interviewers had contact details of a local psychologist to provide to any of the participants, in case this was needed. This did not take place at any time during the fieldwork.

Informed consent

Prior to the field research, the Observatory developed procedures for gaining informed consent from all participants.⁷²

Participants were asked to give their consent to participate orally and this was recorded by the FGD facilitators / interviewers. The informed consent process included outlining briefly the reasons for the study, the issues and questions to be covered during the FGD or interview, time duration, and the voluntary participation and confidentiality of information. The consent form was compiled using accessible language. The questionnaire included a field to be filled out to provide a record of whether informed consent was obtained or not.

None of the participants refused to give their consent. In a few cases, focus group participants left sessions early, due to having other commitments.

Privacy and confidentiality

The Observatory has worked to ensure respondents' privacy and confidentiality. Privacy is particularly important in regard to the data collected during interviews with married young adults, and key informant interviews. The Observatory ensured that responses were gathered in a private location and a safe space where respondents could not be overheard or seen by other members of their communities, as well as at an appropriate time to minimise disruption to their lives. Focus group participants were encouraged to respect the confidentiality of others participating in the discussion and to not disclose anything about the discussion.

No information was recorded that could allow the respondent to be identified. Field data has been recorded, stored, analysed and written up based on the general characteristics, with no possibility that these could lead to the identification of any individual respondents. All data and field notes, including recordings, are stored securely by the Observatory.

Payment and compensation

No payment was promised or given to respondents, in exchange for their time and information. Refreshments were provided during the FGD and interviews as a token of gratitude for the time dedicated to the study participation.

Conflict of interest

The Observatory confirms that they are not aware of any conflicts of interest for this work. The facilitators and interviews disclosed no actual and potential conflict of interest in undertaking the study.

In the next three sections of this report, the analysis of the findings of this study is structured into three sections, looking at Knowledge about child marriage, Attitudes towards child marriage (principally, preferences and whether these are conditional or unconditional), and Perceptions (options, and beliefs about options).

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5. Knowledge about child marriage

Focus group participants from the four population groups – Roma living in segregated communities, Roma living in integrated communities, non-Roma living in rural areas, non-Roma living in urban areas – were asked questions to find out how much they knew about three aspects of child marriage:

- The legal age of marriage
- Prevalence of child marriage in their communities
- Impacts

Across the four population groups, focus group participants displayed extensive knowledge in all three areas, with little obvious variation between the different groups. This was the case for younger (18-24) and older (25-50) age groups, and also for groups of women and of men (with no discernible gender difference between women and men's level of knowledge). In particular, focus groups discussed extensively the negative impacts of child marriage on gender inequality, education, health and wellbeing, social life, and socio-economic conditions.

Knowledge about the legal age of marriage

Generally, participants in the focus groups were aware that 18 is the legal minimum age for marriage in Albania; in each group, there was at least one participant who correctly stated that 18 was the minimum age. This was the case whether participants were from Roma communities or from the wider population, and whether they belonged to the younger (18-24) or older (25-50) age groups. The exception was some non-Roma young women (aged 18-24), living in both rural and urban areas. In one FGD of young women from urban areas, none of the participants knew the legal minimum age for marriage.

Some participants also knew that marriage before 18 is allowed in certain circumstances.

“Legal age for marriage is 18 years old, but there are cases when the girl gets pregnant so the marriage can happen earlier by going through the Court.”

[FGD – non-Roma fathers / caregivers living in rural areas]

Among Roma participants, knowledge about the legal minimum age for marriage was often linked to their own experiences of trying to register marriages at an earlier age (and this being refused). Participants across the population groups also mentioned that children born to underage mothers cannot be registered at the civil registry. A social worker interviewed clarified that in fact, this relates to what name the baby is registered under, rather than being a blanket ban on registering babies born to underage mothers.

“The only problem is if they have kids because they can't register them under their name, and they use one of their parent's names instead.”

[KII – Roma community social worker]

To get around this, as the excerpt above indicates, grandparents register the new-born in their name; examples were recorded during FGDs with Roma participants from segregated and integrated communities, and with non-Roma participants from urban areas, indicating that this is a widespread practice and not limited to Roma communities.

Among all population groups, participants reflected that while most people knew that 18 was the minimum legal marriage age, this was often not taken into consideration, and weddings involving people under 18 still went ahead. 'Traditional' attitudes were seen by some participants as having more influence than the law.

"I think everyone knows that the legal age for marriage is 18. However, I have also heard statements like 'if the girl's feet reach the floor when she is sitting on the chair, then she is ready to get married.'"

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]

This was the case for Roma living in segregated and non-segregated communities, and for non-Roma living in rural and urban areas. The marriage would then be registered after the younger spouse had turned 18.

"I was married as soon as I finished school (after finishing the 9th grade). I went through civil registration after I turned 18."

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in rural areas]

Another trend noted among non-Roma participants was for a young person (usually a girl) to become engaged before she had turned 18, but not to marry until after she had turned 18. This appears to be particularly common in rural areas.

Knowledge about prevalence of child marriage in respondents' communities

In every single focus group, across all population groups, participants referred to at least one case of child marriage of which they were aware. For the most part, these cases only involved underage girls, usually marrying men who were several years older than them. However, participants did report some cases of child marriage involving boys. Discussion among Roma participants living in segregated settlements indicated that boys in their communities typically *marry very young*.

"The girls marry from 12-13, sometimes 14, but rarely later. The boys also marry early, at 14-16 up to 19."

[FGD –Roma young women living in segregated communities]

The data from the focus groups indicates that what participants observed as a 'usual' age for marriage varied considerably within and across different communities. This suggests that marriage practices are also very varied, with, for instance, some Roma families rejecting the practice of child marriage, while some non-Roma families maintain it.

One Roma participant made the important point that within a given Roma community, other factors such as socio-economic status and attitudes towards education can influence the 'usual' age for marriage.

"Lower class people ... tend to marry their children as early as possible. The middle class tends to marry their children a bit older and the higher class tends to pursue education."

[FGD– Roma fathers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

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Roma participants who lived in segregated communities most commonly reported a 'usual' marriage age for girls of between 14 and 16, and for boys, of between 17 and 20. However, some participants mentioned older 'usual' marriage ages.

Roma participants from integrated communities reported a slightly older 'usual' age of marriage for girls, of between 15 and 17, while boys tended to marry between 18 and 23. Again, however, this was not universal.

"In our community we have cases when fifth grade girls are married because the husband's family was rich."

[FGD– Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Participants of these focus groups indicated that in both segregated and non-segregated Roma communities, these age ranges represented what was common practice in their communities. By contrast, during focus group discussions with participants from non-Roma communities, the 'usual' age for marriage was given as above 18, with cases of marriage at a younger age presented as exceptional.

"In most cases they get engaged pretty early but they wait until they are 18 to get married, for girls. While boys, they don't get married until 23. [...]"

[FGD – young non-Roma women living in rural areas]

The exceptions were some rural communities in Fan where girls typically married from age 15.

"Here girls tend to marry very early, some of them as early as 15 years old or as soon as they finish middle school. Boys tend to marry later, 23-25 years old, or later if they have emigrated somewhere."

[FGD – non-Roma fathers/caregivers living in rural areas]

This FGD participant was not the only person to suggest a link between girls marrying, and men migrating.

"There are also cases when parents engage their daughters with emigrant boys and she lives with the husband's parents, while the husband works abroad."

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]

In general, focus group participants observed that child marriages were more common in rural areas than in urban areas.

"It depends on the family, like for example people from the city don't marry their girls young, while people from the villages and rural areas do. They even don't let them go to school and as soon as they get a proposal for their daughter they marry them."

[FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban areas]

Box 1: Child marriage - who decides?

'... that was the order I was given and I followed it.'

... [I was 15] how was I supposed to know what a husband was? We were not like the kids now days that even if you ask them in kindergarten what a husband is they know how to answer as if they were adults. [...]

My uncle's wife had (in her family circle) a nice boy, my husband ... he and his family are nice and he is hardworking. How can I even remember everything ... my family asked me what my choice was... I couldn't talk at all. I was completely lost ... it was really awkward ... the next afternoon they told me the engagement will happen after 2 days. Tomorrow we will go out and get a gift for your husband and get you ready.

While before, they even told me that my husband had come to the store a few times to see how I was and to be honest he gave me a good impression for a stranger.

What can I say I had no reason [to marry] that was the order I was given and I followed it.

[II - Non-Roma young woman, married before age 18]

For the most part, participants from across the different population groups felt that child marriage was becoming less common, including in Roma communities. For instance, younger participants (aged 18-24) referred to child marriages happening less frequently now than they had in their parents' and grandparents' times. Participants often linked these changes to new ways of thinking about love, marriage, and relationships, and changing priorities, as one of the key informants interviewed for this study pointed out.

"Five – six years ago, your daughter had to be married because of the mentality or because the neighbour had done so, you know, because others have done it. While nowadays this has changed. People have become aware that their daughters are not properties and they can't do whatever they want with them."

[KII – employee of an NGO offering community services]

However, these views were not universal, and some Roma participants observed that the number of child marriages appeared to be increasing.

"Early marriages have become more usual. Girls can't wait to have a man, I don't know."

[FGD – Roma young men living in integrated communities]

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Box 2: Changing marriage practices

'Nowadays people no longer ask for their parents' permission...'

Nowadays people no longer ask for their parents' permission, they decide on their own when they want to get married. And this is what happened to me too. I asked my wife to live with me, she agreed and that's what we did. We got engaged when I was 18 and she was 15, we aren't legally married yet. We mutually decided to live together; we didn't really ask our parents. [...]

At first, our very young age was discussed and that we couldn't support ourselves, but our parents wanted us to be happy so they supported us. We were supposed to stay longer like this, but the child came and our relationship grew stronger.

I am the father of a very beautiful son and I am now 23... I am happy and everything seems possible. I will work very hard so he and my wife have everything they want.

I don't know, if my son or daughter want to have a relationship, age is not a problem. This is what our ancestors did and they had a good life. It would be best if they finished school, to have a stable job and an income so they could have a good life.

[II - Non-Roma young man, married before the age of 18]

Knowledge about the impacts of child marriage

Focus group participants from all of the different population groups discussed at length the impacts of child marriage on gender inequality, education, physical and mental health and wellbeing, social life, and socio-economic conditions. Many participants also mentioned a link between child marriage and higher rates of separation and divorce.

"Even in cases when young people get married at an early age with the family approval, divorce happens; there are social problems for the separated family."

[KII – social administrator]

Overwhelmingly, participants felt that the impacts were greater for married girls than for married boys, whose lives were less likely to change dramatically after marriage. They also spoke almost exclusively about negative impacts, stating that child marriage was a practice that only brought problems and difficulties for those affected. This included participants from Roma communities where, judging by the discussion, child marriage was considered a usual practice.

"This is what ruins our lives, because we marry girls early to send them away from home. I was married at 14."

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Participants did mention some benefits of child marriage. The practice ensured that the girl's 'honour' was protected, allowed a couple who loved each other to be together, led to greater responsibility, and meant that children would be born.

“When you marry young the good thing is that you have children fast and then they become the labour force.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban areas]

However, overall, focus group participants felt that the negative impacts of child marriage outweighed these benefits.

Gender inequality

Participants in all of the focus groups spoke of the significant changes that adolescent girls experienced in their lives on marrying. Married girls would immediately be expected to take on a heavy burden of domestic labour, including housework, ‘serving’ their husbands and in-laws, and caring for other family members. Indeed, some participants talked of families and men choosing a young girl for marriage in order that they could ‘train’ her to their liking, because she was so young.

“When girls marry at a very young age they must take care to fulfil all the requests of the mother-in-law and the other family members, they must stay at home and do the housekeeping, to cook, clean and fulfil all the husband’s demands.”

[FGD – young Roma women living in segregated communities]

Following marriage, participants felt that usually, girls’ lives were restricted to housework and raising children, and they were not allowed to continue studying, or to work. Many FGD participants felt that girls were far too young to take on these responsibilities, and were unprepared for them. One participant felt that some families exploited their adolescent daughters-in-law.

“But it happens, they take advantage of the girl and make her work but that depends on the family.”

[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Participants reflected that by contrast, boys married at a young age did not experience such a significant change in their lives. Changes that they did experience were associated with becoming more mature, more responsible, and so were seen by some as positive.

“Boys become more mature and girls learn the habits of their parents-in-law, learn to cook, take care of their homes, children, and so on.”

[FGD – young Roma men living in segregated communities]

Child marriage, then, appeared to participants to push adolescents into very ‘traditional’ gender roles that restricted girls’ opportunities for future study, careers, and other forms of self-realisation. This serves to perpetuate gender inequality inside and outside the household. One participant made the link between child marriage and gender inequality explicit.

“First of all, it is out of question to attend the university, I am talking about the girl. High school may be allowed. There is no social life. While it is different for boys. They get on with life as before, and maybe they may feel they have more authority. [...] The gender inequality widens even more.”

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]

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Box 3: Gendered impacts of child marriage

'I continued school, but with a lot of effort and sacrifice.'

We got married when I was 17 and my husband was 22. This isn't a very common age to get married, but there are some cases. In our area, early marriages aren't very common. Now that some time has passed I think I shouldn't have gotten married so young, because I was restricted from many things. [...] It was hard for me to take responsibility in the family, to cook, give birth and raise children. [...]

Your life changes a lot. At first you like everything, because you have everything you ever wanted and you live with the one you love, everything looks pretty and without any problems, and then the responsibility and restraint starts. The biggest change is once you have children, because that's when you have more expenses.

I continued school, but with a lot of effort and sacrifice.

[II - Non-Roma young woman, married before the age of 18]

Education

Participants from all of the population groups included in the study agreed that child marriage has a very negative impact on girls' education.

In recounting cases of child marriage – whether these were 'exceptional' or common – FGD participants from across all the population groups highlighted two points in an adolescent girl's life when this was most likely to happen: at the end of middle school (age 14-15) and at the end of high school (age 17-18). In both cases, this usually marked the end of the girl's education: once married, she would either not proceed to high school, or she would not proceed to university or some other form of further education.

That said, changing economic conditions may be leading to changes in attitudes to whether or not a girl or woman should continue with education after marriage, as this respondent noted.

"This concept has changed a bit, because even when these girls get married at a younger age, it is necessary to invest on them. Their husbands want their wives to attend school and to work, because today families have more expenses."

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in rural areas]

Barriers to access to education were also a factor, as this key informant pointed out.

"I had a case... [a girl who dropped out of school] with great academic results. The area has no public transport and this was the reason she did not go back to school."

[KII – child protection unit employee]

It is important to note that in some Roma communities, it is not a question of girls (or boys) leaving education to marry, but that they never attend school in the first place.

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“Marriage doesn’t affect education, because we don’t go to school at all.”
[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

At the same time, there are Roma families who are willing to support their daughters’ education, right up to university level.

“Nowadays if the girl wants to go to university and if the family can afford it, they let them do that; who can’t afford to do that opts for marriage.”
[FGD – Roma young women living in integrated communities]

The contrast between these two realities again highlights the huge variation in marriage practices – and in attitudes to girls’ education – within different Roma communities and families. It also points to the influence of socio-economic conditions in determining whether a girl will be able to complete her education.

Health and wellbeing

Focus group participants from across the different population groups spoke of the negative impacts of child marriage on physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Roma women (from younger and older age groups) drew attention to the fact that once married, girls are under pressure to become pregnant as quickly as possible. Participants in different focus group discussions reflected on the negative impacts of early childbearing on married girls’ physical health, because their bodies are not physically mature enough for pregnancy and childbirth.

“They are not physically ready to become a mother, because the girl’s body is still growing until the age of 20.”
[FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural areas]

Focus group participants also spoke about the impacts of child marriage on mental health and wellbeing. One FGD [young Roma men living in segregated communities] participant stated that married adolescents ‘have psychological issues’. A non-Roma participant spoke of how she felt that girls who became engaged or married young ‘lost themselves’ and their identities.

“They use ‘we’ in every conversation, implying the fiancé and herself, and they never use ‘I.’ ... The girls see themselves at a function of the relationship, while the boys see themselves at a function of themselves.”
[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]

While not spoken of directly, some participants also hinted at the sexual trauma experienced by adolescent girls following marriage, who were physically, emotionally, and mentally unprepared for sexual relations. In one focus group with young Roma women living in segregated communities, two of the participants stated that they had known nothing about sex and sexual relations before they married, and had only found out on their wedding nights.

Finally, two participants in two FGDs mentioned that married girls were at risk of domestic violence, but this was not discussed further in these or any other FGDs.

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Vulnerability to domestic violence was mentioned in this Key Informant interview.

“Normally there have been cases of violence, continuous arguments and it spreads throughout the neighbourhood”

Are they more exposed to domestic violence?

“Yes, yes”

[KII –representative of an NGO offering community services]

Social life

Many participants drew attention to the fact that on marrying, both adolescent girls and boys were no longer able to socialise with their friends and relatives to the same extent. However, participants across all the population groups agreed that the restrictions on married girls’ movement outside the home and contact with peers were more rigidly enforced. One participant made the connection between restrictions on married girls’ mobility and contact with peers to gendered social norms.

“I haven’t seen a girl to have a social life. It is related to the unwritten norms/rules.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in rural areas]

One key informant made the point that this control extended to social media, with implications for an engaged or married girl’s access to friendship and support networks.

“When they get engaged they close their Facebook page, delete their friends from Facebook ... [the fiancé says] ‘why did they comment... you are not supposed to speak to him because you told me once he teased you’...so things like this.”

[KII – child protection unit employee]

Another key informant spoke of married adolescent girls becoming the ‘property’ of their husbands’ families, and that ‘they are no longer themselves’ [KII–employee at an NGO offering community services].

Box 4: No school, no social life

‘What school, no way...’

I got married at the age of 17. [...]

I expected it to be more awesome. It was hard but we got used to each other and how to pass the hard times. Even we did not understand how our life changed after marriage.

What school, no way! We worked at the clothing shop. Social life? No! We didn’t go out. The head of the family was in charge. I was the husband. I lived with my parents in the same house but in command was my father. Everyone has their own responsibilities but my father had the most. [...]

I became a parent at the age of 19. It was a beautiful experience and the same was for my wife. I have three kids. I have twin girls [who are] 10 and a boy [who is] three.

I have not finished school.... I do not want my kids to get married at the same age as me. I want them to finish school. I think this is for the best.

[II - Roma young man, married before age 18]

Socio-economic conditions

Some Roma participants drew links between child marriage, school dropout, and the perpetuation of poverty in their communities.

“The negative effects are that they fail to finish school because of the early marriages, barely find work and have economic problems.”

[FGD – young Roma men living in segregated communities]

Some Roma women participants noted that poverty was also linked to the fact that many child marriages failed, meaning that young women ended up as single parents, struggling to support themselves and their children.

“Young people get married, but ... then they realise that life is not easy and they separate. Then they try it again (with another man). They become even poorer by having children by both marriages. Even for boys it is the same thing.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Box 5: Child marriage – cycles of poverty

‘My daughters had worse luck than I did...’

When I was 14 my father had found a husband and decided to marry me and my mother approved of this too, while my opinion didn't matter at all because they had already decided. At first I couldn't go against what my parents had decided and also no one asked me whether I wanted to get married or not, whether it was good for me or not, but when I separated from my first husband and decided to marry my second husband, everything came as a result of the economic conditions in which I was and I didn't have a choice. [...]

My daughters had worse luck than I did, because they were basically kidnapped when they were 13-14, they met their husbands and wanted to get married without my approval. My first daughter has gotten separated twice, and she is now in a new relationship with two children and she doesn't have enough to eat. She only went to elementary school and doesn't work. My second daughter got married and went to Greece when she was 13. She says she is doing well, but I don't know because she doesn't visit very often. My third daughter met a nearby neighbour and that caused a lot of trouble, because I didn't approve. He is very jealous, doesn't let her do anything [on her own]. He is also very lazy and they barely break even at the end of the month. When they fight he tells her 'go home to your mother' and she comes to me crying.

They all have children, and I somehow carry all their problems and I, as a mother, cannot stay without helping them because they have no one else besides me.

[II - Roma mother whose children married before age 18]

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6. Preferences for and against child marriage

This section uses Bicchieri et al's concept of 'conditional' and 'unconditional' preferences to explore attitudes towards child marriage in the four population groups – Roma living in segregated communities, Roma living in integrated communities, non-Roma living in rural communities, and non-Roma living in urban areas. At the end of the section, we review these findings to consider which category of 'social practice' child marriage falls under, again according to Bicchieri et al's framework.

Within Bicchieri et al's framework, conditional preferences are those based on social expectations, i.e. what other people in a given group or community think should be done (normative social expectations), or actually do (empirical expectations). If a person expresses a conditional preference (for instance, for child marriage, or for another practice), that preference is not based on that person's own, individual view, but on what the people around them think and do, and how they believe they will be judged or sanctioned by those people.

By contrast, *unconditional* preferences are based on what Bicchieri et al. term 'non-social beliefs', i.e. beliefs based on a person's individual, moral beliefs (normative non-social beliefs) about what should or should not be done, or beliefs based on factual realities (factual non-social beliefs). These are not influenced by what people in that person's group or community think or do.

During the focus group discussions and key informant interviews, participants discussed their own preferences, but also what they believed to be the preferences of other people in their communities. The main findings from these discussions are summarised in Table 2, and analysed in greater detail below. What emerges strongly is that participants' preferences for and against child marriage were determined by a wide range of factors, shaped by social expectations as well as personal moral beliefs and by factual realities. In many cases, participants spoke of preferences for or against child marriage as being influenced by a mixture of social expectations (for instance, fear of rumours and social condemnation) and factual non-social beliefs (for instance, the 'factual reality' of poverty). This is illustrated in the excerpt below.

"In the girl's case, the family decides on the marriage due to economic problems, 'one less mouth to feed' or because if she gets older than 15-16 she will be considered 'left'. This is the custom. Meanwhile, for the boy, the family thinks that it has found a good and honest wife. [...] The source of the pressure is the tradition and the conditions."
[FGD – young Roma women living in segregated communities]

Examples like this were given during focus groups with women and men across the different population groups included in this study. In the analysis, it was thus often difficult to identify neatly whether the dominant preference for or against child marriage in a particular group was based on social expectations or on economic or other social conditions (and hence, which category of 'social practice' child marriage falls under for this community). This again illustrates how complex an issue child marriage is, regardless of whether it is practised in Roma (or other minority) communities or in majority communities.

In addition, in the analysis it was sometimes hard to separate out a person's individual, moral belief from the influence of normative social expectations. This is particularly the case in relation to the importance attached to 'honour'.

Many participants strongly believed that a girl should be a virgin on marriage in order to protect her and her family’s ‘honour’. At the same time, they were strongly influenced by what other people around them thought about ‘honour’, and in particular, by fear of rumours and gossip about a girl’s ‘honour’.

“They marry them while they are still young to not embarrass their parents. They want them to be virgins.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

Table 2: Conditional and Unconditional preferences for and against child marriage by population group

	Main factors shaping conditional preferences for child marriage	Main factors shaping conditional preferences against child marriage	Main factors shaping unconditional preferences for child marriage	Main factors shaping unconditional preferences against child marriage
Roma living in segregated communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fear of social sanction ▪ Pressure from the community / extended family ▪ Fear of being ‘left behind’* ▪ Praise for marrying off a young daughter 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child marriage is seen as a custom / tradition ▪ Personal belief in the importance of ‘honour’ ▪ Poverty ▪ Wanting to give a child a better life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adolescents are not ready ▪ Child / early marriage is a barrier to education and employment
Roma living in integrated communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fear of social sanction ▪ Pressure from the community / extended family ▪ Fear of being ‘left behind’ ▪ Praise for marrying off a young daughter 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child marriage is seen as a custom / tradition ▪ Personal belief in the importance of ‘honour’ ▪ Poverty ▪ Wanting to give a child a better life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adolescents are not ready ▪ Child / early marriage is a barrier to education and employment
Non-Roma living in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fear of social sanction ▪ Fear of being ‘left behind’ ▪ Praise for marrying off a young daughter 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poverty ▪ Wanting to give a child a better life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child / early marriage is a barrier to ‘self-realisation’ ▪ Adolescents are not ready ▪ Child / early marriage is a barrier to education and employment
Non-Roma living in urban areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fear of social sanction ▪ Pressure from the community ▪ Fear of being ‘left behind’ 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poverty ▪ Wanting to give a child a better life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child / early marriage is a barrier to ‘self-realisation’ ▪ Adolescents are not ready ▪ Child / early marriage is a barrier to education and employment

*i.e. considered too old to marry

Conditional preferences for child marriage

Participants in focus groups from across the four population groups either expressed conditional preferences for child marriage themselves, or talked about how preferences for child marriage among other people in their community were conditional on social expectations. These social expectations related to:

- Fear of gossip and rumours (for instance, that a girl is dating a boy, or is no longer a virgin) and other forms of social sanction
- Pressure from extended family and the wider community
- Fear of girls being ‘left behind’ if they did not marry early
- Praise from extended family and the wider community if a girl married

Overall, the data from the focus group discussions indicates that for Roma living in segregated and integrated communities, social expectations play a very strong role in shaping preferences for child marriage.

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Of all the groups participating, young Roma men living in segregated communities were the most likely to express a strong, conditional preference for child marriage (of girls).

“For girls it is good to marry at a young age because they keep their reputation, honour and create a good and strong family. The sooner, the better because, as we say, ‘the girls have long hair but a short mind!’”

[FGD – young Roma men living in segregated communities]

They spoke extensively of how social expectations push girls towards child marriages. This included fear of shame resulting from rumours, and the influence of what others in the community were doing.

Data from focus groups with non-Roma living in rural and urban communities also indicates that preferences in these communities for child marriage are also strongly influenced by social expectations. For non-Roma respondents from urban areas, social condemnation of adolescent relationships emerged as the most significant social expectation pushing adolescents into marriage. In contrast, for non-Roma participants from rural areas, fear of gossip, rumours or other forms of social sanction, and fear of being ‘left behind’ were more significant.

Fear of social sanction

It is clear from the focus groups with Roma participants that fear of gossip, rumours, and other forms of social sanction shape people’s preference for marrying girls off while they are still children, and that this was closely linked to the importance of ‘honour’.

Some Roma respondents spoke of how a girl (and her family) could face significant social sanction if it was found that she had not been a virgin on her wedding night, such as being ‘sent back’ to her parents’ house.

“If she gets married, and the husband finds out she is not a virgin, not only do they send her back to her family, they also make the family give them money for all the wedding expenses.”

[KII – Roma community social worker]

Marrying a girl young was seen as a way to avoid rumours about her reputation, and this was clearly a very important consideration for families and a significant factor pushing adolescent girls towards marriage.

“There are cases when she works or goes to university, but there will always be rumours about her so it’s better to just get married so her parents are not ashamed.”

[FGD – Roma young women living in integrated communities]

Participants from non-Roma rural and urban communities also spoke of the role of rumours and gossip in pushing girls towards early (i.e. before 20), if not child marriages, and the rumours and ‘scandal’ that could follow the discovery that a young couple were dating, or even if boys and girls were just socialising together. In these cases, parents would pressure children to marry as quickly as possible, in order to stop rumours. This was exacerbated if the daughter was found to be pregnant.

“If your parents find out, there isn’t much you can do.”
[FGD – non-Roma young men living in rural communities]

Community pressure

Analysis of data from the FGDs with both Roma populations reveals that parents face considerable pressure from extended families and the wider community to marry off daughters, and also to agree to a young man’s request for marriage to a daughter.

“Yes, there is a lot of pressure. If my friend marries his daughter, then I have to do the same otherwise she will remain at home and not find any husband.”
[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

Sources of pressure included older relatives, in which case it was very difficult to challenge their views, as well as neighbours.

“When there are old people in these families, they decide when the time is right for the marriage and it is hard to oppose them.”
[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

“If their neighbour’s daughter got married, they have to find a husband for their daughter as well.”
[KII – child protection unit employee]

Younger women and men from non-Roma communities in urban areas also mentioned how pressure from family and their communities meant that once an adolescent relationship was ‘discovered’, the couple would have to get engaged or marry.

“Maybe the pressure from other people makes them get engaged faster because they can’t go out in public freely.”
[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]

Fear of being ‘left behind’

In data from FGDs with all four population groups, it is apparent that there is a strong belief that above a certain age, it is difficult – or impossible – for a woman to marry. The cut-off age appeared to be between 18 and 20. This increases pressure on girls to marry very young so as not to be ‘left behind’.

“Boys ask for a girl at a young age; then we want to arrange [the marriage] as fast as we can because if they become older no one wants them.”
[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

One older male respondent from a non-Roma rural community mentioned that this was particularly an issue for girls and their families living in remote areas

“.. once they pass a certain age no one will want them anymore and because it is an isolated area and the chances to meet people are so slim, they marry their daughters the first chance they get.”
[FGD – non-Roma fathers/caregivers living in rural communities]

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Respondents from rural areas spoke of pressure from the community for girls to marry as soon as they had finished high school as otherwise it would be too late and they would be 'left behind'. However, fear of girls being 'left behind' if they didn't marry at a young age was also discussed by respondents in urban areas. Key informants also spoke of fear of being 'left behind' as influencing the decision to marry young, and of how this is linked to concerns about 'honour'.

"If the girl passes the age of 18 she isn't considered with honour anymore and there are no more requests to marry her so she is considered unmarriageable."

[KII – civil registry office employee]

Praise for marrying off a daughter

In addition to sanctions, it is also important to consider the role of extended families and communities endorsing child marriages (or early marriages) through praise. It was clear that for Roma participants (from segregated and integrated communities), this was an important factor in shaping people's preferences for child marriages.

"For the families it is a good thing to marry their daughter early, it is praised in the community and people take example from that."

[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

Indeed, older Roma women mentioned that if a family married a daughter or son off while they were very young, there was no danger that the family would face condemnation or any negative sanction.

"No one in the community judges when young people are married because tradition has a big influence."

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Praise for marrying a daughter off while she was very young was not just a factor endorsing preferences for child and early marriage in Roma communities, as this excerpt from a young non-Roma woman living in a rural community indicates.

"When parents decide and they succeed to marry their daughter around 18-20 years old, people in the village congratulate them: 'You reached this day and you are "arranging" your children with honour!"

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural communities]

Conditional preferences against child marriage

Overall, analysis of the data from all of the focus groups indicates that social expectations play little role in shaping preferences against child marriage, for any of these population groups.

During a FGD with older Roma women living in integrated communities the role of education in influencing adolescents' attitudes against child marriage was mentioned.

“Education influences, if they go to school they will understand child marriage is not a good thing.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Non-Roma women mentioned how the age at which they had married would influence when their children married.

“The appropriate age to get married in our community is 22-23 years old for girls and 25-28 years old for boys. This is an appropriate age because we got married at this age as well and we will pass on the tradition to our children.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban areas]

Another factor impacting on young Roma people’s preferences against child marriage is socialising with people from non-Roma communities.

“Children and young people are more aware because they [attend] schools. Even public opinion impacts them, because, by frequenting with other peers (non-Roma), young people do not want to get married at an early age.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

Unconditional preferences for child marriage

Participants in all focus groups discussed the influence of individual beliefs about what is morally right or wrong (normative non-social beliefs) and of beliefs about factual realities (factual non-social beliefs) on their preferences for child marriage, or the preferences of other people in their communities.

Broadly, individual moral beliefs (i.e., normative non-social beliefs) shaping unconditional preferences for child marriage related to:

- Custom and tradition
- ‘Honour’, and the importance of girls and women remaining virgins until marriage

Factual realities (i.e., factual, non-social beliefs) shaping unconditional preferences for child marriage related to:

- Poverty or other economic factors, such as migration
- Wanting a better life for a child
- Adolescence being the right time to marry
- Escaping violent and abusive home lives

These beliefs clearly had a strong influence in communities across the four population groups, although there were some differences. For Roma, with little difference between participants from segregated and non-segregated communities, individual moral beliefs relating to ‘honour’ and the importance of child marriage as a tradition were extremely significant in shaping unconditional preferences for child marriage, particularly among women. This was much less pronounced for respondents who were not Roma. Poverty, however, and the desire to try and give a child a better life, were important factors shaping support for child and early marriage (before 20) for respondents from all four population groups.

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Participants in all focus groups mentioned young people falling in love as shaping their preference for child marriage, although in the case of one older man participant, this was in terms of ‘damage limitation’.

“They [parents] can do nothing; they have to marry them [the girls] because otherwise they will make a scandal, commit suicide or leave the house.”

[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

While of course it is important to recognise and accept young people’s agency in choosing to marry, it is necessary to bear in mind the moral and social framework within which such decisions are taken. As discussed in the section above, and again in the section on ‘Options’, adolescents and young people are choosing to get married in a context where it is not considered socially acceptable for them to date and / or have sexual relationships outside of marriage. For adolescents and young people who want to be together, choosing to marry is often the only way.

Custom and tradition

Participants in focus groups drawn from Roma communities (segregated and integrated) emphasised that child marriage is considered to be a strong tradition or custom in their communities, and this is a very significant factor in shaping unconditional preference for the practice.⁷³

In a focus group with younger women, one participant answered simply:

“Well, marrying early is our tradition.”

[FGD – Roma young women living in segregated communities]

This statement points to the challenges in terms of encouraging people to think differently about a practice that they see as a tradition, and hence, as something unchanging and fixed. That said, participants in a focus group with younger men hinted at some conflict between older and younger people regarding adhering to traditions, perhaps indicating that attitudes are starting to change.

“When you have old people in your house you are forced to follow the traditions of the community because they are very important for the elderly.”

[FGD - Roma young men living in segregated communities]

By contrast, with the exception of participants in one FGD with non-Roma fathers / caregivers living in rural communities, none of the non-Roma participants spoke of child marriage in terms of custom or tradition. In fact, one participant was at pains to stress that as far as she was concerned, this was not a custom, rather something that had emerged more recently.

“It was not a custom to get married early. Never has been. But it is happening recently because young people fall in love at a young age.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in rural communities]

Belief in the importance of 'honour'

Analysis of the data from the focus groups with Roma indicates that belief that child marriage is an important tradition is closely linked to the belief that a girl should be a virgin when she marries, in order to protect her (and her family's) 'honour'.

"The tradition to protect the girl's honour still exists, and this is a very strong reason that there are still early marriages."

[FGD – Roma young men living in integrated communities]

Some important differences did emerge. In FGDs with Roma living in segregated communities, participants in every single focus group brought up the importance of protecting 'honour' and why this necessitated girls marrying at a very young age, even if marrying so young was harmful to the girl.

"They are not ready [for marriage], but to us it is more important to preserve their honour."

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

By contrast, among Roma from integrated communities, only women spoke about the importance of 'honour' and virginity and their links to child marriage. Some had very strongly held views on the matter.

"I'd rather kill my daughter with my own hands that allow her [to take the wrong path]."

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

In the FGDs with non-Roma living in rural and in urban communities, few mentions were made of the importance of 'honour', although it clearly does still remain an issue. However, with statements made by these population groups, it was much harder to work out if views on the importance of honour were shaped by personal, moral beliefs, or by social expectations.

"They fear for their honour so as soon as they get a proposal for their daughter, they marry them immediately."

[FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban communities]

Indeed, one younger woman participant believed that 'honour' has become much less significant.

"Honour has passed in second place. It is no longer a problem because you can find a solution."⁷⁴

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural communities]

Poverty

Participants from all age groups and population groups mentioned poverty as an important 'factual reality' underpinning preference for child marriage, with parents deciding to marry off their daughters – or agreeing to marriages – as a way of easing financial pressures at home.

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“In the families with a lot of children, when the girls grow up and the second daughter is old enough to take care of the younger ones the mother marries the first to lower the economic costs.”

[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

They noted that better off families tended to marry daughters off later, and that overcrowding at home was another factor pushing girls into marriage.

Many participants also made the link between a family not being able to afford to send a girl to school and the decision to marry her off.

“... [parents] cannot afford to send them [girls] to school, they don’t have good enough living conditions because of the economy so they marry them off.”

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural communities]

Poverty was also widely cited as a driver of child marriage in interviews with key informants.

“They think marrying the girl to a rich man will help them escape the poverty they are in.”

[KII –social worker]

Chance of a better life

Again, across all four population groups, participants acknowledged that as well as wanting to ease constraints at home, many parents wanted to try and do their best by their daughters, and to give them a better life. For many parents, marriage to a man in a comfortable financial situation seemed to be the best way to do this.

“If they find a good husband with a good economic situation they will fix their daughter’s future.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in rural communities]

In one focus group, with younger men, participants also spoke of how marriage could offer a girl a ‘better life’ in other, non-material ways.

“... even for girls it is better to be married, if they aren’t going to go to school or work so they can have their own life.”

[FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban areas]

In some FGDs with non-Roma (from both rural and urban communities), marrying a girl to a man who had migrated was again seen as a way of giving the girl a chance of a ‘better life’. This was also mentioned by one key informant, although this person did not think such cases were very common.

“Usually they want their daughter to live comfortably, especially with migrants [to] UK or Italy. They don’t really think about what kind of a person he is, they just think that he must live well since he is a migrant.”

[KII – child protection unit employee]

Migration was not mentioned in any of the FGDs with Roma.

One key informant also spoke of parents feeling a responsibility towards their children to make sure that the children are married and settled.

“Parents feel [that their] obligation towards their children is fulfilled once they are married and have their own families.”

[KII –social worker]

Box 6: Wanting to marry for the chance of a better life

‘I wanted to run away because we were bad economically.’

The girls from our area get married at 14-15 because that’s the tradition. The boys get married at 18-19...

I fell in love with my first husband and didn’t ask my mother for her approval. He lied to me and I was young and then we were fighting and I wanted to run away because we were bad economically as well [at home].

My husband took me when I was 15, without asking anyone.

It was my husband’s decision and mine, because, as I said he lied to me, he said we would be happy in Greece and we would work there as well. My mum didn’t want me getting married and she had a fight with my husband’s family, but I didn’t listen to her.

I was young, immature and we had a really bad [economic situation] at my mum’s house. He lied to me all the time ... and as soon as we were in a relationship, he took me to his house.

[II - Roma young woman, married before the age of 18]

Adolescence is the right age for marriage

While not widely expressed, some participants from FGDs with Roma women spoke of believing that adolescent girls were physically ready for marriage and motherhood.

“Yes, they are ready [for marriage] given that the girls are developed ‘biologically/physically’ speaking.”

[FGD – Roma young women living in segregated communities]

One older woman participant spoke in terms of adolescence being the right stage for girls and boys to move on and start their own families, so that their parents would no longer have to take responsibility for them.

“They’d better have their own children. We won’t take care of them our entire life.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

This idea – that parents wanted their children to move on so that they would no longer have to take responsibility for them – was also expressed in a focus group with non-Roma women living in rural communities.

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Box 7: When it all works out well

'I would want my daughter to get married 16, 17 years old just like I did.'

I got married when I was 16, my mother's aunt came over one time and talked to my mother about how I was grown up and that it was time to get married. I had just finished 9th grade and she had found a good guy for me and they asked me about it. I liked him and when my father asked me about it, I told him the same thing, so we got engaged. He liked me, I liked him, his [economic situation] was good and he had a nice house. My parents talked to his parents and they agreed as well.

We were engaged for about a year and then we got married. We had a big wedding, because I was pretty so my in-laws liked me. I was 16 and my husband was 20. After a year together, we had our first child when I was 17. We have been married for 4 years and have 2 children.

It is better if girls get married early because if they get around no one will want them anymore. When my daughter gets older, I would want her to get married as soon as she is ready, like I did and it turned out pretty well. I would want my daughter to get married 16,17 years old just like I did. And I want for her to marry with a good husband as well.

[II - Roma young woman, married before the age of 18]

Escaping an unhappy home life

While not widely discussed, younger Roma women living in segregated communities also mentioned that a girl might choose to marry, or agree to marriage, as a way of escaping an abusive situation at home.

"It happens sometimes that the girls want to marry because they want to leave their house, because they experienced violence there, the inability to fulfil their dreams."

[FGD – Roma young women living in segregated communities]

This was also mentioned in one of the Key Informant interviews.

Box 8: Child marriage to ‘protect’ a daughter

‘I thought it would be better to marry my daughter and at least save her.’

Myself, I was married at 13 years old and I know it is not easy to take care of the family at that age, because you are a child yourself. But my husband used to drink a lot, he used drugs, and he behaved badly at home. When my daughter turned 13 a good family ‘asked’ her [meaning that parents of a boy came and asked her hand in marriage for their son]. After I asked around about the in-laws and I was told that they are good people, I married her off. I couldn’t keep her at home with the husband that I had.

What else could I do. I couldn’t leave my husband, because I was scared. I thought it would be better to marry my daughter and at least save her.

I told her that she was asked for marriage, and that they are very good people. She even met the boy and she agreed.

We know that children shouldn’t be married so young. They should be at least 27-28 years old. But this was how the fate had written.

My daughter is ok where she is married. Her husband’s family treats her well. We live close so I meet her every day. We don’t go to school and women do not work. She stays home and takes care of the family.

[II - Roma mother whose children married before age 18]

Unconditional preferences against child marriage

Individual, moral beliefs (normative non-social beliefs) and views on factual realities (factual non-social beliefs) also had a strong influence on shaping unconditional preferences against child marriage.

Individual moral beliefs (i.e., normative non-social beliefs) shaping unconditional preferences against child marriage related to:

- The right to decide freely for yourself when and who you should marry
- The importance of life experience and ‘self-realisation’

Factual realities (i.e., factual non-social beliefs) shaping unconditional preferences against child marriage related to:

- Adolescents’ lack of maturity and readiness for marriage
- The negative impact of child marriage on education and employment

Participants across the four population groups and across all age groups expressed strong, unconditional preferences against child marriage, including in communities where child marriage was clearly common practice (judging by the discussion during the focus groups). The two exceptions to this were older Roma women living in segregated communities, and older Roma men living in integrated communities; neither group expressed any unconditional preferences against child marriage.

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Younger women from rural communities expressed the strongest unconditional preferences against child marriage. Analysis of their discussion indicates that a wide range of different normative and factual non-social beliefs determine these preferences.

Freedom to decide

Some participants taking part in the focus groups of older and younger men from segregated Roma communities expressed clearly the belief that a young couple should have the chance to get to know each other properly and to decide for themselves whether to marry, rather than being rushed into marriage.

***"I think that kids should have their freedom, within boundaries of course."
[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in segregated communities]***

Interestingly, this idea was not discussed at length in any other FGDs from any other population groups.

'Self-realisation'

At some of the FGDs with participants who were not from Roma communities, women in particular spoke of how marrying early was an obstacle to 'self-realisation'. Their preferences against child or early (before 20) marriage were shaped by the idea that young people should not marry until they had had a chance to fulfil themselves, to 'live a little', and to get to know their future spouse.

***"... it would be better after 24. You have finished your studies, have a job, you have even had time to travel and enjoy your freedom and you are ready to take on responsibilities."
[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]***

It is possible to speculate that the fact that none of the Roma participants spoke in terms of 'self-realisation' reflects the marginalisation and social exclusion that Roma people face in Albania, meaning that opportunities for 'self-realisation' (for instance, through higher education, or travel) are extremely limited. This would require further investigation.

Adolescents are not ready

Participants from many FGDs from across the four population groups expressed a preference against child marriage that was based on their belief that adolescents did not have the maturity for marriage.

For the most part, this was expressed in terms of adolescents not being ready to take on the responsibilities of marriage. For married girls especially, this would lead to their failing to fulfil the role of wife and mother adequately, and also to potential conflicts with husbands and in-laws.

***"I will not marry my daughter unless she is 20 years old because she is not mature enough and she doesn't know how to do anything, which would lead her to a lot of problems."
[FGD - non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban areas]***

However, one younger participant also referred to the emotional aspect of marriage, and of a marriage being 'a lot harder' than a relationship. In his view, adolescents who married had little idea of what they were getting into.

"In my opinion girls shouldn't get married before they are 20 because marriage isn't the same as being in a relationship; it's a lot harder..."

[FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban areas]

Negative impacts on education and employment

Across the four population groups, participants clearly expressed the view that they saw child marriage as a barrier to education and employment, and that this shaped preferences against the practice. Many expressed the view that both girls and boys should complete education and attain some degree of financial stability before thinking about marriage. This included participants from Roma communities and from non-Roma rural communities, where it is clear from the discussion that very few employment opportunities are actually available.

"Marriage at an early age is not good neither for girls, nor for boys. If I would have a relative in this situation I would suggest to her/him to wait until he/she finishes school, gets a job, and after he/she has created [some] economic stability then he/she should create a family."

[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

Box 9: School is the future

'... my advice to other girls is don't make my mistakes, don't do what I did.'

At that age it seemed like the best thing in the world, I thought I would have a better life and that I would be happy, or that it would be something special for me, that I would have a house, a family, kids and overall better things. I grew up as an orphan and I used to watch other people get married and be happy, my father left us when I was 6 so my mother had to be a father as well, I thought it would be a good thing but the opposite happened.... [...]

I didn't go to school at all. My dad left us when I was 6, my mother was 32 at the time and didn't have the opportunity, my older sister did a couple of years of school. [...]

... I wish I hadn't done this ... my advice to other girls is don't make my mistakes, don't do what I did. [...]

I will try, I pray to God [my children] do not share my luck, God is our mirror, our hope, I don't want them to suffer because I have suffered enough, I didn't expect my life to be like this, no people, no future, no home. [...]

I wish for them to stay in school as long as the school will provide opportunity for them to move forward, not like me, they should get married at an appropriate age, so when good and bad things happen they know how to deal with them, at that age the biggest misfortune happened to me and I didn't know what to do.

[II - Roma young woman, married before age 18]

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Child marriage as social practice in Albania

As discussed above in Section 3 on 'Study scope and objectives', Bicchieri et al. suggest a range of categories of social practice under which a population group's reasons for supporting child marriage may fall. These are summarised in Table 1 on page 20, 'Child marriage as collective practice'.

In order to assess what category of social practice child marriage falls under in Albania, let us review how research participants expressed their preferences in favour of child marriage. The categorisation of child marriage for the different population groups is then summarised in Table 3 at the end of this section.

Conditional preferences for child marriage

In regard to attitudes, or to preferences relating to child marriage, participants across the four population groups discussed a range of normative and empirical social expectations shaping conditional preferences for child marriage.

There was considerable overlap across the four population groups, and among women and men from all age groups, in regard to the significant role that rumours, fear of rumours, and fear of social sanction play in shaping preferences for child marriage. There was also considerable discussion of social condemnation of adolescent relationships. To put it simply, according to the participants in this study, child marriages take place in their communities to ensure that rumours do not spread about a girl being in a relationship outside of marriage, which would compromise her 'honour'.

In terms of differences, Roma participants from segregated and non-segregated communities spoke of parents experiencing pressure from neighbours and relatives to marry young daughters, and praise when they did so. Non-Roma participants did not talk of feeling under this degree of social pressure.

From this it is possible to conclude that normative social expectations (beliefs about what other people thought should be done) shaped conditional preferences for child marriage for all participant groups. This means that **child marriage can be categorised as a social norm, according to Bicchieri et al.'s framework, for all four population groups**. Roma (whether they live in segregated or non-segregated communities) participants identified stronger conditional preferences for child marriage within their communities, because of the greater degree of social pressure that they experienced. Roma participants also referred to empirical social expectations, i.e. that 'everyone else marries off daughters (or allows daughters to marry) before they are 18, so that is what is expected of me too'. This means that **for Roma, child marriage can also be described as a descriptive norm**, according to Bicchieri et al.'s framework.

Unconditional preferences for child marriage

Analysis of the focus group data indicates some differences in regard to unconditional preferences for child marriage across the different population groups, but also one significant overlap, namely the role of poverty in shaping unconditional preferences for child marriage.

In terms of individual moral beliefs, (i.e., normative non-social beliefs), attachment to the belief that child marriage was a 'tradition' or 'custom' was very strong among Roma participants, whether they came from segregated or integrated communities. Likewise, Roma participants from both segregated and integrated communities expressed the belief that girls needed to keep their 'honour' – i.e. their virginity – before marriage, and that this was almost more important than anything else. While 'honour' was mentioned in discussions in focus groups with non-Roma participants, this was less in terms of what participants believed themselves, and more in terms of fear of rumours and social sanction.

From this, it can be concluded that Roma participants from segregated and integrated communities identified strong unconditional preferences for child marriage within their communities based on beliefs about what is morally right, i.e., normative non-social beliefs. As such, **for Roma participants in this study, child marriage can be categorised as a moral rule**, according to Bicchieri et al.'s framework, and **can also be categorised as a custom**.

In terms of beliefs based on 'factual realities' (factual non-social beliefs), there was far greater overlap across the four population groups. Poverty was identified in every single focus group as a 'factual reality' shaping unconditional preferences for child marriage. Participants spoke of families being unable to afford schooling for their daughters, or wanting 'one less mouth to feed' at home. They also spoke of the lack of employment opportunities leaving adolescents – and their parents – with few, or no, other options apart from marriage, but also of the desire of parents – and of adolescents themselves – to secure a better future for their daughters. Related to poverty and the lack of employment opportunities, non-Roma participants from rural and urban areas also talked of migration being a factor shaping preference for child marriage.

From this, it can be concluded that participants from all four population groups identified strong unconditional preferences for child marriage within their communities, based on factual non-social beliefs, namely the 'factual reality' of poverty. Within Bicchieri et al.'s framework, this means **we can categorise child marriage as a rational response, for all four population groups**.

What category of social practice does child marriage fall under?

As the analysis above has shown, the reasons behind preferences for (and against) child marriage articulated by participants in this study from across the four population were complex and varied. This makes it difficult to determine which social category applies to child marriage for each population group, let alone for the society in Albania as a whole. Instead, the table below attempts to indicate which social categories may be relevant for thinking about child marriage among the four population groups included in this study.

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Table 3: Child marriage as social practice for different population groups in Albania

	Roma living in segregated communities	Roma living in integrated communities	Non-Roma living in rural areas	Non-Roma living in urban areas
Rational response	✓	✓	✓	✓
Custom	✓	✓		
Moral rule	✓	✓		
Descriptive norm	✓	✓		
Social norm	✓	✓	✓	✓

What emerges from this analysis is that while in all population groups, child marriage can be categorised as a social norm (i.e. a response to empirical and normative social expectations) and as a rational response (to poverty), for Roma living in both segregated and integrated communities, it is a practice that is far more complex and which cannot be efficiently categorised within this schema. Any policy and programmatic responses to child marriage need to take the complexities of this reality into account. Interventions aimed at encouraging changes in attitudes and behaviour relating to child marriage are likely to have little effect unless the poverty experienced in communities where child marriage is practised is also addressed. Interventions also need to be considerate of – and sensitive about – the fact that in Roma communities, preferences for child marriage are also shaped by deeply held, personal beliefs relating to the importance ‘honour’ and of custom and tradition. Interventions that do not take this into account are likely to have little impact.

7. Perceptions of options relating to child marriage

This section analyses participants' views on the 'real life' options available to adolescents and young people in regard to marriage timing, but also the beliefs that they express about the acceptability of those options. The analysis reveals that young people's options in relation to marriage, particularly girls' and young women's options, are heavily restricted. These restrictions are the result of a lack of viable alternatives to marriage (e.g. few employment opportunities), but also to the overriding belief that marriage is the only acceptable option for women, in some cases to the exclusion of all other activities, including completing schooling. In addition, social condemnation of relationships other than (heterosexual) marriage – for instance, dating, or cohabiting with, a boyfriend or girlfriend – mean that marriage becomes the only acceptable way for two people to be together.

That said, for the participants of this study, there was significant variation between the different population groups regarding at what point marriage becomes 'the only option' for a girl or a woman. For Roma participants – particularly those living in segregated communities – poverty, a lack of educational and employment opportunities combined with very strong normative social expectations and non-social beliefs around 'honour' and virginity mean that marriage becomes the best or 'the only option' for girls by mid-adolescence. By contrast, some non-Roma participants from urban communities spoke of university and careers as being acceptable options for girls and young women, but still with the expectation that marriage would follow these. Non-Roma participants from urban and rural communities were also restricted by the same normative social expectations around dating and cohabitation, and also reflected that for young women who did not go to university (particularly if this was because their families could not afford it), marriage shortly after the completion of high school remained the best or 'the only option'.

For boys and men from the four population groups, the options around marriage are less restricted. That said, they still do face pressure to marry, and (heterosexual) marriage for them also becomes 'the only option' at some point (usually) after they reach adulthood, as this excerpt from one of the focus groups indicates.

“Pressure from relatives is very big, for example: my little brother was unmarried at 22 years old, which is a rare case among Roma community, and our relatives was saying why is he not married. So one beautiful day our mother, without his approval found him a girl and married him even though he might have been in a relationship with someone else.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

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Boys and men face the same restrictions around dating and cohabiting (but not social pressure relating to 'honour' and virginity), but a far greater range of options in terms of acceptable activities other than marriage. These include completing high school, university, work, and migration. For Roma boys and men, however, in reality these options may be very limited, due to poverty and / or a lack of educational and employment opportunities.

It is also important to note that in all of the focus groups, participants reflected that they believed that young people's options in relation to marriage were changing. For instance, across all of the population groups, participants spoke of how in the past, parents would arrange marriages for their children and choose the marriage partner without consulting them, whereas now, this was very uncommon. If a marriage was arranged, the parents would now consult with their daughter or son. However, increasingly, young people were choosing their own marriage partners.

“The custom is that the decision to get married is taken by the parents, but times have changed and now more often it is the youths who take the decision when and with whom to get married.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban communities]

In addition, it was clear from some of the comments that the option of postponing marriage in favour of education and / or work was now becoming more acceptable, and more realistic, including in some Roma communities.

“The concept of marriage has changed over the years with arranged marriages barely being practised anymore and moving towards marriage out of love. People tend to focus on their education, career and then think of marriage. That had made the age of marriages go up.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

That said, it is important to note that regardless of what beliefs people might have about suitable options for young women and men, practically speaking, young people often faced very limited opportunities, as this key informant remarked.

“Education can be a good opportunity to increase income in the family but this does not always prove to be effective. Also, employment is a good opportunity but in practice it is not working as it should because a lot of young people are unemployed.”

[KII – nurse]

The findings on options – and beliefs about options – facing adolescent girls and young women (and their parents) in the four population groups included in this study are summarised in tables 4, 5, and 6 below. The remainder of this section analyses the findings for each population group in greater detail.

Table 4: Options available to girls and young women: education

	What educational opportunities are available to girls and young women?	Is school / university considered to be an acceptable option for adolescent girls and young women?	What are the options available to a girl who is not in school / university?
Roma living in segregated communities	School – if the family can afford it <i>Education would be a good thing for young people, but the actual situation does not offer good possibilities.</i> [FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]	Yes – with some exceptions	Marriage <i>When you can't afford to send your daughter to school, you marry her to someone to not keep her home, as that shames the family.</i> [FGD – Roma mothers / caregivers living in segregated communities]
Roma living in integrated communities	School; university – if the family can afford it	Yes – with some exceptions <i>Regarding boys, they usually take them to school, even to university. While girls no, because they think that they will take the wrong [path].</i> [FGD – Roma young men living in integrated communities]	Marriage <i>Families who marry girls at a young age for economic reasons were not able to educate them and the best option is marriage.</i> [FGD – Roma mothers / caregivers living in integrated communities]
Non-Roma living in rural communities	School; university – if the family can afford it <i>Economic reasons are a factor as well, they can't afford to send their children to university so they marry them as soon as they finish high school.</i> [FGD – non-Roma fathers / caregivers living in rural areas]	Yes	Marriage <i>When girls don't continue their education, the best solution for them is marriage, because they don't have [anywhere] to work. When they continue education, they make their own choice.</i> [FGD – non-Roma fathers / caregivers living in rural areas]
Non-Roma living in urban communities	School; university – if the family can afford it	Yes <i>This happens because when [girls] finish high school they don't usually go to university and there is nothing for them to do but sit at home so the best decision is for them to get married</i> [FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban areas]	Marriage or work

Table 5: Options available to girls and young women: work

	Are employment opportunities available for girls and young women?	Is work considered to be an acceptable option for girls and young women?	What are the options available to a girl who is not working?
Roma living in segregated communities	No – very limited employment options for anyone	No <i>It is better for her to be married than to go to work and to put her family to shame.</i> [FGD – Roma mothers / caregivers living in segregated communities]	Marriage
Roma living in integrated communities	No – very limited employment options for anyone <i>[It] is impossible to find a job for people, so what to say about young people, what will they do, collect cans, sell something, there is no work. So, they marry them.</i> [FGD – Roma fathers / caregivers living in integrated communities]	No <i>Sometimes [parents] want to send them to work, but are afraid they might make ... mistakes, so they marry them instead.</i> [FGD – Roma young women living in integrated communities]	Marriage or school (if family can afford it)
Non-Roma living in rural communities	No – very limited employment options for anyone <i>Life here in the village doesn't offer any other possibility. There is no employment so marriage is the only solution.</i> [FGD – non-Roma fathers / caregivers living in rural areas]	Yes	Marriage or school or university (if family can afford it) <i>The conditions here don't give [many] options and it is known that a girl, after high school, should either get engaged, or go to university, because there are no other options here, there is no employment.</i> [FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural areas]
Non-Roma living in urban communities	Yes, but limited <i>Lately things have changed a little because tailoring shops have been opened and women have started working there.</i> [FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]	Depends on the family <i>There are families who think it's a taboo for girls to work.</i> [FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]	Marriage or school or university (if family can afford it)

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Table 6: Options available to girls and young women: relationships

	Is it acceptable for young people to date / have a relationship?	Is cohabitation an option for a young couple?	What is the best option for a young couple who want to be together?
Roma living in segregated communities	No <i>... when the youth don't get married at a young age it happens that the girls and the boys form relationships that are unwanted and words start to spread and everything is over.</i> [FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]	No <i>If I know you are living together with someone I shoot you straight in the head because you don't have an honour...</i> [FGD – Roma fathers / caregivers living in segregated communities]	Marriage
Roma living in integrated communities	No	No	Marriage <i>... if a girl falls in love with a boy her parents marry them right away because they want to make sure she is still pure when she gets married.</i> [FGD – Roma young women living in integrated communities]
Non-Roma living in rural communities	No <i>It is not acceptable to continue their relationship, especially here in the village.</i> [FGD – non-Roma mothers / caregivers living in rural areas]	No <i>Living together doesn't happen in our community and is considered as immoral and very bad, so we either get married or not at all.</i> [FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural areas]	Marriage
Non-Roma living in urban communities	In some circumstances <i>They talk, they go out, they get into a relationship.... These things never used to happen</i> [FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban communities]	In some circumstances <i>There are many cases when young people start to cohabit after finishing high school, so around 18. Those that were in a relationship during high school live together when they start the university in Tirana.</i> [FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban communities]	Marriage

Roma living in segregated communities

Analysis of the data from focus group discussions with Roma living in segregated communities reveals that for these participants, options available to adolescents – particularly girls – are very restricted. Marriage emerges as the only, or the best, acceptable option for adolescent girls. For instance, younger women FGD participants reflected that marriage was the only way for an adolescent girl to escape an abusive environment at home, or for her mother to place her in (what she views as) relative safety.

"I married my daughter at 12. [My] husband was a drug addict; I had nowhere to keep my daughter."

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

This implication behind this excerpt – that a parent would think her 12-year-old daughter would be safer married than living at home – underline both the limited options that women like this feel they have for seeking help and / or leaving (presumably) abusive relationships themselves, and the attachment to the idea that marriage is the best option for securing an adolescent girl's future.

Education

Participants from segregated Roma communities spoke of educational opportunities for young people as being very limited, with older men mentioning that school was not an option at all for Roma children and adolescents, because of lack of money. Younger men reflected on the lack of educational opportunities:

“Education would be a good thing for young people, but the actual situation does not offer good possibilities.”

[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

Older women and younger men both spoke of how if a family cannot afford to send a daughter to school, the only, or best option, is to marry her off. The reason for marriage being the best solution, for both groups of participants was that a girl neither in school, nor married, would be a source of shame for her parents, as her ‘honour’ would be compromised.

It is important to note that for one participant at least, marriage did not close down completely the option of continuing with school.

“There are some cases that after you get married, the husband’s family may let you continue school, like it happened to my daughter.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

Work

None of the participants in focus groups from this population group discussed employment opportunities at all, perhaps implying that there are none, or none worth discussing.

Nevertheless, on the subject of work as an option for adolescent girls, older women expressed strongly the view that work was not an acceptable activity for girls.

“It is better for her to be married then to go to work and to put her family to shame.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

Again, this was linked to deeply held beliefs about the importance of ‘honour’, and fears of the shame that would result if a girl’s ‘honour’ were under question.

By contrast, participants had the expectation that boys should work.

“... married boys must work to bring money at home, but often they are unemployed and pass their days in bars, drinking.”

[FGD – Roma young women living in segregated communities]

Relationships

Dating, or even socialising with members of the opposite sex, were not considered acceptable for adolescents by participants from this population group.

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“... when the youth don’t get married at a young age it happens that the girls and the boys form relationships that are unwanted and words start to spread and everything is over.”
[FGD – Roma young men living in segregated communities]

Some participants also had very strong views on cohabitation.

“If I know you are living together with someone I shoot you straight in the head because you don’t have honour... take you daughter home and get her properly married not this living together thing.”

[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

As a result, if an adolescent is already in a relationship, the only option is marriage.

Older women and men also spoke of how they viewed marriage as the only option to preserve a girl’s ‘honour’.

“There is no other way to preserve her virginity than for her to get married.”
[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

Also significant is this statement, made by an older man.

“If the girl reaches 20, she doesn’t marry anymore.”
[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

This implies that conversely, after the age of 20, marriage ceases to be an option at all.

Roma living in integrated communities

Focus groups with Roma living in integrated communities indicate that adolescent girls from this community have more options in relation to education, but face the same restricted options relating to work and relationships as Roma girls living in segregated communities.

Education

Younger women focus group participants felt that some girls have a wider range of options now in relation to education, including the option of going to university, if their parents can afford to send them. That said, discussion with this group and with younger men indicated that many girls still do not have this option.

Once out of education (whether she drops out or completes high school, or university), focus group discussions with all four age groups indicate that the only, or best option for a girl is to marry.

“They finish school and you can’t do anything other than to marry them, because as a girl grows up she must marry, we won’t keep her home for nothing, she must go to her husband.”
[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

This means that just as for Roma girls living in segregated communities, the participants in this study felt that marriage is seen as the only, or best option, for a girl who is not in education.

Once married, older women, for their part, felt that education was no longer an option.

When the girls get married at 16 do they continue school? Generally, what happens?

“No, no, no in very few cases. That’s not how it works in our community.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in segregated communities]

Work

Older women and men who participated in the focus groups reflected on the lack of employment opportunities available for young people.

“Employment is good for young people but the current situation doesn’t offer such examples.”

[FGD – Roma mothers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

For one participant, the lack of employment options meant that for all young people, male and female, marriage becomes the only option.

“[It] is impossible to find a job for anyone, so what to say about young people, what will they do, collect cans, sell something, there is no work. So, they marry them.”

[FGD – Roma fathers/caregivers living in integrated communities]

That said, just as with Roma living in segregated communities, many parents do not see work as an acceptable option for girls who have dropped out or completed school, because it would bring them into contact with men.

“Sometimes [parents] want to send them to work, but are afraid they might make ... mistakes, so they marry them instead.”

[FGD – Roma young women living in integrated communities]

Relationships

Focus group participants indicated that it would not be an acceptable option for young people to date or have a relationship. As with Roma living in segregated communities, if parents found out that a young couple were having a relationship, or if a young girl was ‘kidnapped’ and left home to be with her boyfriend, the only option would be for the parents to marry them.

“... if a girl falls in love with a boy her parents marry them right away because they want to make sure she is still pure when she gets married.”

[FGD – Roma young women living in integrated communities]

Non-Roma living in rural communities

Findings from focus groups with this population group indicate that while adolescent girls living in rural areas appear to have more options than Roma girls in regard to education, including the option of going to university, they face very limited employment opportunities, and the same restrictions on dating and relationships as adolescent girls living in Roma communities. In addition, as with Roma girls and young women, once out of education, marriage becomes the only, or the best, acceptable option.

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Education

Focus group discussions with all four age groups indicated that for these participants, it was considered 'normal' for girls to have the option of completing high school. Indeed, girls were expected to finish high school. That said, participants were clearly aware of individual families who could not afford to continue to send their daughters to school after a certain level; in such cases, marriage was again seen as the only, or best option.

“When the family can’t afford to take the girl to school, they don’t have any other option [other] than find her a husband and marry her.”

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural areas]

University was considered to be an option for young women as well as young men, but only if their parents could afford it. If not, once again, marriage was seen as the only, or best option for a girl once she had completed high school.

“When girls don’t continue their education, the best solution for them is marriage, because they don’t have [anywhere] to work. When they continue education, they make their own choice.”

[FGD – non-Roma fathers/caregivers living in rural areas]

Significantly, some participants did not see marriage as closing down entirely the option of further schooling and / or higher education.

“.. there are women here who are engaged or married and have children and go to university.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in rural communities]

Work

Older men and younger women from this population group spoke of the limited employment opportunities available. If a girl or young woman had left education and was not working, then the only or best option was marriage.

“There is no employment [in the village] so marriage is the only solution.”

[FGD – non-Roma fathers/caregivers living in rural areas]

Relationships

As with Roma adolescents, participants in the focus groups with this population group were clear that adolescents did not have the option of dating or having a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend. This means that if a young couple wanted to be together, the only option would be marriage.

“Living together doesn’t happen in our community and is considered immoral and very bad, so we either get married or not at all.”

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in rural areas]

Participants also pointed out that for young people living in rural areas, the opportunities for meeting people are very limited. In the context of marriage being seen as so important (and ultimately, the 'only option'), this means that when a potential spouse appeared, agreeing to marriage would be the best option, regardless of age.

“Here is also the issue of the mentality, they don’t have many opportunities to meet people, they are isolated so as soon as the first chance arrives, they agree to marriage.”

[FGD – non-Roma fathers / caregivers living in rural communities]

Box 10: Marriage is the only way to be together

‘I told her father that either he let us date or we would get married.’

My story is a little out of the ordinary, but it worked out in the end. I met a girl when I was in 9th grade and we started going out, but after 9th grade was over, her father didn’t send her to school anymore because he was a little fanatic. So, I couldn’t meet with her anymore, so I wanted to marry her and I went to her house to ask for her hand in marriage. I told her father that either he let us date or we would get married. At first, he said that she was young, but then he agreed and in the end we got married.

At first I was a little embarrassed because none of my friends had gotten married at that point and they all tried to talk me out of it. My wife was embarrassed as well because we were young and we didn’t know anything about marriage. But we learned overtime and we have been married for 3 years now, we don’t have any children, but that is because we are taking it slow. I finished high school and my wife goes to high school part time, and then we will see how it goes.

[II - Non-Roma young man, married before the age of 18]

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'My father didn't let me go back to school ... and he said that I could do that or whatever I wanted after I got married.'

I fell in love with a boy who was 4 years older than me. I was in my first year of high school, but he actually liked me since 9th grade, so we started going out and I was 16 at the time. Then he migrated to Italy and came back after a while. Then my parents found out about our relationship and my father threatened to not let me go to school if I continued seeing him so I agreed with him on that. I also knew that going to school was the best way to meet with him. So we did that, until three months after I had started my second year my father found out and he didn't let me go to school anymore.

Then we decided to get engaged, and after a few tries my father finally agreed. I was 17. My father didn't let me go back to school after that and he said that I could do that or whatever I wanted after I got married. We got married after a few months, while I was 17 and he was 21.

After I turned 18 we made it official to the city hall and I went back to school. We have been married for 5 years, and it has been good. Our biggest challenge was when we had a kid because of all the expenses but we both work and we work it out.

[II - Non-Roma young woman, married before the age of 18]

Non-Roma living in urban communities

According to focus group participants from non-Roma urban communities, the option of completing high school and continuing to university was available to girls (and boys), but only if their parents could afford it. If not, then as with other population groups, marriage was the only or best option for a girl no longer in education. Employment was also an option for some girls and young women, but once again, for a girl or young woman not in education or employment, the only or best option was marriage. Young women also did not have the option of migration, which was available for young men; rather, marriage was the only way for a girl or young woman to migrate. Finally, as with every other group included in this study, marriage was seen as the best option for a young couple to be together; however, younger participants did give examples of young couples cohabiting (perhaps without their parents' knowledge).

Education

While participants from all four age groups agreed that completing high school, and going on to university, were options for adolescent girls and boys, they acknowledged that financial constraints restricted this option for some families. As with other groups, in this case, marriage was seen as the only or best option for a girl.

"We try very hard to get them to finish high school, and who is lucky gets to do that, but not all families have an opportunity to do that so that leads to girls getting married and boys trying to find a job to support their families and themselves."

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban areas]

Younger men also reflected that it was still unusual for a girl to go to university, while young men now have the option of migration. This functions to further delay marriage for men.

“Boys usually migrate to other countries because they need the income and to secure their lives, so that is why they get married later.”

[FGD – non-Roma young men living in urban areas]

Work

Older and younger women reflected that there were few employment opportunities for anyone in the neighbourhoods where they lived, although younger women noted that some employment opportunities were beginning to open up for women.

“Lately things have changed a little because tailoring shops have been opened and women have started working there.”

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban areas]

That said, both older and younger women noted that some families do not consider work to be an acceptable option for girls and young women.

“There are very few employment opportunities like the fish factory, the shoe factory but even there [wages are low] and most parents are fanatics [and do not] let their daughters work. For them it’s better to get married so they are in control.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban areas]

Relationships

Once again, for this population group, dating or having a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend does not appear to be an option for young people, and if a couple want to be together, marriage is the only or best option.

“There are cases when they fall in love and they start dating when they are young so the families feel pressured to marry them.”

[FGD – non-Roma mothers/caregivers living in urban areas]

That said, some younger people had alternative views on this, indicating that in urban areas, perhaps options are now a little more flexible.

“Those that were in a relationship during high school live together when they start university in Tirana. In this way, they spend less with the rent, too and manage to save money.”

[FGD – non-Roma young women living in urban communities]

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Box 11: When marriage is the only option

'I wouldn't have gotten married that young either, but I got pregnant.'

I started out with a bad experience. I was a teenager and I started dating this guy when I was in 9th grade, so I was like 15 years old. He was a senior in high school. At first we were very secretive and I was trying to hide it from my parents. I was a good student and I continued high school. I was 16 at the time and when we started being sexually active, we weren't careful and I got pregnant.

I had previously told my mum that I had met someone, but no more than that. Then I was starting to show, so I told him to come to ask for my hand at my house. It was very problematic, but with the help of God everything turned right. He came to my house and at first my dad disagreed, because I was doing well in school and he was unemployed and so on. But I told my father that that's who I wanted to marry. Then I told him that if he didn't let me I would go away from the house. I also told him I was pregnant and they had no other option but to agree.

We had the wedding when I was 17 and after 6 months of being married I had my baby, which was 4 months before I turned 18. At first it was very hard, because I had no idea how to take care of a baby, but my mother-in-law helped me and eventually I got the hand of it. When we got married a lot of people were talking about us and things seemed really bad. But then things started to turn around. Now I continue high school part time and I might go to university as well.

I don't even consider that option for [my daughter] to have it as hard as I did. I wouldn't have gotten married that young either, but I got pregnant. I won't think of marrying my daughter before she is 23 and after she has finished university. That goes for my son as well. I got married with love and it worked out in the end, but I wouldn't want my children to go through that.

[II - Non-Roma young woman, married before the age of 18]

8: Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

While not designed to be representative, this study has provided important insights into knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions relating to child marriage in Albania. The findings reveal that while levels of knowledge of the legislation relating to child marriage and of the negative impacts of the practice are high, child marriages still happen in all of the four population groups included in the study. Within Roma communities in particular, many people continue to support the practice, due to a complex combination of strong social expectations, belief in the importance of child marriage as a custom or tradition and for ensuring 'honour', and the realities of living in poverty and overcrowded conditions. This was the case among women and men participants, and among older and younger people. Any policy and programme interventions with these communities need to be similarly complex and comprehensive.

Analysis of the options available to girls and young women in relation to education, work, and relationships also revealed that for all four population groups, marriage remains the best – or 'only' – option for being in a relationship, and was usually seen to be exclusive, i.e. not a life course that could be combined with education and / or employment. This is clearly beginning to change for girls and young women living in urban areas, where girls and young women now appear to have the option of delaying marriage until they have finished higher education and gained employment, and also where pre-marital relationships are now becoming socially acceptable. However, for girls living in rural areas and from Roma communities, significant changes will need to take place in order to open up options to girls and young women beyond marriage. These changes will need to happen in the realm of gendered social norms and what are considered as acceptable life courses for women, as well as in terms of improving the accessibility of education at secondary level and beyond, and improving economic conditions and employment opportunities. Only this way will girls and young women begin to have 'real' life options, in addition to marriage.

Recommendations

Once the data analysis and the draft of this report had been completed, the findings were shared at roundtable events with stakeholders in Korça, Durrës, Lezha, and Tirana. Participants from municipal and city authorities, police departments, regional education directorates, social service departments, health institutions, local courts, and NGOs engaged in discussions on the study's findings and identification of potential follow-up interventions to address the phenomenon.

The following recommendations are based on the findings and analysis of the study, as well as on recommendations made by participants of these round table events.

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The overall recommendation stemming from this study is that the government should address child marriage through policy measures at the central and local level, determining the interventions, related budgets as well as roles and responsibilities of various public entities. Considering the complex challenges of this phenomenon, actions with regard to child marriage need to be **mainstreamed** in relevant policy documents and address the cross-sectoriality of public response to it. Policies and action plans that could play the most significant role in countering child marriage are those in the area of gender equality, birth registration, education and vocational training, sexual and reproductive health, women's and girls' economic empowerment, social inclusion particularly of Roma, rural development, youth, justice, etc. These policy measures need to approach the issue from these directions:

1. Sensitising and educating;
2. Creating alternatives for children other than marriage;
3. Prevention and support for children affected by child marriage.

The following further detail the recommended approaches:

Sensitising and educating

- Work in a consistent and long term fashion with Roma and remote rural communities to encourage changes in attitudes, and ultimately behaviours around child marriage and other norms that affect it. Interventions must target the individual, the family as well as the community.
- Engage actors who are close to these communities and have their trust to carry out this work. The most suitable actors to carry out this role are service providers, such as teachers, health workers, social welfare professionals as well as community influencers, such as heads of communities, young activists, civil society employees, peers, etc. To this end, these actors should become recipients of awareness, sensitisation and capacity development investments, with a view to approach the community with the right messages, while using effective approaches and channels of communications.
- The messages discouraging child marriage, while anchored within the violence against children, public health and gender-based violence discourse, must be combined and be delivered in the framework of overall gender equality, girls' empowerment, value of the child, benefits of education, rights of victims, and challenge forced and early marriage myths and beliefs around 'honour' and virginity.
- Actively engage boys and men through community mapping and bystander intervention programmes in which they speak out against child marriage.

- Promote positive cases of girls, particularly from Roma communities, who have continued in education and have been able to provide a better life for themselves.
- Work with girls at risk of child marriage to empower them and encourage them to challenge gender inequality and to embrace alternative life options to marriage. Activities could include girls' clubs and girls' safe spaces, mentoring, highlighting women role models, and life-skills training.
- Undertake adolescent pregnancy prevention through interventions such as: information provision, sexuality and health education, life skills building, contraceptive counselling and service provision, and the creation of supportive environments. Offer interventions that combine curriculum-based sexuality education with contraceptive promotion to adolescents, in order to reduce pregnancy rates among adolescents.
- Encourage schools and community centres to play a more active role in raising awareness about these kinds of social issues, not only among children and adolescents, but also among parents and families.
- Make strategic use of media, as a public education tool, to draw attention to cases and negative consequences of child marriage.

Creating alternatives for children other than marriage

- Overall, there need to be attractive alternatives for children other than marriage, both from the perspective of the family/parents and for young people themselves. To this end policies and programmes must be put in place and implemented to lessen the economic burden of adolescents on the family and to enable young people to establish an independent life, such as: economically feasible education, access to housing, access to employment, access to health and other social services.
- Implement programmes and strategies that increase children's and particularly girls' access to education and financial opportunities, as these can either directly or indirectly delay marriage. These strategies may include:
 - Step up initiatives in the education sector to increase the integration of Roma children at school from the early years, to build and encourage their aspiration for intellectual, professional, and cultural advancement, which directly impacts on the age of marriage.
 - Provide support to children from poor families to continue education. Free books and transport should be provided to children from poor families for high school, not just for compulsory education.
 - Develop financial schemes to support girls coming from families with difficult economic situations, especially to Roma girls, who want to pursue education or to follow professional courses, rather than high school.

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Prevention and support for children affected by child marriage

- The capacity of frontline service providers such as Child Protection Workers, Police, Health, Social Welfare, Education, Heads of communities, Legal and Psychosocial sectors must be improved to enable them to recognise child marriage as a child protection issue and address it as such, in a way that promotes inter-sectoral collaboration. To this end, effective reporting mechanisms to encourage victims of forced and child marriage to report the offence must be made available.
- Make available and accessible sexual and reproductive health services, including information and materials, particularly investing in outreaching the segregated communities as well as rural and remote areas, while intentionally targeting adolescents, with a view to prevent child marriage.
- Support affected children and young people to make use of second chance classes to enable them to follow education even after being married and create opportunities for themselves.
- Prioritise assistance to young married people to find a job, by creating opportunities to open a small business, and with housing programmes.
- Encourage frontline service providers to support young couples who have become parents to develop life and parenting skills.

Annex 1: International standards

International treaties

The first UN document to address consent in marriage and early marriage was the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** (1948) (Article 16). This laid the ground for UN General Assembly Resolution 843 (IX) (1954), which states that child marriage is inconsistent with the UDHR and urges states to 'to take all appropriate measures [. . .] [to eliminate completely] child marriages and the betrothal of young girls before the age of puberty.⁷⁵' The 1962 **United Nations Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages** again stated that marriage required the full and free consent of both spouses, and that states should set a legal minimum age for marriage, but did not state what that age should be.

The issue of full and free consent in marriage was reiterated in the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)** (1966), Article 10, and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** (1966), Article 23.

Child marriage is specifically addressed in the **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** (1979), along with wider issues relating to women's sexual and reproductive rights. Article 16 of the Convention states that 'the betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect.' While the treaty does not specify a minimum marriage age, General Comment No.21 (1994) by the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (the monitoring body for CEDAW) 'considers that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both man and woman', and notes the harmful impact of the practice on the girl child spouse's health, education, financial autonomy, and right to choose her own partner.⁷⁶

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) does not specifically address child marriage. However, the CRC does consider harmful traditional practices (Article 24), and a number of the CRC's provisions also address violations of children's rights that occur in the context of child marriage, such as violence against children (Article 19), sexual abuse and exploitation of children (Article 34), and denial of access to education (Article 28). General Comment No. 4 (2003) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (which monitors compliance with the CRC), calls on States party to set 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage for women and men. In addition, the Comment states that child marriage constitutes a harmful traditional practice that negatively affects girls' reproductive and sexual rights.⁷⁷

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child both frequently raise child marriage as an issue to be addressed in their Concluding Observations on signatory states' periodic reports.⁷⁸

The **United Nations General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women** (1993) does not include early marriage or forced marriage within its definition of violence against women, but does call upon states party to act to protect women and girls from harmful traditional practices, and from forms of violence that often occur within early marriages.⁷⁹

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Regional instruments

The Council of Europe reiterated the importance of a minimum age for marriage in the **Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** (1950). Article 12 of the Convention provides that 'men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and to found [a] family.'⁸⁰

The **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)** addressed child marriage in its **Resolution on Forced Marriages and Child Marriages** (2005). Among its recommendations, the Resolution urges member states: to refrain from recognising forced marriages and child marriages contracted abroad except where recognition would be in the victims' best interests; to facilitate the annulment of forced marriages; and to consider criminalising forced marriage as a specific offence. Coercive sexual relations within forced and child marriages should be considered as rape, the Resolution also recommends.⁸¹

The Council of Europe **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention)** prohibits forced marriage, but does not deal specifically with child marriage.

International plans of action

ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action

Recognising the negative impacts of early marriage on reproductive rights and, ultimately, development, the agreed Programme of Action following the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in 1994 calls on state parties to discourage early marriage, and to create a socio-economic environment 'conducive to the elimination of all child marriages.'⁸² The ICPD Programme of Action also reaffirms that all marriages should be founded on the free and full consent of both spouses.

The governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, adopted and committed to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing PfA), which devoted one of its strategic objectives to realising the rights of the girl child. In relation to early marriage, clauses included: enforcing laws to ensure that marriage is only entered into with the free and full consent of both intending spouses; enforcing laws concerning the minimum age of marriage; and raising the legal minimum age of marriage where necessary.

The MDGs and the SDGs

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not directly address child marriage, MDG3, indicator 3.1 (the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education) and the two targets under MDG5 (Target 5.A: reduction of the maternal mortality ratio; and Target 5.B: universal access to reproductive health) were relevant to encouraging states party to challenge the practice.⁸³

Ending the practice of child marriage globally is included in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls'. Target 5.3 is to 'Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation'.⁸⁴ Given the links between child marriage, adolescent fertility, and maternal and neonatal mortality, reducing the number of girls marrying and having children is also integral to the realisation of SDG3, 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages'. The specific relevant targets under SDG3 are: 3.1: reduce the global maternal mortality ratio; 3.2: end preventable deaths of new-borns and children under 5 years of age; and 3.7: ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services.⁸⁵

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Annex 2: Drivers and impacts of child marriage identified at global, regional, and national level

Drivers of child marriage

Gender inequality

*Although child marriage is often against the law ... it persists because it is a deeply embedded social norm associated with perceptions of femininity and masculinity and is considered critical to upholding societal values.*⁸⁶

Underlying the practice of child marriage in every region are social norms upholding gender inequality.⁸⁷ Child marriage is driven by the lack of value placed on girls' education and potential professional fulfilment, the links made between controlling girls' and women's sexuality and wider family and community 'honour', the perception that women's role should be confined to domestic labour and child rearing, and the often-unquestioned assumption that a 'good wife' is an obedient, servile spouse.

In addition, in many communities where child marriage is practised, children in general and girls in particular have very little say over decisions that affect their lives made at the household level, as social norms dictate that they are expected to obey their parents and elders. This makes it difficult for them to challenge the decision to take a girl out of school and to marry her off.⁸⁸

Lack of value placed on girls' education

Girls' education, and parents' attitudes to girls' education, are strong determining factors in regard to child marriage. To put it simply, the longer a girl stays in school the later she will marry.⁸⁹ When parents see little value in educating girls, on the basis that their destiny is to marry and have children, rather than to work outside the home, then this can be used as a justification for removing them from school, placing them at greater risk of child marriage.⁹⁰

It is important to note, however, that in addition to not valuing girls' education, other factors may influence a decision to take a girl out of school, including practical barriers such as the distance a girl has to travel to school, the poor quality of the education provided, negative attitudes of teachers towards female students, and the failure of schools to keep girls safe from sexual harassment and other forms of violence.⁹¹ Once out of school, whatever the reasons for her dropping out, a girl is at much greater risk of marriage.

Controlling girls' sexuality and mobility

Justifications for removing girls from school and for marrying them early often relate to social norms around controlling girls' freedom of movement and social interaction, in order to ensure that they do not have premarital sexual relations that could affect their and their family's 'honour'. These arguments are also given to justify removing a girl from school, where she might come into contact with boys.⁹²

Marriage as the only option for girls

Closely linked to the lack of value placed on girls' education and the desire to control girls' sexuality and social interaction is the attitude that marriage represents the only acceptable future for girls.⁹³ Research from different contexts has shown how parents often feel that it is important for their family's status, and part of their duties towards their daughter, to secure a 'good match' for her, and to do this as soon as possible: this helps drive child marriage.⁹⁴ In addition, the perception that child spouses will be more obedient and subservient than older women, and will accept traditional gender roles within the household, is another factor driving the practice.⁹⁵

Poverty and social exclusion

*The girls most likely to marry before the age of 18 reside in rural and remote areas, have little or no education, and reside in the poorest households.*⁹⁶

At the global, regional, and national level, many studies have shown that poverty is a key driver of child marriage.⁹⁷ Families may justify marrying off a daughter as this will mean 'one less mouth to feed' at home when the girl moves to live with her husband,⁹⁸ while girls may agree to a marriage as a way of escaping overcrowding and lack of money at home.⁹⁹ In societies where bride price or dowry is paid, this can also be a factor in the decision.¹⁰⁰

Poverty combined with social exclusion may also push young people into marriage, if they and their families see no realistic opportunities for securing decent employment in the face of discrimination and marginalisation. This has been a consistent finding in research on child marriage in Roma communities, which experience high levels of poverty and social exclusion across Europe.¹⁰¹

High levels of migration, often linked to poverty, have also been shown to drive child marriage, as men migrating reduces the number of 'suitable' men for marriage, meaning that parents want to marry their daughters off as soon as possible.¹⁰² Finally, child marriage is also strongly associated with living in remote rural areas.¹⁰³

Inconsistent or poorly implemented legal protections

Most countries have legislation in place specifying a minimum marriage age (although this may be lower than 18), and many others have legislation in place specifically criminalising child marriage and / or forced marriage. However, the failure of state agencies to enforce legislation can leave adolescents unprotected. Laws criminalising forced marriage or child marriage are often not enforced effectively,¹⁰⁴ due to police or court reluctance to interfere in 'private' or 'cultural' matters. This is particularly the case when child marriages and forced marriages take place in minority communities.¹⁰⁵ Weak national birth registration can also make it difficult to enforce the legal minimum marriage age.¹⁰⁶

Child marriage

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions among affected communities in Albania

'Shocks': economic transition, conflict, and natural disaster

Studies have found that in communities where child marriage is already an established social norm, 'shocks' such as violent conflict, economic collapse, or natural disaster can push more parents to decide to marry off their daughters. A 'shock' at the household level, such as the death of a primary income earner, can also result in households deciding to marry off young daughters.¹⁰⁷ Anecdotal evidence from Kosovo suggests that rates of child marriage there went up during the conflict in 1999, as parents married off their daughters to protect them, and girls who had been orphaned and / or left as the heads of households sought protection and a breadwinner.¹⁰⁸ Increased rates of child marriage have been recorded among refugees fleeing the war in Syria.¹⁰⁹

Young people choosing to marry

In some cases of child marriage, an adolescent may choose to get married, to another adolescent or to an older partner. However, this decision may be influenced by other factors, such as poverty and over-crowding at home, unplanned pregnancy, pressure to marry from parents when they find out that a girl is dating, or a desire to escape an unhappy home life.¹¹⁰

Impacts of child marriage

Early motherhood

At the global level, most adolescent girls who give birth are already married or living in some form of union sanctioned by their family and community.

In many cases of child marriage, married adolescents have little control over whether or not to become pregnant, and over the number, spacing and timing of pregnancies; they are often under a lot of pressure to have a baby within a year of the marriage.¹¹¹ This leaves them at risk of unwanted pregnancies, as well as of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.¹¹² Child spouses' access to reproductive health services may also be limited, either because of a lack of appropriate and accessible services, or because husbands and in-laws stop child spouses from attending clinics, or insist on accompanying them.¹¹³

The younger a girl becomes pregnant, the greater the risks to her health.¹¹⁴ Adolescent pregnancy remains a major contributor to maternal and child mortality. Lack of physical maturity means that pregnancy-related complications are a leading cause of deaths among girls age 15-19 in developing countries, and studies have shown that 15 to 19-year old mothers are twice as likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth compared to mothers aged between 20 and 24, and girls under 15 are five times more likely.¹¹⁵ Adolescent mothers (ages 10 to 19 years) face higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections than women aged 20 to 24 years.¹¹⁶ Girls who survive pregnancy can face reproductive health problems, including obstetric fistula, which can lead to isolation and stigmatisation.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the emotional, psychological and social needs of pregnant adolescent girls can be greater than those of other women. Additionally, some 3.9 million unsafe abortions among girls aged 15 to 19 years occur each year, contributing to maternal mortality and lasting health problems.¹¹⁸

Early childbearing can increase risks for new-borns, as well as young mothers. In low- and middle-income countries, babies born to mothers under 20 years of age face higher risks of low birth weight, preterm delivery, and severe neonatal conditions.¹¹⁹ Children born to mothers under the age of 18 are also at greater risk of stunting and of dying before their fifth birthdays than children born to older mothers.¹²⁰ Married girls' lack of education means they are less likely to have knowledge of issues relating to children's health and nutrition, meaning their children are more likely to be malnourished and less likely to be immunised.¹²¹

Poverty and social exclusion

Household poverty is a key factor driving child marriage in many countries, but it is also an outcome, as child marriage serves to perpetuate extreme poverty and inequality for girls married as children, and for their children.¹²² This is closely linked to school dropout, as failure to complete secondary education means that married girls do not have the skills, knowledge, or vocational training that they need to find jobs in the formal economy, and are less likely to participate in the formal labour force overall.¹²³ This can have the effect of lowering household income overall and keeping households in poverty.

Social exclusion and marginalisation are important factors in driving child marriage, but child marriage also serves to reinforce social exclusion, for instance by contributing to discriminatory attitudes towards communities where it is practised, as well as by helping to keep adolescent girls out of education, employment, and other spaces where they could access formal support to integrate.¹²⁴

School dropout

Child marriage for girls is strongly associated with school dropout and failure to complete secondary education. Indeed, in countries and communities with high prevalence of child marriage, marriage is usually the primary reason for girls leaving education.¹²⁵ If a girl is not taken out of school to marry, then it is highly likely that she will drop out after the marriage takes place, and / or when she becomes pregnant.¹²⁶ This means that married adolescents miss out on acquiring technical skills and knowledge, understanding of health (including reproductive health and rights) and nutrition, and confidence that they would receive at secondary school.¹²⁷ Once again, this makes it more likely that married adolescents will remain in poverty and experience social exclusion as they move into adulthood.

In contexts where boys are affected by child marriage as well, such as in Nepal, and among Roma in south eastern Europe, school dropout prompted by marriage also contributes to keeping married boys, and their spouses and children, in poverty.¹²⁸

Child marriage

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Perpetuation of gender inequality

Just as child marriage is driven by gender inequality, the practice also perpetuates gender inequality. In many communities where child marriage is practised, women move to live with their husband's family following the marriage. A married girl often occupies the lowest status in her husband's family's household and is under the effective control of her husband and in-laws, 'limiting her ability to voice her opinions and form and pursue her own plans and aspirations', as well as her decision-making power within the household.¹²⁹ This power imbalance is often exacerbated by a large age gap between married girls and their spouses.¹³⁰ Isolation limits married girls' opportunities to take part in community and national-level discussions and debates, or engage in political processes.¹³¹

Gender-based violence

Analysts have argued that child marriage is itself a form of gender-based violence,¹³² as in practice, it signals the violation of a girl's right to make decisions about her own body.¹³³ The practice is included in the list of 'harmful traditional practices' associated with gender-based violence included in various international and regional documents relating to women's rights and children's rights.

Child spouses are also more vulnerable to domestic violence and other forms of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse from husbands and in-laws than those who marry later.¹³⁴ Numerous studies have also found that married girls are more likely than older married women to believe that domestic violence against women is justified in certain circumstances.¹³⁵ Child spouses may also not be given adequate clothing or enough to eat, and forced to work long hours inside and outside the home by their husband's family.¹³⁶

In many contexts, married girls' first experiences of sex are often forced and traumatic. The traumatic experience of forced sex can be worsened by the fact that the girl may know nothing or very little about sex before she marries, and be totally unprepared.¹³⁷

Impacts on Psychological and emotional wellbeing

After marriage, married girls may have very limited mobility; their contact with their parents may be controlled or limited,¹³⁸ and they may be stopped by their husbands and in-laws from staying in touch with friends, or may find it too difficult to keep in touch.¹³⁹ Because of this, child spouses can be very isolated and have little access to social support.¹⁴⁰ This, on top of their low status and lack of voice in their husband's family, a large burden of domestic work and child care, and, in some cases, trauma following forced sexual contact or other violence, can have a big impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of married girls.¹⁴¹ However, these are hard to assess, as they may vary in intensity, have long-term emotional consequences, and are not readily visible.

Characteristics of child marriage in Albania

Qualitative research undertaken by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights and by UNFPA has indicated that in Albania, child marriage is an issue overwhelmingly affecting girls, and which particularly affects girls from the Roma minority. That said, it is important not to characterise child marriage as a 'minority' issue. Small-scale, qualitative studies by UNFPA and by the Observatory have indicated that child marriages occur among the general Albanian population, and that girls living in rural areas, in remote, mountain communities and in border areas may be particularly at risk.¹⁴²

It is likely that most marriages involving adolescents are not registered, within Roma communities and the wider population. In two regions of Albania, Korça and Vlora, women who had married before the age of 18 who were interviewed by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights 'were quite often at a loss when asked about the legal situation with their relationship', as cohabitation was viewed as a form of 'social marriage' that was approved by parents and the wider community.¹⁴³ That said, the Observatory's research indicates that child marriages involving non-Roma are more likely to be registered, following an application to the court for the marriage to take place. This is a process that is closely related to registration of children for health purposes and social security benefits, and also to facilitate migration (when the husband was already living abroad).¹⁴⁴

Factors driving child marriage in Albania

Research to date by the Observatory and by UNFPA has indicated that the main factors driving child marriage in Albania are gender inequality, as well as poverty and social exclusion. The courts also appear to play a role in creating an enabling environment for child marriages, as discussed above. Finally, while many child marriages in Albania are arranged by parents, some adolescents choose to marry. However, as has been found in other national contexts, there may be many other factors influencing this decision, including: poverty and over-crowding at home, unplanned pregnancy, pressure to marry from parents when they find out that a girl is dating, or a desire to escape an unhappy home life.¹⁴⁵

Gender inequality

Lack of value placed on girls' education, resulting from gender bias, is a factor driving child marriage in Albania.¹⁴⁶ Research by the Observatory and by UNFPA found that in communities where child marriage is practised, girls and women are encouraged to see marriage and children as their only acceptable future.¹⁴⁷ This then becomes a justification for taking girls out of school, placing them at greater risk of child marriage. This was one of the regional-level findings from research by UNFPA on 14 countries in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region,¹⁴⁸ including Albania; it was also one of the findings of the Observatory's research on child marriage among Roma in Albania.¹⁴⁹

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In UNFPA's regional research, the need to ensure that girls did not lose their virginity before marriage, to ensure the family's 'honour', was cited as an important reason for parents to remove girls from school and for arranging early marriages, to stop them coming into contact with boys.¹⁵⁰ This was also a finding from the Observatory's research on child marriage among Roma in Albania.¹⁵¹

In many communities where child marriage is practised, including among Roma and in remote, mountainous communities in Albania,¹⁵² children in general and girls in particular have very little say over decisions that affect their lives.¹⁵³ UNFPA's research in Albania also found that in remote, rural communities, as well as girls having little or no say over when they married, their mothers also were unable to challenge decisions made by their husbands, meaning that they could not intervene on behalf of their daughters.¹⁵⁴

Poverty and social exclusion

Poverty and social exclusion are important factors driving child marriage. This has been a consistent finding in research on child marriage in Roma communities, including in Albania. Poverty has been shown to push adolescents into marriage for economic reasons, either because their parents want to have 'one less mouth to feed' at home, or because the adolescent herself wants to escape poverty and overcrowding at home.¹⁵⁵ Among Roma, including in Albania, lack of identity documents, high school-dropout rates, high unemployment, overcrowding, and poor access to services are all features of the social marginalisation that this population faces.¹⁵⁶ They are also factors which drive child marriage, with adolescents often feeling that they are left with marriage as the only option.

Linked to poverty, some research indicates that migration is also in some contexts a factor in driving child marriage. In Kosovo and Albania, parents saw marriage to a man who had migrated as a way to secure their daughter's economic security, according to qualitative research by UNFPA and by the Observatory.¹⁵⁷ Data from the focus group discussions conducted for this research also supports this, with several respondents from different population groups mentioning a link between child marriage and migration. However, further research is needed to investigate whether migration is indeed a significant factor driving child marriage in Albania.

Annex 3: Extended Methodology

Information on the selected municipalities

In the four focal regions of this study target municipalities have been further selected based on the concentration of Roma population¹⁵⁸, and based on the percentage of poverty¹⁵⁹.

The selected municipalities where this study was carried out were:

1. Durrës Municipality, which is in the central part of the country and is a coastal municipality. This municipality is the central municipality of the region and it has a moderate rate of poverty (percentage of Poverty is estimated to be 0.141) and a high number of Roma people (577 Roma community members).
2. Sukth administrative unit, which is a unit of Durrës Municipality, is a remote area, and it has the highest level of poverty of all municipalities in Durrës region (percentage of Poverty is 0.211). Roma population is estimated to be only 17 Roma community members.
3. Korça Municipality, which is located in the South-East part of the country and is the central municipality of Korça region. The percentage of poverty in this municipality is estimated to be 0.096, and in the mean time it has the highest concentration of Roma population (784 Roma community members).
4. Pojan administrative unit which is a subdivision of Maliq municipality within Korça region. This administrative unit has a high level of poverty (Percentage of poverty is 0.115), and a low number of Roma population (94 Roma community members).
5. Bilisht administrative unit is an administrative unit of Devoll municipality in Korça region. The town of Bilisht is the most south-eastern city of Albania, and it is 9 km from the border with Greece at Kapshtica. It has a moderate level of poverty (percentage of poverty is 0.085) and a high proportion of Roma people (274 Roma community members).
6. Lezha Municipality is a town and municipality in northwest Albania within Lezha region. It has an average level of poverty (Percentage of poverty is 0.13) and it is the municipality with the highest concentration of Roma population (223 Roma community members).
7. Fushe-Kuqe Administrative unit is a village and a subdivision of the municipality Kurbin within Lezha region. It has a high level of poverty (percentage of poverty is 0.2), and 16 Roma community members.
8. Fan administrative unit is a village and a subdivision of the municipality Mirdita in Lezha region. It has the highest level of poverty within the region (percentage of poverty is 0.238), and it has no Roma community.
9. Tirana Municipality is the capital and largest city of Albania. It is also the heart of Albania's cultural, economic and governmental activity, located on the central-west corner of the country. It has a low level of poverty (Percentage of poverty is 0.092), and it is the municipality with the highest concentration of Roma people within the country (Number of Roma community members is estimated to be 2631).
10. Kamza Municipality is a peripheral municipality in Tirana region. It is the municipality with the highest rate of poverty within the region (Percentage of poverty is 0.252), and it has a very low number of Roma community members (only 5 Roma community members).
11. Rogozhina Municipality is a town and a municipality in Tirana region, centrally located in the Western Lowlands region of Albania. This municipality has a high rate of poverty (percentage of poverty is 0.209) and a high concentration of Roma community by counting 189 Roma community members.

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Information on the FGDs

Focus groups discussions (FGDs) have many advantages as a method for collecting data on people's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and expectations along with information on their individual and community practices. FGDs are highly flexible. They permit the gathering of a large amount of information in a relatively short period of time. A lively group discussion can generate important insights into topics that previously were not well understood (such as, in this case, what shapes preferences and options relating to child marriage), and also for a variety of views to emerge. As FGDs enable group opinions to emerge, they are particularly useful for considering social norms.¹⁶⁰

The following FGDs were conducted separately with Roma and non-Roma participants in each data-collection site:

- with young women aged 18-24;
- with young men aged 18-24;
- with female parents and caregivers aged 25-50; and
- with male parents/caregivers aged 25-50.

This division between different groups based on age was made in order to test if there are differences in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, beliefs about options, perceptions, and preferences between the younger generation and an older generation (young adults and parents/caregivers). In addition, the researchers wanted to make sure that younger respondents would feel comfortable expressing their opinions, which they may have felt uncomfortable doing in the presence of older people, and also to make sure that older respondents did not dominate the discussion or influence what younger people had to say.

Separate focus groups were held with women and men. This was done to ensure that all participants would be able to speak freely, including those from very conservative communities where a mixed discussion group might be deemed inappropriate, and / or where women could potentially be put at risk by speaking out on what is considered to be a sensitive topic. This was also done so as to be able to record gendered differences in views on knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions.

Altogether, 34 FGDs were carried out, detailed in the table below (two FGDs were not used, as these were mixed-gender, and are not included below).

Table 7: Distribution of FGDs

Population group	Number of FGDs	Locations
Male Roma parents / caregivers living in integrated communities	1	Lezha
Female Roma parents/caregivers living in integrated communities	3	Durres; Rogozhina; Korça
Male Roma young people (18 – 24) living in integrated communities	2	Durres; Tirana
Female Roma young people (18 – 24) living in integrated communities	1	Lezha
Male Roma parents/caregivers living in segregated communities	2	Sukth; Tirana
Female Roma parents/caregivers living in segregated communities	1	Fushe Kuqe
Male Roma young people (18 – 24) living in segregated communities	3	Korça; Lezha
Female Roma young people (18 – 24) living in segregated communities	2	Shkoza; Korça
Male Non-Roma parents/caregivers living in rural areas	2	Durres; Pojan
Female Non-Roma parents/caregivers living in rural areas	2	Vaqarr; Sukth
Male Non-Roma young people (18 – 24) living in rural areas	2	Sukth; Vaqarr
Female Non-Roma young people (18 – 24) living in rural areas	3	Bilisht; Fan; Devoll
Male Non-Roma parents/caregivers living in isolated urban areas	2	Bathore, Durres
Female Non-Roma parents/caregivers living in isolated urban areas	2	Bilisht; Lezha
Male Non-Roma young people (18 – 24) living in isolated urban areas	1	Lezha
Female Non-Roma young people (18 – 24) living in isolated urban areas	3	Tirana; Durres; Kamez

FGD participants were identified with the assistance of local facilitators, who are service providers and/or influential persons in the target communities. Difficulties were only faced in identifying young Roma girls not married before 18, since, according to the local facilitators, their number is extremely low. Indeed, in Durrës, it was only possible to find one Roma woman who had not been married before the age of 18 who agreed to participate in the research. This woman was instead interviewed.

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Information on the Individual interviews

While FGDs provided important data on perceptions and social norms, they did not provide 'life narratives' of people affected directly by child marriage, or allow discussion of some of the very sensitive aspects of child marriage practices. Indeed, ethical considerations (namely, protecting the confidentiality and safety of respondents) mean that FGDs would have been an inappropriate method to collect such information, and the questions included in the FGD guide were not tailored to elicit this kind of information.

It is worth mentioning that there were no difficulties in identifying young adults married before the age of 18 from the Roma community. During communications with service providers, and local NGOs that offer services in these communities, it was stated that marriages before the age of 18 are very common in this community, and it is rather difficult to find young people that are not married before 18. By approaching young people married before 18 together with a person that their community knows and trusts, it was not difficult to encourage them to talk to interviewers and express their opinions.

The situation was more different regarding non-Roma communities where the practice of child marriage seems to be not so common. With the assistance of local facilitators, and thanks to the extensive experience that the local staff of the Observatory have in the respective areas, it was possible to identify young adults married before 18. Altogether, 16 Individual Interviews were carried out, detailed in the table below.

Table 8: Distribution of IIs

	Durres	Korça	Lezha	Tirana
Young non-Roma man married before age 18		1	1	
Young non-Roma woman married before age 18	1	1	2	
Young Roma man married before 18	1			1
Young Roma woman married before 18	1	1	1	2
Roma mother whose children married before age 18		1		1
Young Roma woman NOT married before 18	1			

Information on the Key informant interviews

The KII respondents were selected because they are the people in their communities who are most likely to have come into contact with young adults affected by child marriage, and to understand the impacts of the practice. Fifteen KIIs were carried out in total detailed in the table below.

Table 9: Distribution of KIIs

	Durres	Korça	Lezha	Tirana
Teachers		1		2
Health centre employees		1		
Psychologists			1	
Staff from municipality administrations	1		1	1
Social workers	2	1	1	
Staff from civil society organisations				1
Heads of communities		2		

More information on the study implementation

Local staff in each region were responsible for conducting the data collection. The local coordinators made contact with service providers and/or influential persons in certain communities including heads of communities, health centre employees, school staff, municipality staff, social workers, psychologists, etc., who they then interviewed. Furthermore, these persons facilitated the identification and invitation of the FGDs participants and young people married before 18 who were interviewed.

Each group discussion was facilitated by at least two staff members. The focus group moderator asked the questions, and in some cases also took notes. The minute keeper was responsible for writing notes of the discussion. When the participants agreed, the conversations were recorded. After the end of each focus group discussion, the minute keeper transcribed the discussions and shared them with the focus group moderator for double checking. Within the day, data transcribes and notes taken were shared with the central office staff that translated them into English and shared them with the researcher. The same process was followed for the interviews.

Several focus groups were selected randomly to be monitored by UNICEF or UNFPA and by the central office staff from the Observatory.

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Annex 4: Data collection instruments

The data collection instruments were pre-tested in the field and the questions were revised, before being finalised. The first testing was carried out in three FGDs: (1) with a mixed group of Roma parents/caregivers living in segregated communities in Korça region; (2) with young Roma girls living in segregated communities in Tirana region; and (3) with non-Roma parents/caregivers living in isolated urban areas (men only). The aim was to test: (1) How easily understandable were the questions for Roma and non-Roma communities, and how the respondents reacted to them; (2) If the respondents expressed themselves more freely in mixed groups or in divided groups. After the first testing, it was decided that it would be better to have divided groups, and some of the questions had to be reviewed in order to be more understandable for everyone. Once the questions were reviewed a second round of testing was carried out: (1) With Roma parents living in integrated communities (men only) in Korça, and (2) with young girls living in isolated urban areas in Tirana.

Find below the data collection instruments used for this study.

Focus groups discussions guide

At the beginning, after presenting yourself (name and surname and the organisation you represent) as well as people accompanying you read the consent form below by adapting it with your listeners:

First of all, thank you for accepting to take part in this conversation. I would like to share with you the information on the study we are working on and the possibility of your contribution.

Observatory for Children's Rights in cooperation with UNICEF and UNFPA is conducting a study on knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of different communities regarding early / child marriages, with the aim of designing various programs on this subject.

For this reason, we would be interested in what you could tell us about this practice in the community / area where you live. Your participation would be very valuable and important to better understand this topic. The conversation / discussion last about 60-90 minutes. We are going to ask some questions about your perceptions and opinions in order to start a discussion among you. We will not be contributing to the discussion but we will moderate it and ensure that it is kept on track while allowing opportunities for discussion for all.

Please try to voice all your issues but do not interrupt each other. Everyone has the right to contribute to the conversation, so please be respectful of other participants and their opinions. Be free not to answer any questions or to interrupt the conversation if you are not comfortable or if the question is not clear. My colleague and I will be present during the conversation. Only with your approval we will record the conversation. If you would prefer us not to record, then my colleague will note the opinions expressed.

We want to assure you that everything you will say during the discussion will remain anonymous and will be treated with confidentiality – We do not need to know your names or surnames, and nothing you say will be linked to you. You will also be pleased not to discuss what will be said during this focus group with people outside of this group. To ensure the confidentiality of everyone, please do not reveal anyone's identity during the discussion (you are pleased not to mention names, or give personal examples).

If at any point, you decide that you no longer want to take part, please let one of the facilitators know. You are free to leave at any point.

If you do not have any questions, may we proceed?

After having received the oral consent of every participant, please fill the next part, which contains general information that it is not needed to be asked directly to the participants. Please do not ask for any personalised information.

Date:

Location:

Number of participants (at beginning): _____ (at the end): _____

Category:

Age of participants (starting from): _____ (up to): _____

Sex of the participants (males): _____ (females): _____

Starting time:

Ending time:

Focus group facilitator:

Note-taker:

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We are now ready to proceed with the questions!

Notes for the interviewer: The discussion will be based on seven main questions. If you note that you are not getting answers or that the discussion is not going on you may ask the prompt questions which are marked so. The main question is also followed by other explanatory questions.

1. MAIN QUESTION (mq): What can you say in general about marriage / cohabitation in this area / community? / What does marriage mean to you?

PROMT QUESTIONS TO ENSURE ANSWER ON A MAIN QUESTION (Prompt):

Why is marriage important?

What is the role of woman in marriage? What about the role of man?

What is considered a happy marriage?

2. (mq) In your perception/opinion, when is the most appropriate age for marrying? (for girls and boys) Why do you think so?

3. (mq) Usually, in your knowledge, at what age marriages take place? **(It should be clarified that it is not just about formal marriages, but also about living in a union. Participants should also be encouraged to answer about the age when girls marry and the age when boys marry)**

If no one does not mention marriage under 18 years old, will be followed:

3.1. What do you know about cases when marriages happen earlier?

3.2. What is the youngest age you have heard that marriages take place? (for girls and boys)

3.3. What is said about such cases?

3.4. How does the life of young people change when they marry at this age? (for girls and boys)

- How do her / his duties and roles in the family change?

- How do her / his everyday activities change? (for girls and boys)

3.5. What benefits does marriage bring for these young people? (for girls and boys)

3.6. What negative effects do these marriages have? (for girls and boys)

3.7. Do you think that girls / boys are ready to get married at that (early) age?

- Do you think they are ready to be a wife / husband? Why?

- Do you think they are ready to be parents (mother / father)? Why?

4. (mq) In the cases you have heard, who takes the decision for the marriage? **Based on the answer of the first question:** Why do young people / parents / families decide that marriage happens at an early age?

Prompt: What are the reasons that usually lead to marriages at a young age?

- [If someone answers: **For economic reasons**]
 - Wouldn't there be any other option to provide a better life for young people and for families rather than marriage? What would these options be? How accessible are these options by the community?
 - Would youth education be seen as a good investment to increase domestic earnings? Why?
- [If someone answers: **Good thing on the honour / reputation side**]
 - Wouldn't there be any other option to ensure the honour of girls and families? Why?
- [If someone answers: **It is the best thing for the girls / boy**]
 - Would education be seen as a good option too? Why?
- [If someone answers: **Young people choose to marry at that age**]
 - Wouldn't parents encourage them to wait until they finish school / get a job before entering into a marriage?
 - Is it accepted by the community that a boy and a girl continue their 'friendship' / relationship without making it official (through marriage, cohabitation, engagement)? Why?
- [If someone answers: **It is a good thing for other reasons**, ask about these reasons

5. (mq) Are there some ideas/customs/attitudes that promote or discourage marriages at an early age (for girls and boys)? Have these ideas/attitudes changed over time? In what ways?

Prompt: Do families feel pressured to marry their children? What are those pressures? What happens if a family does not marry their daughter/son around that age? How does the community welcome their decision?

6. (mq) What do you know about the legal age for marriage? How do you know that?

If any of the participants answers about the legal age for marriage:

6.1. Is there a way to marry/cohabit before the allowed age? Can marriage / cohabitation / engagement happen before the legal age? If yes, how?

7. (mq) If you think about a girl in your family who is still young (prompt: sister, niece, daughter), do you think she should get married / is ready to get married? Why? What about a young boy in your family?

7.1. If the answer is no:

7.1.1. Why is marriage not a good option for your young (sister, niece, daughter)?

7.1.2. Why is marriage not a good option for your young (brother, nephew, son)?

7.2. If the answer is yes:

7.2.1. Why is marriage a good option for your young (sister, niece, daughter)?

7.2.2. Why is marriage a good option for your young (brother, nephew, son)?

Is there anything else that you need to add?

Finally, thank the participants and give the occasional congratulations. If you are asked about the study and whether it will be published, you should first emphasise that the study will be general and their thoughts are very valuable, but the personal information they provide will not be displayed any longer. Promise to notify if there are any publications on the topic discussed.

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Key informant interviews

At the beginning, after presenting yourself (name and surname and the organisation you represent) as well as people accompanying you read the consent form below:

First of all, thank you for accepting to take part in this conversation. I would like to share with you the information on the study we are working for and the possibility of your involvement through an interview.

Observatory for Children's Rights in cooperation with UNICEF and UNFPA is conducting a study on knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of different communities regarding early / child marriages, with the aim of designing various programs on this subject.

For this reason, we would be interested in what you could tell us about this practice in the community / area where you work / provide services. Your participation would be very valuable and important to better understand the situation on this topic.

The conversation / interview lasts about 30-45 minutes. Your participation is willingly and volunteered. Be free not to answer any questions or to interrupt the conversation if you are not comfortable or if the question is not clear. My colleague and I will be present in the conversation. Only with your approval will we record the conversation. If you would prefer us not to record, my colleague will note the opinions expressed.

We want to assure you that the conversation will remain anonymous - so it is not necessary to know your name or surname. Anything you say here will be treated confidentially, and nothing you say will be aligned to you.

If you do not have any questions, may we proceed?

After having received the consent of the respondent, please fill the next part:

Date: _____
Location: _____
Institution: _____
Function: _____

We are now ready to proceed with the questions:

1. What can you say in general about marriage / cohabitation in this area / community?

Prompt:

Why is marriage considered important?

What are the female and male roles in the marriage?

At what age do marriages usually happen in this area/community (for girls and boys)?

- **If the interviewee declares that marriages occur above the age of 18 years, follows:**

What can you say about marriages under 18 in this community? In your opinion, which gender or groups of people are involved?

2. Who takes the decision regarding the marriage? Depending on the answer: Why do young people / parents / family / or others decide that marriage happens at an early age?

Prompt: What are the reasons that usually lead to early / child marriages? Do people find it ok to marry girls / boys before they finish 9 years of education? Before they find a job? Why?

- [If the answers is: **for economic reasons**]
- Wouldn't there be any other option to provide a better life for young people and for families rather than marriage? What would these options be? How accessible are these options by the community?
- Would youth education be seen as a good investment to increase domestic earnings? Why?
- [If the answers is: **good thing on the honour / reputation side**]
- Wouldn't there be any other option to ensure the honour of girls and families? What would these options be?
- [If the answers is: **it is the best thing for the girl / boy**]
- Would education be seen as a good option too? Why?
- [If someone answers: **Young people choose to marry at that age**]
- Wouldn't parents encourage them to wait until they finish school / get a job before entering into a marriage?
- Is it accepted by the community that a boy and a girl continue their 'friendship' / relationship without making it official (through marriage, cohabitation, engagement)? Why?
- [If the answers is: **it is a good thing for other reasons**, ask about these reasons.

3. Are there some ideas/customs/attitudes that promote or discourage marriages at an early age (for girls and boys)? Have these ideas/attitudes changed over time? In what ways?]

Prompt: Do families feel pressured to marry their children? What are those pressures? What happens if a family does not marry their daughter/son around that age? How does the community welcomes their decision?

4. How does the life of girls and boys change after marriage (especially when marriage takes place at an early age)?

- What are the positive impacts (for girls and boys)?
- What about the negative impacts (for girls and boys)?
- Are these impacts known by young people, by the family, by the community?

5. Are people familiar with the legal age for getting married?

6. In case when the expected age of marriage differs from the legal age, how do people decide what to do? What motivates this decision-making process? What happens?

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Individual interviews with young people married before the age of 18 years old

At the beginning, after presenting yourself (name and surname and the organisation you represent) as well as people accompanying you read the consent form below:

First of all, thank you for accepting to have this conversation together. I would like to share with you the information on the study we are working for and the possibility of your involvement through an interview.

Observatory for Children's Rights in cooperation with UNICEF and UNFPA is conducting a study on knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of different communities regarding early / child marriages, with the aim of designing various programs on this subject.

For this reason we would be interested in what you could tell us about this practice in the community where you live, as well as regarding your experience if you want to share it. Your participation would be very valuable and important to better understand the situation on this topic.

The conversation / interview lasts about 30-45 minutes. Your participation is willingly and volunteered. Be free not to answer any questions or to interrupt the conversation if you are not comfortable or if the question is not clear. My colleague and I will be present in the conversation. Only with your approval will we record the conversation. If you would prefer us not to record, my colleague will note the opinions expressed.

We want to assure you that the conversation will remain anonymous - so it is not necessary to know your name or surname. Anything you say here will be treated confidentially, and nothing you say will be aligned to you.

If you do not have any questions, may we proceed?

After having received the consent of the respondent, please fill the next part:

Name of Interviewer: _____
Location: _____
Date: _____
Start time: _____
Finishing time: _____

Respondents will be encouraged to speak freely about their experience. Your questions will be as limited as possible and will only be made to prompt them to speak. You can rely on the following questions.

Prompt questions for unstructured interviews

1. What is understood by marriage/union in this community? What role does a woman have in marriage? What about the man? What is considered a happy marriage?
2. Usually, in your knowledge, at what age marriages / unions take place in your community? (for girls and boys)
3. What can you tell us about your experience?

Prompt:

- Can you tell me about how you came to get married?
 - How old were you married?
 - Did you take the decision to marry at this age or was your family's / somebody else choice?
 - What were the reasons you got married so young?
 - Was it ever discussed in your family about the legal age of marriage while your marriage was being discussed? If yes, what was said? How was the decision taken afterwards?
 - What other options did you have at that time except marriage?
 - How did you expect your life after marriage? What did you expect to change? How would these changes be?
 - How did your life really change after marriage? Did you continue school? Employment? Social life? The role in the family? Responsibilities?
 - How was it for you to assume new responsibilities as a wife / husband?
 - Are you yet a mother / father? If yes, how old were you when your first child came? How was this new experience for you?
4. When your children are older, do you think you will want them to marry at the age that you married? Why? Would you consider their marriage before finishing school? Before finding a job? Why?

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Annex 5: Endnotes

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¹⁶UNICEF, 'UNICEF - Child Protection from Violence, Exploitation and Abuse - Child Marriage', 21 December 2012, http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html ; Loaiza and Wong, 'Marrying Too Young. End Child Marriage'.

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¹⁸For a full list of the international legal treaties and plans of action that address child marriage, see Annex 1.

¹⁹UNICEF, 'Early Marriage - A Harmful Traditional Practice. A Statistical Exploration' (New York: UNICEF, 2005); Population Reference Bureau, 'Who Speaks for Me? Ending Child Marriage' (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2011).

²⁰UNICEF, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children', 131.

²¹UNICEF, '25 Million Child Marriages Prevented in Last Decade Due to Accelerated Progress, According to New UNICEF Estimates', UNICEF, 6 March 2018, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102735.html.

²²Loaiza and Wong, 'Marrying Too Young. End Child Marriage', 27. The report does not indicate which countries are included in 'Eastern Europe and Central Asia'.

²³Percentage of marriages registered in 2010 involving a girl aged 15–19: Işıl Bayraktar, 'Child Marriage in Turkey (Overview)' (Istanbul: UNFPA EECARO, 2012).

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³¹See: Larisa Ilibezova, 'Child Marriage in the Kyrgyzstan (Overview)' (Istanbul / Bishkek: UNFPA EECARO, 2014); Stojanka Mirceva, 'Child Marriage in FYR Macedonia (Overview)' (Skopje / Istanbul: UNFPA EECARO, 2012); Maia Barkaia, 'Child Marriage in Georgia (Overview)' (Istanbul / Tbilisi: UNFPA EECARO, 2014).

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³⁵Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 'Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues'; Quentin Wodon et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report', Conference Edition (Washington, DC: World Bank / International Center for Research on Women, 2017); Roma Women's Centre BIBIJA, Ethnographic Institute SASA, and UNICEF, 'Ethnographic Research on Child Marriage among the Roma Population in Serbia (Title TBD)' (UNICEF, 2017).

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³⁷Jennifer Parsons et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 13, no. 3 (2015): 12–22; Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 'Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues'.

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⁴⁰The drivers and impacts of child marriage are explored more fully in Annex 2.

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⁴⁴If a girl has not reached sexual maturation by age 14 however, sexual intercourse is still illegal. For more information see: <https://www.ageofconsent.net/world/albania>

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- ⁴⁹Minority Rights Group, 'Albania: Egyptians', Minority Rights Group, accessed 11 May 2018, <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/egyptians/>
- ⁵⁰European Roma Rights Centre, 'Families Divided: Romani and Egyptian Children in Albanian Institutions' (Budapest: European Roma Rights Centre, 2017).
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- ⁵²Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), 'Mapping Roma Children in Albania' (Tirana: Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), 2011), 17.
- ⁵³De Soto, Beddies, and Gedeshi, 'Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion', 28.
- ⁵⁴Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community' (Tirana: Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 2015).
- ⁵⁵Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania' (Tirana: Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 2016).
- ⁵⁶Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Marriage in Court? The Rights of Children, Underage Marriage and the Role of the Court'.
- ⁵⁷Elona Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)' (Tirana / Istanbul: UNFPA EECARO, 2012).
- ⁵⁸Further details of the findings of previous studies are given in Annex 2
- ⁵⁹Bicchieri, Jiang, and Lindemans, 'A Social Norms Perspective on Child Marriage: The General Framework [DRAFT: Commissioned and to Be Published by UNICEF]'.
- ⁶⁰Bicchieri, Jiang, and Lindemans, 11.
- ⁶¹Bicchieri, Jiang, and Lindemans, 11.
- ⁶²Bicchieri, Jiang, and Lindemans, 15.
- ⁶³Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'.
- ⁶⁴Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'.
- ⁶⁵Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Marriage in Court? The Rights of Children, Underage Marriage and the Role of the Court'.
- ⁶⁶Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Marriage in Court? The Rights of Children, Underage Marriage and the Role of the Court'.
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- ⁶⁹Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Marriage in Court? The Rights of Children, Underage Marriage and the Role of the Court'.
- ⁷⁰English versions of the data collection instruments are included as Annex 4.
- ⁷¹For more information on the methodology please refer to Annex 3.
- ⁷²English versions of the informed consent statements are included within the research tools in Annex 4.
- ⁷³The exceptions were the focus group with older women living in segregated communities and younger men living in integrated communities, where custom and tradition were not mentioned at all.
- ⁷⁴This is likely to refer to a 'solution' to an unplanned pregnancy, i.e. an abortion.
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⁸⁴Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5> (accessed 17 May 2018).

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⁸⁶UNICEF, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children', 130.

⁸⁷UNFPA, 'The State of World Population 2016: 10 How Our Future Depends on a Girl at This Decisive Age'.

⁸⁸Parsons et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature'; Jensen and Thornton, 'Early Female Marriage in the Developing World'.

⁸⁹Walker, 'Early Marriage in Africa - Trends, Harmful Effects and Interventions'; Clark, Bruce, and Dude, 'Protecting Young Women from HIV/AIDS: The Case against Child and Adolescent Marriage'; Jensen and Thornton, 'Early Female Marriage in the Developing World'; K.G. Santhya et al., 'Associations between Early Marriage and Young Women's Marital and Reproductive Health Outcomes: Evidence from India'; International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health 36, no. 3 (2010): 132–39; Marcontonio Coltabiano and Maria Castiglioni, 'Changing Family Formation in Nepal: Marriage, Cohabitation and First Sexual Intercourse', International Family Planning Perspectives 34, no. 1 (2008): 30–39; Scott T. Yabiku, 'The Effect of Non-Family Experiences on Age of Marriage in a Setting of Rapid Social Change', Population Studies 59, no. 3 (2005): 339–54; Hotchkiss et al., 'Risk Factors Associated with the Practice of Child Marriage among Roma Girls in Serbia'; Tanja J. Müller, 'Education for Social Change: Girls' Secondary Schooling in Eritrea', Development and Change 37, no. 2 (2006): 353–73.

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¹²²Parsons et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature', 15–16. See also: Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'.

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¹²⁸Ouattara, Sen, and Thomson, 'Forced Marriage, Forced Sex: The Perils of Childhood for Girls'; Farnsworth, 'Child Marriage in Kosovo (Overview)'.

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¹³¹Parsons et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature', 15.

¹³²UNICEF, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children', 13; Ouattara, Sen, and Thomson, 'Forced Marriage, Forced Sex: The Perils of Childhood for Girls'.

¹³³UNFPA, 'State of World Population 2008. Reaching Common Ground: Gender, Culture and Human Rights' (New York: UNFPA, 2008), 49.

¹³⁴UNICEF, 'Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children', 131; Jensen and Thornton, 'Early Female Marriage in the Developing World'; ICON-Institut Public Sector, Hacettepe Institute of Population Studies, and BNB Consulting, 'National Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey' (Ankara: ICON-Institut Public Sector, 2009).

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¹³⁶Ilibezova, 'Child Marriage in the Kyrgyzstan (Overview)'.

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¹³⁸Velieva, 'Child Marriage in Uzbekistan (Overview)'.

¹³⁹Farnsworth, 'Child Marriage in Kosovo (Overview)'; Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'.

¹⁴⁰Parsons et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature', 14.

¹⁴¹UNICEF, 'The State of the World's Children 2011: Adolescence an Age of Opportunity', 33; Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 'Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues'.

¹⁴²Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'; Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'.

¹⁴³Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania', 76.

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¹⁴⁴The Observatory considered 35 cases related to the judicial practice of child marriage in the districts of Korça and Pogradec for the study 'Marriage in Court: The Rights of Children, Underage Marriage and the Role of the Court'; none of the cases involved individuals belonging to the Roma population.

¹⁴⁵Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'; Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'.

¹⁴⁶Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'; Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'; Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'.

¹⁴⁷Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'; Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'; Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'.

¹⁴⁸Hoare, 'Child Marriage in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Regional Overview'.

¹⁴⁹Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'; Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'.

¹⁵⁰Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'; Hoare, 'Child Marriage in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Regional Overview'.

¹⁵¹Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'.

¹⁵²Observatory for Children and Youth Rights; Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'.

¹⁵³Parsons et al., 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: A Review of the Literature'; Jensen and Thornton, 'Early Female Marriage in the Developing World'.

¹⁵⁴Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'. See also: Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'.

¹⁵⁵Hotchkiss et al., 'Risk Factors Associated with the Practice of Child Marriage among Roma Girls in Serbia'; Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'; Farnsworth, 'Child Marriage in Kosovo (Overview)'; Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community'; Martsenyuk, 'Child Marriage in Ukraine (Overview)'.

¹⁵⁶De Soto, Beddies, and Gedeshi, 'Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion'.

¹⁵⁷Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, 'Taking the False Step of Family Bliss: Case Studies of Child and Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora, Albania'; Farnsworth, 'Child Marriage in Kosovo (Overview)'; Boce Elmazi, 'Child Marriage in Albania (Overview)'.

¹⁵⁸Roma Mapping (2011), data available at: <http://www.sidalbania.org/romacom.html> (accessed 17 May 2018)

¹⁵⁹Profile of Poverty and Inequality in Albania 2016, data available at: <http://documents.shihang.org/curated/zh/510751480409557798/pdf/110582-REVISED-PUBLIC-report-ALB-complete.pdf>

¹⁶⁰See: Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2007), chap. 5; David E. Gray, *Doing Research in the Real World* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004).

