

# 9.

## Policy recommendations

The present chapter sets out policy recommendations for Arab countries based on the research and analysis undertaken for this study, along with other available evidence. The study advances the premise that Arab Governments need to act on two fronts: (1) eliminating child marriage; and (2) neutralizing the negative impacts of child marriage at

the individual and household levels. It is well known that ending child marriage is crucial to advancing gender equality; therefore, Governments must address the structural determinants of gender inequality. Hence, countries must tackle harmful gender roles, norms and power relations by adopting holistic and multifaceted policies, as discussed below.

### A. Design targeted strategies for curtailing or eliminating child marriage in the Arab region

Child marriage persists in the region, highlighting its localized nature and the need for targeted interventions. High-prevalence countries (over 10 per cent) should develop prevention strategies, focusing on “hotspot” areas (provinces, governorates or regions). These efforts should be accompanied by programmes that challenge harmful norms and discrimination, along with the

vigilant implementation of nationwide child protection policies and legislation, including closing loopholes related to child marriage. Recent systematic reviews indicate that cash incentive programmes have effectively reduced child marriage rates in various countries.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Arab countries could consider adopting similar initiatives to address this issue.

### B. Neutralize the adverse impacts of child marriage

Countries should adopt a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to address the adverse effects of child marriage and create

an empowering environment for females. This approach should include: (1) strengthening family planning and maternal and child

health-care policies to reduce unintended pregnancies, births and avoidable child deaths to lessen the population growth and thereby curtail the economic cost of child marriages in the region; (2) focusing on reducing the fertility and educational differences for girls married before and after turning 18 years old, mainly for countries that experience higher economic costs due to child marriage despite having lower child marriage prevalence;

(3) being proactive with educational sector policies to ensure the continuation of girls' education before and after marriage, particularly alternative learning opportunities after marriage or while pregnant; and (4) developing and implementing flexible labour market policies that support and allow more women to enter the labour market before and after marriage.

## **C. Strengthen data collection on child marriage and its impacts**

To effectively address the problem of child marriage in the Arab region, it is crucial to ensure the collection of reliable and disaggregated data on key indicators. Countries should establish systematic data collection processes to gather accurate and up-to-date information. This can be

accomplished by developing comprehensive databases using administrative data systems or conducting sample surveys. Such initiatives will facilitate a deeper understanding of the immediate and long-term effects of child marriage on women, girls, their families, communities and the overall society.

## **D. Promote multi-stakeholder initiatives for greater financial sustainability**

Estimating the economic impact of child marriage is a means to address the short-, medium- and long-term effects of child marriage while adopting a human rights-based approach. Investing in initiatives to eliminate child marriage not only upholds

human rights but also makes economic sense. In this regard, it is crucial for Governments to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders to secure sustainable funding opportunities and work towards eradicating this harmful practice in the region.