



Number of Syrian child-brides in the Netherlands rose alarmingly *War and poverty fertile breeding ground for child marriage*

Child marriages in Holland exist on a small scale mostly among migrant communities and asylum seekers, with the arrival of Syrian refugees the number of child-brides has risen significantly, according to the report 'Just Married' from the University Maastricht and the Verwey-Jonker institute in December 2015. Main cause: the Syrian civil war.

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In July 2014 there were two cases of Syrian child brides among the asylum seekers in Holland. The number rose drastically to 55 requests of Syrian child brides in 2015. Most of the times the men are ten or twenty years older than the underage girls, while most marriages took place in Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey.

Family-honor

1 in 5 girls marry before their eighteenth birthday, according to GirlsnotBrides.org, a global partnership of more than 550 civil society organisations committed to ending child marriage. The main reason for child marriage is poverty. Parents with lack of money regard it as a way to collect the dowry early. The second reason is to 'protect' the girl, child marriage in this case is meant to safeguard the honor of the girl and with that the honor of the family. The family-honor in Middle Eastern societies is connected to the virginity of the daughter in question. That's why parents let their daughter marry young to make sure that she enters marriage as a virgin. In war situations the risk of rape is very high and early marriage is seen as protection.

Number of Syrian child -brides doubled

The Syrian civil war strengthens the reasons for parents to marry their daughters off at a young age as is shown by the alarming increase of the number of child-brides among Syrian refugees in Jordan. While before the civil war in 2011 the percentage amounted to 13% this doubled in 2014 to more than 30%, according to UNICEF reports in 2014. Also in Turkey this development is noticeable, the German newspaper Augsburgener Allgemeine reports in [an online-article of 7 March 2016](#) that the Syrian refugee girls in the Turkish border city Killis are increasingly forced to marry Turkish men out of dire poverty. A growing number of these refugees are coming to ask asylum in the Netherlands, which caused the raise in number of child-brides in Holland.

'Saved' by the British embassy

For most people in Europe it's quite shocking to realize that child marriage is not just a phenomenon in foreign countries, it's also an issue at our doorsteps. The Syrian refugee crisis has highlighted this matter, however it has been an issue long before that, for instance in England. There have been quite some cases reported of underage girls born and raised in England, who have been taken on a 'holiday' to their parent's home country, where they were 'sold off' as brides. Gabriella Gillespie's father took her from her home in the UK to Yemen in 1977 and married her off when she was only 13. Soon after her marriage she became a mother. With the help of the British embassy in 1992 Gabriella escaped to England with her five children. She shared her story [on a blog of the NGO 'Too Young to Wed'](#): *"Some may think that because I was a child bride 20-odd years ago, things have improved and this practice no longer exists, but all we need to do is look at the photos (of child brides) to know otherwise. My heart breaks every time I see another picture of a child bride, read another story, or see the statistics on child marriage."*

(No) solution

Child marriage continues to be an issue because the breeding ground for child marriage still exists: poverty and war. Now it's unrealistic to ban poverty and war worldwide, but it is possible to make parents aware that child marriage is not the solution for their poverty problem or a way to 'protect' their daughter. Raising awareness is one of the most important tools to prevent child marriages.

Arab Vision, an international Christian organisation which produces Christian and social TV-productions for and about the Arab world, is currently in the preparation phase of a production about child marriage in the Middle East. "The production has as goal to raise the awareness of the inhabitants of the Middle East that child marriage is a malicious practice. It violates the interests of the child and at the same time it doesn't offer a solution for poverty. On the contrary, it sustains poverty because the girl in question often is taken out of school and with that she's deprived of the possibility to develop her skills, skills which can actually lift her family out of poverty", according to the organisation.

About Arab Vision

Arab Vision was founded in 1997 and is a community of Christians in the Arab World committed to spreading the Gospel and working to obtain a more just society in accordance with the Gospel.

Main goals of the organisation are producing and distributing of Christian TV programmes via (satellite)TV and Internet.

For more information, please visit our website www.arabvision.org or email to contact@arabvision.org
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