

# Child Marriage in Ukraine (Overview)



**My father gave me in marriage. I was not asked if I wanted to [marry] or not.**

—Roma child spouse, married at 14

## Child marriages

Early or child marriage is the union, whether official or not, of two persons, at least one of whom is under 18 years of age.<sup>1</sup> By virtue of being children, child spouses are considered to be incapable of giving full consent, meaning that child marriages should be considered a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. In Ukraine, among the general population, early marriage is closely linked to early sexual debut and unplanned pregnancy. Among the Roma minority, child marriage affecting girls and boys is driven by patriarchal traditions and poverty, among other factors.

Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that affects girls and boys in different ways. Overall, the number of boys in child marriages around the world is significantly lower than that of girls. Girl child spouses are also vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse within relationships that are unequal, and if they become pregnant, often experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not ready for childbearing. Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home.

Various international treaties, conventions, and programmes for action address child marriage. These include: the 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (which followed the UN Fourth World Conference on Women). These international instruments cover the abolishment of harmful customs and traditions, violence against the girl child, marriage consent, marriageable age, registration of marriage, and the freedom to choose a spouse.

This fact sheet provides information about child marriage in Ukraine and offers recommendations aimed at addressing the issue. It includes a review of national legislation and the country's ratification of the various international standards relevant to the issue, analysis of current practices and attitudes towards child marriage, and statistical information about the prevalence of the practice. The methodology for this study involved a review of the existing legal framework and literature related to child marriage in Ukraine, and interviews and focus groups with child spouses, community members, and experts working in the fields of children's and women's rights.

*The decision to marry should be a freely made, informed decision that is taken without fear, coercion, or undue pressure. It is an adult decision and a decision that should be made, when ready, as an adult.*

—Dr. Babatunde  
Osotimehin, Executive  
Director, UNFPA



## Recommendations

- Create effective mechanisms to ensure implementation of existing legislation to protect the rights of all women and girls, especially those from marginalised groups.
- In the education system, introduce educational programmes on the protection of sexual and reproductive health for adolescents and youth, to be delivered by education sector specialists, in collaboration with NGOs, and with the technical support of healthcare organisations and the involvement of adolescent psychologists.
- Challenge patriarchal gender stereotypes that women's self-fulfilment can only be realised through marriage. This should include discussing other paths that women can follow (for instance, higher education and building their careers, planned and responsible parenthood where men are also involved as fathers) in the media and in education.
- Encourage youth health services to use peer-to-peer education to share knowledge about reproductive health, and to start dialogue on previously 'taboo' topics.

## Roma-specific recommendations

- Integrate the already existing, small-scale programmes of Roma social-medical mediators into national government programmes, and institutionalise the profession of Roma mediator.
- Provide social workers with better training, so that they can work more effectively on resolving issues facing Roma, and can work cooperatively with Roma mediators.
- Develop and implement measures to improve the level of literacy among adult Roma, reduce school drop-out rates among Roma children, and improve the standard of housing and infrastructure in Roma settlements.
- Provide information to Roma community members (especially young women and men) on sexual and reproductive health and on the health consequences of child marriage.
- Establish women's consciousness-raising groups, to empower young Roma women who face multiple forms of discrimination. In addition, provide young Roma women with practical help with employment, education, and changing their qualifications, and assistance in opening small businesses.
- Enable Roma to obtain identification documents, and encourage the registration of births, marriages, and deaths (even if late).

## Legal and national context

Ukraine has ratified both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), along with the other main international agreements on human rights. As a member of the Council of Europe, Ukraine has also ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (1997), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1997), the Revised European Social Charter (2006), and the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (2006).

Women's and children's rights are protected under the Constitution of Ukraine, the Family Code, the Code of Laws on Labour, and the Code of Criminal Procedure. Legislation specifically addressing women's and children's rights includes the laws 'On the Protection of Childhood' (2001), 'On the Prevention of Family Violence' (2001), 'On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men' (2005), and 'On the Prevention and Combating [of] Discrimination in Ukraine' (2012).<sup>2</sup> In 2011, the position of Ombudsman for Children was established to protect children's rights.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Verkhovna Rada (national parliament) of Ukraine passed the National Plan of Action for Children (2010-2016)<sup>4</sup> in order to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, experts interviewed for this study felt that this good legislative framework is not effectively implemented.

According to the Family Code of Ukraine (Article 6),<sup>5</sup> 'a child is a person aged under 18, when majority is attained'. In the law 'On the Protection of Childhood' (Article 1), it states, 'A young child is a child under 14. Children aged 14-18 are adolescents.'<sup>6</sup> Under the Civil Code (Articles 34 and 35), a person who has reached 18 years of age enjoys full civil capacity.<sup>7</sup>

An adolescent marrying before the age of 18 immediately acquires full civil capacity, as does a child aged 16-17 who works under an employment contract or wishes to engage in an entrepreneurial activity, or who becomes a parent.<sup>8</sup> Full civil capacity extends to all civil rights and obligations.<sup>9</sup>

## Who can contract a marriage?

In Ukraine family relations are regulated, first of all, by the Constitution and the Family Code. The Constitution (Article 51) emphasises that marriage is based on the free consent of a man and a woman and that each of the spouses has the same rights and obligations in marriage and the family.<sup>10</sup>

According to the Family Code and the law 'On State Registration of Acts of Civil Status' (2010), a marriage must be registered at a State civil registry office, and both future spouses must present a Ukrainian or other

national passport. Religious marriages and cohabiting couples have no legal status, although under Article 74 of the Family Code, if a man and a woman live as a family, but are not legally married, the property acquired during cohabitation is owned jointly.

Following recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>11</sup> and the CEDAW Committee,<sup>12</sup> in 2012 the Family Code of Ukraine was amended to raise the minimum age for marriage for girls from 17 to 18; the minimum age for boys was already set at 18. However, a court may grant permission for a person aged 16 years or older to marry if it is established that the marriage is in her or his interests (Article 23). In practice, there are two main reasons why children under 18 could be given court permission to get married: pregnancy and religious beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

Sexual intercourse and other activities of a sexual nature with persons under 16 years of age is illegal under Articles 155 and 156 of the Criminal Code, punishable by deprivation of liberty for up to five years.

### Family planning and reproductive rights

Ukraine adopted the State Programme ‘Reproductive Health of the Nation 2015’, which aims to create conditions for safe motherhood, provide training in reproductive health for children and young people, improve family planning, and maintain the reproductive health of the population.<sup>14</sup> The implementation of this and other programmes is overseen by the Ukrainian State Family Planning Centre.<sup>15</sup> However, inadequate funding complicates implementation and impairs essential progress, particularly in small towns and villages, where poor infrastructure significantly limits access to health services.<sup>16, 17</sup>

The rate of contraception use among all women has increased in Ukraine, however, according to a 2010 report, there are extremely high rates of use of emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy.<sup>18</sup> Overall, use of contraception in urban areas is notably higher than that in rural communities, particularly in regard to use of ‘modern’ methods of contraception. These are used by every second married woman (50.3 per cent) living in cities or towns, and by 37.1 per cent of women in rural households.<sup>19</sup>

Under the Civil Code of Ukraine (Article 284), adolescents over the age of 14 can access health services;<sup>20</sup> this includes access to reproductive health services, and the right to request the termination of a

Do you know [if it is] possible in Ukraine to have an abortion legally?

No, we do not know.

Have you been told about this [in school or in college]?

No.

*(Focus group with female students at a medical college, 16-17 years old)*

pregnancy. According to the survey ‘Youth of Ukraine’ (carried out in 2010), 61.0 per cent of respondents who had had sexual intercourse had used some form of contraception. However, a number mentioned using withdrawal and rhythm methods (15 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively), rather than modern forms of contraception.<sup>21</sup> Limitations on access to contraceptives

for adolescents include being financially dependent on parents, lack of a friendly and welcoming attitude to teenagers in clinics, and the failure of medical staff to respect adolescents’ privacy.<sup>22</sup>

“It is a process of developing dialogue, [of] recognising that young people do explore. They can get information to make a decision.”

*(International NGO employee)*

There is no particular course or approved curriculum on sexual education in schools. Some aspects of sexual education (such as HIV/AIDS prevention, sexually transmitted diseases, gender relations between boys and girls) are studied in grades 5 to 9 at secondary school, in the course ‘Fundamentals of Health’.<sup>23</sup> But it is left up to the teacher to decide which issues to focus on during the course and how to teach it.<sup>24</sup>

“My [geography teacher at school] considered it his duty, and every lesson, he said: ‘Girls, listen, give birth to at least two children. It is necessary to support the [nation] ... See our dying race. You need to have two children, even ... three.’”

*(Female student)*

Under the law on ‘Fundamentals of Legislation on Health Care’,<sup>25</sup> a woman has the right to request termination of her pregnancy up to the 12<sup>th</sup> week, and abortion in the period between 12 and 22 weeks of pregnancy is allowed under some specific conditions. Girls aged under 15 have the right to terminate a pregnancy up to 22 weeks. However, in practice, it may be difficult for a woman to obtain an abortion because of lack of facilities (in rural areas) or cost, among other reasons.<sup>26</sup> The abortion rate fell from 32.1 per 1,000 women of childbearing age in 2000 to 16.6 in 2009, and since 2001, the number of births has exceeded the number of abortions, the result of improved access to contraception and reproductive

health services.<sup>27</sup> A decline in the abortion rate among teenage girls is a positive development: during the period 1995-2009, the number of abortions per 1,000 girls aged 15–17 decreased by 5.6 times.<sup>28</sup> Worryingly, the right of women to access abortion is now under threat, due to the growing influence of right-wing religious groups on public policy.<sup>29</sup> Church officials appealed to the Verkhovna Rada to prohibit abortion, and some politicians have (unsuccessfully) introduced bills proposing a ban on abortion.<sup>30</sup>

## Child marriages in Ukraine

According to the statistical evidence available, early marriages in Ukraine are quite rare (and have fallen significantly since the 1970s),<sup>31</sup> and are more typical for villages than cities. According to data from the State Statistics Service in Ukraine, in 2012, in rural areas, marriages involving adolescents under the age of 15 made up 0.048 per cent of registered marriages, and those involving adolescents aged 15-19 accounted for 9.98 per cent. In cities, marriages involving adolescents under the age of 15 accounted for 0.023 per cent of registered marriages, and those involving adolescents aged 15-19, 4.84 per cent.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, data from the Ukraine Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) (2012-2013) shows that overall, 11 per cent of women surveyed aged 20-49 years were first married/entered marital union before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In urban settlements this proportion was 10 per cent, and in rural areas, it was 14.5 per cent.<sup>33</sup>

*“We broke up six months after the wedding. We understood that we could not live together. This was because of the economic factor and the influence of his relatives.”*  
(Female child spouse)

The MICS data also reveals a link between level of education and early marriage: 16.6 per cent of the women aged 20-49 who had married before the age of 18 only had secondary education, compared to 8.6 per cent who had higher education. Differences by wealth quintile are also notable: 15 per cent of women in the poorest households married before 18, whereas the proportion of early marriages among women from rich households was below 10 per cent.<sup>34</sup>

MICS 2012-2013 data also found an adolescent birth rate of 34 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 who took part in the study. The percentage of women aged 15-19 who were pregnant or had already had a live birth was twice as high among those in rural areas compared to those in urban areas, and a relatively high total fertility rate was found in households in poorer wealth quintiles. Level of education, and a focus on acquiring higher education

remain strong factors that affect fertility, as only 1.8 per cent of young women with higher education have given birth to a child.<sup>35</sup> Overall, the adolescent pregnancy rate is two to four times higher than in other European countries.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, early marriages are more typical for women than for men. Data for 2012 from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (see Table 1 at the end of this fact sheet) demonstrate that for the age group 16-18, the number of women who married exceeded the number of men by seven times. According to gender-based stereotypes that are common in the society, it is important for Ukrainian women to be married. That is why even young people – and young women in particular – express support for the idea of marrying early.<sup>37</sup>

*“We did not have a planned pregnancy. We were dating, talked about the plans. It turned out that my partner apparently outwitted me. I had big plans for life. ... I would like to study more, to move to live in another city. He changed his mind...”*  
(Female child spouse)

As noted by UNICEF, young married or cohabiting girls often get pregnant while they are still teenagers. They often drop out of school. These girls do not obtain higher education, cannot get a job, and often find themselves isolated from the outside world.<sup>38</sup>

Early marriage and motherhood are connected with early sexual intercourse. According to a survey of public opinion (carried out in February 2013), 7 per cent of respondents reported that they had first had sexual intercourse between the ages of 12 and 15, and 42 per cent between the ages of 16 and 18.<sup>39</sup> Analysis of judgments made in cases where adolescents have applied to the court for permission to marry reveals that pregnancy is generally the main reason given for granting consent to the marriage, when the applicants are aged 16 or 17. This is not the case for applications made by adolescents under 16, where permission is very rarely granted, even in cases of pregnancy.<sup>40</sup>

Early sexual intercourse is also of concern in the context of high rates of HIV infection in the country, given that adolescents may be more likely to practise risky sexual behaviour.<sup>41</sup> The distribution of new HIV infections by age shows that 19 per cent of HIV-positive people are children under the age of 18 years.<sup>42</sup> In addition, research by UNICEF in 2009 found that around 26 per cent of female sex workers in Ukraine were aged under 18 (approximately 17,000 aged 15-17, and 3,800 aged under 15).<sup>43</sup>

Domestic violence is a significant but hidden problem in Ukraine.<sup>44</sup> While no data was found on gender-based violence in early marriages in Ukraine, and none of the child spouses interviewed spoke of experiencing it, it is likely that some child spouses are affected by a range of violence associated with power relations, including sexual assaults in marriage and physical violence.

One of the main problems that child spouses did report facing was lack of financial independence. Many were reliant on parents, and could not afford to live independently. Some female child spouses reported being able to complete their schooling or university education, while others were not able to go to university, or had to dropout.

“Girls dream of marriage. First love must end in marriage.” (Female child spouse)

As a rule, female child spouses interviewed said that their parents and family were supportive of the marriage. In Ukraine, there are still patriarchal attitudes that maintain that a woman's main role should be as a wife and mother. That is why some parents are happy that their daughter is 'on the right path' in life. At the same time, the child spouses who participated in this study said that they would not advise their friends or siblings to marry early, because of the challenges they faced, most of which were connected with financial and psychological issues.

## Roma in Ukraine

Ukrainian authorities do not have any reliable statistics on Roma, as many Roma do not have identity documents. According to the 2001 Census, there were then 47,917 Roma people living in Ukraine. However, the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Division estimates that the Roma population is much larger, between 120,000 and 400,000.<sup>45</sup> As reported in a 2012 study, many Roma are reluctant to apply for identity documents because 'it is too complicated and mainly dangerous', given that it involves contact with the police.<sup>46</sup> Analysis by 'Chirikli' Women's Fund found that 40 per cent of people coming into contact with Roma mediators in Roma communities did not have documents.<sup>47</sup>

“If you take into account xenophobia on the whole, then this group [Roma minority] is the most vulnerable: cases of bad attitudes from police, discrimination, for example ... in accessing education, at the institutional level.” (International NGO employee)

“It is convenient for our government not to have statistics. They will be reporting on the implementation of the strategy, and there is no indicator.” (Roma NGO activist)

There is also no comprehensive data on the socioeconomic situation of Roma in Ukraine, as this data is not collected by the authorities.<sup>48</sup> However, the research for this study and other studies has revealed that Ukrainian Roma people face regular and systematic discrimination in almost all areas, including access to education, housing services, healthcare, employment, and social services.<sup>49</sup> According to the European Roma Rights Centre, most Roma children drop out of school early, and/or leave school illiterate.<sup>50</sup> In general, within Roma communities, few people have formal education (particularly women), and there are high levels of unemployment, deplorable living conditions, and poor health.<sup>51</sup>

“What help do [Roma] need? The older generation [need] jobs, the kids would [see that]. And it could stop the begging. ... But they do not care, they are used to begging. This is an illness. It's a lifestyle. They need something to do. [They] need some job.” (Roma child spouse)

Roma women in Ukraine are subject to a multiple and/or intersectional discrimination, as women and as members of the Roma minority. Echoing statements made by Roma rights organisations,<sup>52</sup> Roma women interviewed for this research said that they faced discrimination and inhumane and degrading treatment from doctors and other hospital staff, which in some cases included denial of healthcare. Negative stereotypes are sadly common, and Roma also face discrimination and prejudice from the general public.<sup>53</sup> In concluding observations, both the UN CEDAW Committee and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have noted concern over ongoing discrimination against Roma women and children, and the obstacles that they face in accessing education, healthcare, and other social services.<sup>54, 55</sup>

“Really people do not know much about the Roma, their way of life. There is only fear that they will steal something from you or will [try to tell your fortune].” (Journalist and human rights activist)

“We are not satisfied with the strategy ... It was developed without the participation of Roma, without taking into account the opinion of Roma ... But the fact that the document was accepted - that's good. Then we can fix it, together take steps towards addressing the problem.” (Roma NGO activist)

The ‘Strategy for protection and integration of Roma national minority into Ukrainian society [by] 2020’ has been adopted by the Ukrainian government.<sup>56</sup> But experts from Roma rights NGOs are very critical towards this document, as it lacks proper mechanisms to implement changes; they feel there is little political will to address the problems facing Roma.

### Child marriages among Roma

While no reliable statistics exist, rates of child marriage are thought to be much higher among the Roma population. Few Roma marriages overall are registered, partly because to register a marriage, both spouses must present a passport (and many Roma do not have a passport), and because many involve spouses under the age of 18. But if we take early motherhood as an indicator for child marriage, then the official data does support this idea. According to birth statistics, in 2011, 141 girls under the age of 15 gave birth in Ukraine; of these, 55 took place in Zakarpatska oblast, which has the largest population of Roma living in Ukraine.<sup>57, 58</sup>

“A woman’s status, according to the Bible, is in second place ... The woman knows her place. The woman [is the] the mother, the homemaker. All the important issues are decided by a man.”  
(Female activist, Roma NGO)

As this study and other reports show, early school dropout is linked to child marriage among Roma in some cases. It is important to note, however, that Roma girls face other barriers to education, rooted in poverty, in lower expectations from within the community on Roma girls to complete education, and in discrimination within the education system, particularly the practice of segregated schooling for Roma children. Many Roma families take girls out of school due to poverty, so that girls can work, or look after younger siblings while parents work.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, boys are often able to continue with education, if they want to.

“A man in a Roma family is a king from birth. For a king everything is possible. The boys have a choice. They can work, can continue to study.” (Roma NGO activist)

Girls are also taken out of school in order to protect them from the threat of abduction for forced marriage, and generally face restrictions on their freedom of movement.

“If a child is brought up according to God, she must listen to her mother.”  
(Older Roma woman)

Child marriages are explained by members of the Roma community as ‘tradition’ or ‘natural’. Many Roma girls see early marriage as normal, and find it difficult to be critical towards their own ‘traditions’. Traditional patriarchal attitudes towards gender and sexual roles help support the practice. For example, huge value is placed on female virginity for Roma women by their families and community; this means there is pressure on girls to marry young, so that there is less danger of their losing their virginity before marriage. In addition, girls are expected to obey their parents.

“Urban Roma women were more or less OK with contraception. And in rural areas - none [of them] knew what it was.”  
(Older Roma woman)

However, it is important to note that there are significant socioeconomic factors also pushing girls into early marriages. For instance, lack of education about family planning and lack of access to contraception is a factor, as are low levels of education, poverty, and overcrowded and poor quality housing (i.e. in Roma camps).

“I would like to have a job ... to earn money, in order that my wife will not beg. For example, [to] graze cows. Or to be an assistant (in construction). I was trying to find [anything]. ... I go to trash [heaps] and search for metal.” (Roma man, 20 years old, three children, illiterate, married at 13)

In addition, while the introduction of generous state support for children has meant that more Roma children are now being registered at birth, some experts interviewed commented that this could be putting more pressure on young girls and women to marry and have children early, in order to gain access to state benefits.

Despite the lack of statistics, it is clear from the interviews with Roma child spouses carried out for this study that Roma boys also experience early marriage. This is in contrast to other population groups in Ukraine.

In some cases, young couples choose to marry. In other cases, marriages are arranged by parents, and the child spouses are given no option but to agree. Abductions for forced marriage (bride kidnapping) also happen in some Roma communities in Ukraine. One Roma child spouse interviewed for this study told of how her own mother had been abducted by her father and forced to marry. In turn, this girl was forced by her father to marry a man she did not know, and to move to a different part of Ukraine, after she and her boyfriend had tried to run away together. Her father forced her to do this because he believed she had brought 'shame' on the family and community, by 'disobeying' him and having a relationship with a boy of whom the family did not approve.

*“I fell in love, we were 15-16 years old. I studied in regular school and left it. It was shameful for me to be pregnant and [go to] school. That is why I left.”* (From story of NGO activist about Roma women)

Levels of domestic violence within Roma communities are high. Research by the 'Chirikli' Roma Women's Fund and the European Roma Rights Centre found that out of 240 Roma women interviewed, 112 (46 per cent) reported having experienced domestic violence, including both physical and psychological abuse. In such cases, the state authorities and agencies do not respond effectively to either prevent domestic violence, to punish offenders or to provide services to victims<sup>60</sup>. Marriage is supposed to 'protect' girls but at the same time, it makes them dependant on their husbands.

*“I never heard any complaints from women, [from Roma] single girls about violence towards her or something. I have a feeling that it's ... unfortunately [taken for] granted. Often community leaders say 'it's our tradition'. I have then only one question: Can violence against women be considered a tradition...?”* (International NGO activist)

It is important to note that the Roma minority in Ukraine is not homogenous, and differs by socioeconomic status and level of education, and that this is an important factor guiding perceptions and the practice of early marriage. One Roma NGO activist interviewed noted, for instance, that while in the past, 14 was the average age for marriage, 'Now the girls in some groups of Roma have married later, at 16 or 18 years'.

## Responses to child marriage

**Working with Roma girls.** Some projects in Roma communities are being implemented to 'build knowledge of Roma girls on reproductive health, family planning, and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies'.<sup>61</sup> The 'Chirikli' Roma Women's Fund runs projects for Roma women targeting issues of reproductive health and sexuality. For example, in one project, 'Room for mother and child', Roma girls and women can come and discuss issues that are 'taboo' in their community, such as sexuality, reproductive health, and family planning.

**Roma mediators.** Roma social-medical mediators are drawn from Roma communities, and act as intermediaries between people living mainly in Roma settlements and social and medical services. Since 2010, there have been successful examples of Roma mediators working in different parts of Ukraine, and they are in general one of the best examples of reaching out to the Roma community.<sup>62</sup> Roma mediators are/could be used to raise issues related to early marriage.

*“We have our mediators... They conduct focus-groups with mothers, [with] girls, on why girls should study. [T]his is how we can change the situation – [by] changing their understanding.”* (Roma NGO activist)

## Key points (general)

Ukraine has legislation on women's and children's rights, but there is a lack of mechanisms to implement it.

In Ukrainian society, double standards towards gender roles still prevail. There are different expectations for women and men about their place in public and private spheres, and their productive and reproductive labour.

Early marriage in Ukraine is connected with the problem of early sexual debut of young people, and unplanned pregnancies.

Early marriage may cause problems such as school dropout, and prolonged economic and psychological dependency on parents.

Education in schools, including lessons on reproductive health, maintain gender stereotypes.

## Key points (Roma-specific)

There is a lack of statistics on Roma people in Ukraine, making it difficult for the state to address problems facing Roma, such as early marriage.

Ukrainian authorities do not show any serious political will to resolve the problems facing Roma.

Roma women and girls face intersecting forms of discrimination and violence, from outside and inside their communities.

Early marriages, including forced marriages, are explained by the Roma community as 'tradition' or 'natural', and perceived by Roma girls as 'normal'.

Rates of poverty and unemployment are very high in Roma communities, and many Roma live in poor conditions.

## Quotes (general)

*I think the situation in Ukraine ... besides particular issues, overall Ukraine has good established legislation... However, the implementation is the bigger problem than just having the legislation.* (International NGO employee)

*... they say that [a woman's] main purpose is to protect the hearth, home, comfort. They forget that [a woman, as well as] a man, is a person who wants to realise herself. But the girls are thinking, why put off something that you still have to do...* (Female student)

*In practice, it is not an issue of early marriage. It is an issue of early sexual behaviour. Kids are getting pregnant at the age of 16.* (Children's rights officer, international NGO)

*At school, two girls left school, got married, gave birth.* (Female student)

*Some teachers considered it a sacred duty to tell us with whom to meet, how to live ... [So] if you do 'that' [have a sexual relationship], you're not worthy.* (Female student about secondary school education)

## Quotes (Roma-specific)

*Statistics on Roma people for us too – [it's] a very sensitive issue. We say that we [have been working on Roma issues for] 15 years. But ... to date, the government and [us, we] have no official statistics on Roma.* (International NGO employee)

*State authorities [are sceptical] towards Roma people. I felt [that they had a] prejudiced attitude. They believe that this group does not need anything, they are used to living in poverty.* (Researcher)

*There are even [some Roma] having affairs in front of you. You cannot say anything. God forbid you do the same, then they beat you and cut off your hair. They may even cripple you. But you can't go to police.* (Roma child spouse)

*But the girls are socialised in obedience to what they perceive as the norm. It is necessary, it should be.* (Roma NGO activist)

*I was talking a lot with Roma women – for them to get a job better than [being a] cleaner – I've never met such examples.* (NGO activist)

## Data overview

<b>Total population (2013):</b>	45,461,627 <sup>63</sup>
<b>Average household size (2011):</b>	2.58 <sup>64</sup>
<b>Life expectancy at birth (2012):</b>	66.1 (males); 76.0 (females) <sup>65</sup>
<b>Population under age 15 (2013):</b>	15.5% <sup>66</sup>
<b>Population aged 15-18 years (2013):</b>	2.0% <sup>67</sup>
<b>Population below national income poverty line (2008):</b>	2.9% <sup>68</sup>
<b>Unemployment rate (2012):</b>	7.5% <sup>69</sup>
<b>Youth literacy ratio (2010):</b>	99.75% (overall); 99.7% (males); 99.8% (females) <sup>70</sup>
<b>Health expenditure per capita per year (2011):</b>	US \$263 <sup>71</sup>
<b>Main ethnic groups:</b>	Ukrainians (77.8%), Russians (17.3%), Belarusians (0.6%), Moldovans (0.5%), Crimean Tatars (0.5%), Bulgarians (0.4%) <sup>72</sup>
<b>Main religion:</b>	Orthodox, Kiev Patriarchate (14.9%), Orthodox, Moscow Patriarchate (10.9%), Greek-Catholic (5.3%) <sup>73</sup>
<b>Main languages:</b>	Ukrainian (67.5%), Russian (29.6%) <sup>74</sup>
<b>Average age at first marriage (2010):</b>	25.8 (overall); 27.1 (males); 24.5 (females) <sup>75</sup>
<b>Age-specific fertility rate for ages 15-19:</b>	26.7 births per 1,000 women <sup>76</sup>
<b>Total fertility rate:</b>	1.5 <sup>77</sup>

## Child marriage statistics

**Table 1.** Marriages by bride's age and groom's age (2012)

Total number of marriages	Bride's age (years)		Groom's age (years)	
	Under 16	16-18	Under 16	16-18
556,552	84 (0.02%)	14,472 (2.6%)	1 (N/A)	2,087 (0.4%)

**Table 2.** Live births by mother's age<sup>78</sup>

Total number of live births	Mother's age				
	Under 15	15	16	17	Total under 18
520,705	163	620	2,200	5,067	8,050 (1.55%)

**Table 3.** Percentage of women who have had a live birth by age 18, by area and age group (2012)<sup>79</sup>

Age	Urban	Rural	Total
20-24	3.9	5.8	4.4
25-29	2.7	5.5	3.3
30-34	3.9	7.1	4.6
35-39	6.8	7.7	7.0
40-44	4.7	7.3	5.5
45-49	3.3	4.0	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>4.7</b>

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## Key messages

When a girl delays marriage, everyone benefits. A girl who marries later is more likely to stay in school, work, and reinvest her income into her family. Crucially, a girl who marries later is more empowered to choose whether, when, and how many children to have. When investments in girls are made, everyone benefits: their families, communities, and most importantly, the girls themselves.

There is a huge cost to inaction on child marriage. It is time for policy-makers, parliamentarians, communities, families and young people to address this issue head on. Let's deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Let girls be girls.

Child marriage violates girls' rights, denies them of their childhood, disrupts their education, jeopardises their health, and limits their opportunities. No cultural, religious, or economic rationale for child marriage can possibly justify the damage these marriages do to young girls and their potential. A girl should have the right to choose whom she marries and when. Parents want the best for their children, and need to support their girls' choices and decisions to marry.

UNFPA is working with governments and partners at all levels of society to deliver comprehensive programmes addressing the needs of vulnerable and married girls, and providing access to livelihoods, social support and health programmes, including sexual and reproductive health. The ultimate aim is to end child marriage in this generation and to shift cultural attitudes to protect girls' rights.

## What must be done to break the silence on child marriage?

Bring greater attention to the situations faced by married girls and girls at risk of child marriage, and advocate strongly for their rights. Child marriage is not good for girls or development. The world cannot afford to see the rights, health, and potential of thousands of girls being squandered each day.

Promote investments that build up adolescent girls' capabilities and skills, especially education. Girls'

education, particularly post-primary and secondary, is the single most important factor associated with age at marriage. Girls especially need social support and access to programmes that provide life skills, literacy, livelihoods, and sexual and reproductive health information and services, such as family planning and lifesaving maternal health services.

## Invest in adolescent girls!

Investments should provide platforms for vulnerable girls to develop life skills and critical health knowledge, obtain access to social services including sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention, gain vocational and employable skills for work, and have access to friends and mentors.

Married girls need special targeted strategies that provide access to education, life skills, and health including SRH and HIV prevention, and opportunities to participate fully in society. Maternal health programmes need to be reoriented with dedicated outreach for the youngest, first-time mothers, to enable them to use antenatal, essential and emergency obstetric care, and post-delivery services.

## Acknowledgements and contacts

This fact sheet was prepared by Tamara Martsenyuk for UNFPA. She would like to thank the interviewees for their kind cooperation and UNFPA Office in Ukraine (particularly, Olga Osaulenko) for their support. Further, she is very grateful to Svitlana Gusak, Irine Kogut, and Olena Bogdanova for their expert advice; Oksana Rybak, Iuliia Soroka, Inna Tretyak, Oleg and Tetyana Martsenyuk, and Olesya Mygal for organisational help in fieldwork; and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine for cooperation and help with data. She would also like to thank Joanna Hoare, Team Leader and Editor, and Nigina Abaszade, Gender Expert with UNFPA EECARO.

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June 2014, Version 1

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