

## Call for input: Accelerating Progress Towards Preventing Adolescent Girls' Pregnancy

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*“Women are half of society and give birth to the other half, yet this responsibility must never be placed on them when they are still minors” - Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah*

In today's rapidly changing world, this topic is controversial because it intersects with cultural traditions, religious interpretations, economic conditions, and human rights principles. Adolescent pregnancy is defined by WHO as pregnancy in a girl between 10 and 19<sup>1</sup> which means their bodies have not fully developed yet and this might lead to serious health complications that may threaten their lives and the babies lives. In addition, early pregnancy has a deep negative impact on the mental health of minors such as anxiety, depression and the loss of their childhood.

**Case study:** Jordan is considered one of the countries with moderate to low rates of adolescent pregnancy. however, the Syrian refugee crisis led to an increase in child marriage and pregnancy rates between 2010 and 2015, reaching approximately 18% in 2015. This rate then declined again by 2019 to 10.6%<sup>2</sup>.

### **1- The main drivers of adolescent pregnancy, including social, economic, cultural, legal and structural factors.**

The reasons for adolescent pregnancy:

- **Poverty:** Many families push their daughters into early marriage that leads to pregnancy to reduce the financial burden on the household.  
**Solution :** Encourage women to work<sup>3</sup> The Jordanian National Commission of Women (JNCW) has highlighted the need for economic empowerment of women as both a fundamental right to equality, but also as an essential tool for poverty reduction.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.childrenofjordan.org/%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.mop.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root\\_storage/ar/eb\\_list\\_page/97742757-5f15-492a-8246-603d0abee8b2.pdf](https://www.mop.gov.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/ar/eb_list_page/97742757-5f15-492a-8246-603d0abee8b2.pdf)

- **Customs and Traditions:** In developing countries, there is a belief that a woman’s physical constitution today is the same as in the past and that she is capable of childbearing before they are physically and mentally ready. Also, to protect the girl’s honor.  
**Solution:** Raising community awareness about health risks of early pregnancy and correct the harmful cultural beliefs, educate families about girl’s rights, and empowering girls socially and economically which helps families see that a girl’s value lies in her education and abilities not only early marriage<sup>4</sup>.
- **Family disintegration:** Family breakdowns often drive girls to seek marriage and start their own families as a way to escape their domestic realities.  
**Solution:** Raising awareness among girls that they have the right to feel safe and protected. In Jordan, family protection services exist to support girls who experience physical or psychological harm due to family disintegration or domestic violence. These services provide a caring, safe, and stable environment, and help girls understand that marriage is not a solution<sup>5</sup>
- **Lack of Knowledge and Education<sup>6</sup>:** Many adolescent girls lack education about sexual and reproductive health, they may not fully understand the consequences of pregnancy .  
**Solution:** Providing sexual and reproductive health education in schools which help adolescents understand the consequences of early pregnancy.
- **Lack of Decision-making Power<sup>7</sup>:** Many minors are not mature enough to make important life decisions due to their young age and limited experience.  
**Solution:** Empowering girls by developing life skills, self-confidence, and decision making abilities through educating programs to help them in making right decisions and to strengthen their independence
- **Academic Failure:** Academic failure can contribute to early pregnancy because girls who struggle in school might feel disconnected from educational goals and seek emotional support elsewhere.  
**Solution:** Academic support programs and flexible school programs to give them a chance to continue education without stigma.

Hence, girls who suffer from one of these issues are at particular risk of adolescent pregnancy.

## **2- Measures, including laws, policies and programs, resources and investments, have proven effective in preventing adolescent pregnancy and in addressing the root causes of adolescent pregnancy**

In Jordan there are many programs that contribute to reducing adolescent pregnancy.

- “Shababna program”– sexual and reproductive health awareness<sup>8</sup> by UNFPA, RHAS
  - This program focuses on educating adolescents and young people about sexual and reproductive health “SRH” including pregnancy prevention, healthy relationships, and informed decision making.

<sup>4</sup> <https://petra.gov.jo/Include/InnerPage.jsp?ID=97207&lang=ar&name=news>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.psd.gov.jo/ar-jo>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/adolescent-pregnancy>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/adolescent-pregnancy>

<sup>8</sup> <https://jordan.un.org/en/220793-unfpa-and-rhas-raise-awareness-youth-sexual-and-reproductive-health-through-shababna>

- Comprehensive sexuality Education “CSE” in schools<sup>9</sup> by The Ministry of Education, UNFPA,
  - RHAS provides age-appropriate, scientifically accurate information on puberty, health, relationships and contraception. Evidence shows that students who receive comprehensive sexuality education are more likely to delay early sexual activity.
- Youth-and women friendly health services<sup>10</sup> by the Ministry of Health and UNFPA
  - These services provide confidential counseling, family planning and reproductive health services in a safe and non-judgmental environment. Improving adolescents’ access to contraception, with counselling helping to prevent unintended and early pregnancies.
- Adolescent and youth friendly health services by the Ministry of Health
  - The program trains healthcare providers to deliver reproductive health services tailored to adolescents, including education on pregnancy prevention and access to family planning methods<sup>11</sup>.
- National GBV prevention and response<sup>12</sup>.
  - Aimed at reducing violence against women and girls. These involve coordination between health, social services, law enforcement and justice sectors to support survivors and promote prevention.

### **National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy 2020-2030<sup>13</sup>:**

Implementing institutions:

- Higher population Council
- Ministry of Health
- UNFPA

The strategy addresses adolescent pregnancy as a national public health and social issue. It focuses on prevention through education, access to family planning, legal protection against early marriage, and youth empowerment.

Main goals based on the UN website:

- Enabling environment
- Information and services
- Community engagement
- Sustainability and governance

### **The Legal age of marriage in Jordan**

In Jordan, the legal age of marriage is 18 years old for both girls and boys, child marriage is strongly linked with adolescent pregnancy, i.e. girls who are married at a young age are more likely to become pregnant early and by setting 18 as the minimum marriage age, the law reduces the number of girls entering early marriages- thereby lowering early and unintended pregnancies.

<sup>9</sup> <https://jordan.unfpa.org/en/news/promoting-comprehensive-sexuality-education-jordan-socio-ecological-model>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.moh.gov.jo/ar/awareness/NewsDetails/136/551>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.moh.gov.jo/ar/awareness/NewsDetails/136/551>

<sup>12</sup> <https://jordan.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence-and-harmful-practices>

<sup>13</sup> <https://jordan.unfpa.org/en/news/launching-national-reproductive-and-sexual-health-strategy-years-2020-2030>

Article (4) of the "Instructions for Granting Permission to Marry Those Who Have Completed Fifteen Years of Age and Have Not Completed Eighteen Years of Age No. (1) of 2017" **stipulates the following:** For the purpose of granting permission to marry, the court must ensure the following: **1-** The suitor is eligible for engagement according to the provisions of Article (21) of the law. **2-** The judge verifies the offer and simple choice. **3-** The judge verifies the relevant provisions of the Court, including the benefit derived from the engagement and the prevention of harm, using appropriate means of verification. **4-** There is no significant age difference between the parties. **5-** The suitor is not already married. **6-** The engagement does not cause the couple to drop out of school. **7-** A specific agreement is made with the matchmaker, and a marital home is prepared. **8-** The required medical documentation is presented<sup>14</sup>.

### 3-Measures to Prevent Stigma and Support Continued Education for Pregnant Adolescents in Jordan

Dropping out of school leads to early marriage and pregnancy, and vice versa; early marriage and pregnancy lead to dropping out of school.

Measures taken by Jordan to ensure education for pregnant minors:

- Legal protection of the right to education
  - Jordan guarantees free and compulsory basic education to all children , and there is no legal provision that allows school to expel or refuse enrollment of pregnant girls, which legally protects their access to education<sup>15</sup>.
- Compliance with international Human rights obligations
  - As a state party to the convention on the rights of child , Jordan is required to protect children from discrimination and promote the right to education without exclusion , including pregnant adolescents<sup>16</sup>.
- Monitoring and prevention of school drop out
  - The ministry of education<sup>17</sup> uses attendance monitoring and dropout prevention systems. Schools counselors and social workers follow up with students who show risk factors for leaving school, which indirectly supports pregnant adolescents
- Continuation of education during pregnancy
  - There is no documented official requirement for pregnant girls to discontinue school ; attendance decisions are more influenced by family and social pressures<sup>18</sup>.
- Re-entry into school after childbirth
  - Legally, adolescent mothers are allowed to return to school after childbirth ,but a national reintegration policy like childcare support , flexible learning is not widely implemented<sup>19</sup>.
- Addressing stigma and discrimination

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.sigi-jordan.org/article/ork-hk-k-laal-k-m-by-n-tzoyg-lk-sr-t-o-l-nkt-aa-aan-ltaalym-3>

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Education (Jordan). Education Laws and Regulations (consistent with international education rights framework).

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Articles 2 and 28

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Education (Jordan). Education Statistical Yearbooks and Dropout Monitoring Reports, 2023/2024.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF Jordan. Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy and its impact on Education, 2022

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch & UNICEF findings on education continuity barriers (Jordan and MENA context).

- Government, UN agencies, and civil society collaborate on awareness-raising and gender-sensitivity training to reduce stigma related to adolescent pregnancy and to reinforce girls' right to education<sup>20</sup>.

#### Questions and answers :

#### Did Jordan establish a minimum age of consent for sexual activity and please share data on possible cases of criminalization of consensual sexual activity among adolescents?

In Jordan, the law does set a minimum age of consent for sexual activity, but it is closely linked to protections against sexual exploitation rather than a standalone “consent law”. Under the Jordanian penal code, sexual relations with a person under 18 years old are treated as a criminal offense, and consent from someone below that age is not legally recognized as valid consent for sexual activity; sexual activity with minors is treated as statutory rape or sexual assault and can lead to serious penalties, including imprisonment depending on the age of the younger party and the circumstances of the offense<sup>21</sup>.

#### Does your Government or organization regularly collect, analyze, and use disaggregated data on adolescent pregnancy?

Yes, the government of Jordan collects data on adolescent pregnancy through national surveys and health reporting systems. Promising practices include tracking trends by age, gender, and region, and using this data to inform education and health programs.

The key challenges: 1- Gaps in qualitative information. 2- Reaching marginalized groups. 3- Ensuring data is updated regularly.

**In conclusion**, adolescent pregnancy is a complex social and health issue shaped by education, economic conditions, and cultural norms. Addressing it effectively requires programs that combine health services, education, and support for girls and their communities. Ensuring access to reproductive health information and services, as well as opportunities to continue schooling, helps prevent early pregnancies and supports the overall well-being of adolescents. Reducing adolescent pregnancy also has positive effects on social and economic development.

#### Recommendations:

- 1- Adopt a youth and adolescent-girl led national action plan co-written with minor girls and young people, to define their priorities.
- 2- Strengthen legal accountability to prevent under-age pregnancy below legal threshold including any exceptional marriage provisions.
- 3- Guarantee girls' uninterrupted education and tackle the structural drivers of early pregnancy by preventing school dropout and enabling re-entry at any age.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO, Gender-Sensitive Education Programming, Jordan country reports

<sup>21</sup> [https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Jordan%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Jordan%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0_0.pdf)