

EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGES

Summary of Policy Brief

Islamic Relief is calling for an end to early and forced marriages by raising awareness of gender justice from an Islamic human rights perspective.

Islamic Relief is calling for an end to early and forced marriages by raising awareness of gender justice from an Islamic human rights perspective.

Early and forced marriage (EFM) denies women and girls their God-given right to dignity, justice and freedom of choice. It causes physical and emotional harm, often with devastating consequences that impact not only individuals but damage relationships, families, and wider society. In particular, early marriage can result in serious health complications during pregnancy and childbirth, which is the leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-old girls in developing countries.

As one of the world's largest Muslim humanitarian agencies, Islamic Relief is leading the way in providing a faith perspective to help tackle harmful practices like EFM, particularly in Muslim communities.

Key policy positions:

- We take an Islamic human rights and community-based approach to ending EFM, and our interventions are based on the principle of 'do no harm.'
- We promote 18 as the minimum age of marriage for both female and male to help protect children, ensure young people are able to give their free and full consent to marriage and that they possess the level of maturity required to enter into a marital contract.
- We work to safeguard the rights of all by raising awareness of the harms of EFM, promoting education, empowering females, improving the health of communities, supporting parents and guardians to fulfil their responsibilities and promoting the sanctity of marriage.
- We tailor our interventions to the specific needs and cultures of local communities, recognising that EFM has different drivers. We address inter-dependent issues including educational, socio-cultural, economic, religious, legal and health factors. Our research and local knowledge ensures our work is relevant, culturally sensitive, effective and sustainable.

An Islamic human rights perspective

EFM is often a complex mix of socio-cultural and economic factors but in some societies, it is thought to be sanctioned by religious beliefs. Islamic Relief is leading the way in challenging misconceptions about marriage in Islam and raising awareness of the harm caused by EFM.

We are advocating for gender justice from an Islamic human rights perspective and our expertise in working with Muslim communities means we are well positioned to use faith as a driver for positive change.

Our key faith positions on EFM include:

- The necessity in Islam for the protection of life and health to guide every decision.
- The requirement of consent for a marriage to be legally valid in Islam.
- The Islamic requirement for both male and female to have reached not only puberty but the age of 'comprehensive maturity' before entering a marriage.
- The obligation of all Muslims to obey the laws of the land they live in, many of which specify a minimum legal age for marriage.

Call to action

We call upon governments, civil society organisations, local leaders and community members to work together to help end EFM and specifically to:

- Raise awareness of the harms of EFM, prevent its occurrence through proactive strategies, empower women and children to resist EFM and support those affected.
- Recognise the unique causes of EFM in target communities - including the interdependence with poverty and conflict - and tackle the root causes, through measures including the educational, social and economic empowerment of females.
- Mobilise faith leaders to bring religious legitimacy to tackling EFM and ensure parents and guardians understand their moral and legal responsibility to those in their care.
- Advocate for a legal framework that effectively prohibits EFM and holds states accountable for the implementation of all ratified international conventions that protect women and children.

Calling for an end to EFM is part of Islamic Relief's Gender Justice strategy that includes fighting all forms of gender-based violence including domestic violence and female genital mutilation/cutting. For the full version of our EFM Policy, Islamic Declaration on Gender Justice and other gender justice policies visit www.islamic-relief.org/gender-justice