

# Combating violence against women: all EU countries must ratify the Istanbul Convention

*MEPs called on the 11 member states that haven't ratified the Istanbul Convention to do so, in a plenary debate with Commissioner Ansip on Monday evening.*

- The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women entered into force in 2014
- To date, 11 member states still have not ratified the Istanbul Convention
- One in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence

European Parliament Press Release (13.03.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2p8Tr0n> - To date, the 11 member states that still haven't ratified the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), known as the Istanbul Convention, are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovakia and the United Kingdom.

During the debate, a vast majority of MEPs regretted the fact that these countries (including Bulgaria, which is currently holding the Council Presidency) fail to consider the Convention as the best available instrument when it comes to

fighting violence against women. They stressed that reluctance to ratify the text was often based on misconceptions and misleading arguments regarding how the word “gender” is used in the Convention. They urged the EU Commission and the Council to take tangible action to help all member states to ratify the text as quickly as possible.

Some MEPs expressed fierce opposition to what they consider “the ideological baggage” of the text and its definition of gender. They rejected the idea that the EU has any competence on the issue and called for respecting “the internal order of every society”.

Commissioner Andrus Ansip reiterated that the Convention was about preventing violence against women, without any other hidden purpose, and hoped that member states that still have doubts about fully implementing the Convention will consider its fundamental purpose: supporting female victims of violence.

## ***Context***

The Istanbul Convention, the most comprehensive international treaty on fighting violence against women, was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2011. It entered into force in August 2014 and was signed by the EU in June 2017.

According to the European Commission, one in three women in the EU has been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, over half of women have experienced

sexual harassment and one in 20 has been raped.

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[After Bulgaria, Slovakia too fails to ratify the Istanbul Convention](#)

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# **Male feminists inside Uganda's police strike out at killing of women**

By Thomas Lewton

<http://tmsnrt.rs/2p9cTLo> – Balancing a heavy clay pot on his head with a baby tied to his back, policeman Francis Ogweng caused a scene as he marched down the busy highway towards Uganda's capital, Kampala.

With traffic backed up to the horizon, crowds of men stared and laughed as the baby girl swaddled in white cloth slipped precariously down Ogweng's back, pulling his khaki uniform into disarray.

"We want to put ourselves in the shoes of women," Ogweng, an assistant superintendent in the Uganda Police Force (UPF), told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Is it difficult to carry water? Is it difficult to carry a baby?"

Judging by the sweat dripping down his face, it is.

Onlookers were surprised to see a senior officer marching to stop violence against women, in a force that opponents of Uganda's long-serving President Yoweri Museveni accuse of spending more time suppressing dissent than tackling crime.

Police often break up opposition rallies in the east African nation with teargas and beatings, rights groups say they torture suspects to illicit confessions, and surveys often rank the force as Uganda's most corrupt institution.

"Their image has been tainted," said Regina Bafaki, head of Action for Development, a local women's rights group.

“They have actually been more violators than protectors of citizen’s rights.”

But a spate of unsolved murders of young women, with more than 20 corpses found beside roadsides south of the capital since May, is putting rare public pressure on the police.

They have charged more than a dozen suspects with the women’s murders, listing possible motives range from domestic rows through sexual abuse to ritual murder linked to human sacrifice.

### ***Battering of women***

Ogweng was not alone, flanked by three policemen carrying bundles of firewood, a 50-strong police brass band and other officers carrying placards that read: “Peace in the home. Peace in the nation. Prevent Gender Based Violence”.

“Men can also carry water, men can carry babies ... it does no harm at all, it doesn’t make a man less of a man,” said Ogweng, who describes himself as a feminist – a rarity in a country where women often kneel to show deference to men.

About half of Ugandans believe that domestic violence is justified under certain circumstances, such as when women neglect children or burn food, government data shows.

“There are those who still believe that battering of women, beating of women, is something normal,” said Asan Kasingye, assistant inspector general, another unlikely ally in Uganda’s fight for gender equality.

“We must invest our resources, our training, our recruitment ... into fighting against gender based violence,” he said, seated in his top floor office at the police headquarters.

“It must percolate, it must be known by everybody. So it preoccupies us.”

### ***Stripped naked***

The police demonstration calling for an end of violence against women went down well with locals around Entebbe, where about 20 women were raped and murdered in 2017.

“This government prides itself for bringing security ... but at the same time when these ladies were being murdered, the government didn’t even talk about it,” said Anatoli Ndyabagyera, whose fiancée Rose Nakimuli was killed in July.

The murders illustrate a broader problem in Uganda, where government data shows more than one in three women suffer physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner, although few report it to the police.

“We have in our society a dangerous attitude of men thinking they can dispense with women and they can get away with it,” said Ndyabagyera. “They look at women and tend to think of them as items of ownership.”

Four in 10 girls wed before they turn 18, even though Uganda has banned child marriage, according to the United Nations children’s fund (UNICEF), and few go beyond primary school.

Efforts to pass a bill seeking to ban traditional practices, like dowry and the inheritance of widows by their husbands’ male relatives, and to grant rights to women in divorce have floundered for years.

Women wearing miniskirts were stripped by mobs of men following the 2014 Anti Pornography Act that banned “indecent” dressing and the police in 2015 stripped female opposition leader Zaina Fatuma naked in the street.

“There are (officers) who are badly behaved,” said Ogweng, who works in the child and family protection department.

“But there are those who are good, and there are many.”

Given the influential role of the police in Ugandan society, Ogweng believes he can help to change people’s perceptions about what it means to be a man.

“People are so rooted in the culture where some things are only done by women and some things are done by men,” he said.

“If a man, a police officer, can carry a baby, can carry a pot, then other men can do it ... Men even called me afterwards and said: ‘You have opened my eyes’ ... So I think people are beginning to understand.”

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## **El Salvador woman freed after 15 years in jail for abortion**

*A 34-year-old woman in El Salvador has been freed after spending 15 years in jail for having an*



## ***abortion.***

BBC (14.03.2018) – <http://bbc.in/2pcD0oZ> – Maira Verónica Figueroa Marroquín was released after her 30-year sentence for aggravated murder was reduced.

Abortion is banned in El Salvador, a predominantly Roman Catholic nation, in any circumstances.

Ms Figueroa always maintained her innocence. She said she suffered a stillbirth in a house where she was working as a maid in 2003.

She was taken to hospital, arrested and eventually sentenced for inducing an abortion.

Her parents, as well as journalists and activists, were outside the prison in Ilopango, near the capital San Salvador, to welcome her.

“I am happy to be with my family,” she said.

“I want to study law to understand what happened to me and help other women,” she added.

“I’m going to start again and make up for lost time.”

Ms Figueroa is the second woman this year to have her sentence for abortion reduced by the Supreme Court.

Teodora Vásquez, 35, had her sentenced commuted a month ago.

She spent 10 years in jail after her baby was found dead and she was sentenced for murder.

### **Complete ban on abortions**

El Salvador is one of a handful of countries in the world where abortions are completely banned and carry heavy sentences.

The punishment is up to eight years in jail but in many cases in which the foetus or newborn has died, the charge is changed to one of aggravated homicide, which carries a minimum sentence of 30 years.

While El Salvador is not alone in Latin America in having a total ban on abortions, the country is particularly strict in the way it enforces it.

Doctors have to inform the authorities if they think a woman has tried to end her pregnancy. If they fail to report such cases, they too could face long sentences in jail.

Human rights groups say this results in a criminalisation of miscarriages and medical emergencies, with more than 100 convicted of abortion-related crimes in El Salvador since 2000.

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## **Will Morocco's new law protect women from violence?**

*Legislation criminalises violence against women, but some claim law falls short, leaving domestic abuse victims at risk*

By Ahmed El Amraoui

Al Jazeera (08.03.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2oUtlWv> – A new law in Morocco criminalising violence towards women has divided opinion, with some observers applauding the legislation as progress while critics claim some women would still be left at risk.

Until recently, women were vulnerable to various types of violence in private and public spheres, including rape, sexual harassment and domestic abuse.

Much of this abuse had gone unreported, with such incidents considered private matters and not criminal.

In a bill approved by parliament on February 14 after years of debate among political parties, civil and women's rights groups, the new law defines violence against women as "any act based on gender discrimination that entails physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm to a woman. It also criminalises cyber harassment and forced marriage".

The new law imposes tougher penalties on perpetrators, including prison terms ranging from one month to five years and fines from \$200 to \$1,000.

The law, however, does not explicitly outlaw marital rape or spousal violence and does not provide a precise definition of domestic violence.

### ***Domestic violence***

Bassima Hakkaoui, minister of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development, praised the bill as defining "all kinds of violence against women, offers preventive and protection measures and increases penalties for people who commit violent acts against women."

Human Rights Watch said the law includes positive provisions, but leaves women at risk of being abused in a marriage.

“The law allows for protection orders that prohibit an accused person from contacting, approaching, or communicating with the victim,” the rights group said. “But these can only be issued during a criminal prosecution or after a criminal conviction. Moreover, the orders can be cancelled if spouses reconcile which will only add more pressure on women to drop such orders.”

In 2009, in a survey of 8,300 women, 62.8 percent said they had been subject to psychological, physical, sexual or economical violence, according to High Planning Commission (HCP), an independent government statistical institution.

Miloud Kaouass, professor of Islamic studies at Ibn Tofail University in the city of Kenitra, applauded the law, but stressed the importance of raising awareness for such a move to be effective.

“The law is good but we need to enhance the importance of moral values and manners among our youths both in school and at home. As long as we get away from ethics, morality and manners, violence and harassment against women would never stop.

“Teaching our youth Islamic values will also help. Islam considers even looks with some kind of sexual attraction as harassment,” Kaouass told Al Jazeera.

Kaouass claimed it would be difficult for the new law to address claims of violence by married women against husbands, saying loopholes in the legislation could lead to false accusations.

“A relationship between a husband and wife is supposed to be based on love and consent. In the case of a married couple, it is difficult to differentiate if the relationship was with or without consent,” he said.

Hayat Ndichi, a member of the Aspiration Feminine NGO, said the law lacks clarity, which in turn would not deter molestation or limit violence.

“The main problem of the new law is the way it defines abuses. Articles of the law lack clarity and are not as precise as international norms. This means opening the door for many legal loopholes and interpretations,” she told Al Jazeera, adding conjugal rape had been ignored.

However, she praised the bill for getting tough on perpetrators and including cybercrimes.

***‘I didn’t know what to do. I was so afraid’***

Fatima Zahra, a 17-year-old journalism student, said proving violence against women could be challenging.

“If you don’t have evidence that someone did something bad to you, you can’t prove it and police can’t prove it as well. So how the law would be implemented?” she said.

“When a man harasses you, he knows you can do nothing about it. Because you will be afraid of those people who are around who will think that you are the reason because you attracted him.

“The problem is always you. This is why there are many places where I can’t wear whatever I want, especially if I am alone,” she told Al Jazeera.

Sarah, a 22-year-old university student, remembers with bitterness one of many incidents where harassment went beyond words.

“I don’t know from where some men get the nerve to ... start touching you.

“I remember once, I was in my first year of high school and I got into a taxi, which is supposed to be a safe place. He started to feel my leg with his hand. I didn’t know what to do. I was so afraid,” she told Al Jazeera.

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**Further reading:**

[Morocco: New Violence Against Women Law](#)

[Violence against Women: 16 Reasons to Amend Morocco's 103-13 Bill](#)

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## International Women's Day 2018

HRWF (08.03.2018) – Today we're celebrating International Women's Day by highlighting some women's organisations around the world who are working to help empower women and [#Pressforprogress](#).



[Women for Women International](#) works to support women affected by war. They work in eight countries "offering support, tools, and access to life-changing skills to move from crisis and poverty to stability and economic self-sufficiency." They offer [individual sponsorships](#) that provide women with a



monthly stipend, training opportunities, and education.



[SB OverSeas](#) is an NGO based in Brussels, Belgium working to help refugees by providing services focused on education, empowerment, and emergency aid. HRWF is currently working with SB OverSeas on the issue of child marriage in refugee camps in Lebanon by telling the stories of girls in the camps. Read past stories: [Girls are a worry until death](#), [Chasing a childhood in Shatila](#), [A cup of tea served by child brides](#), and [A firsthand account of child marriage in a Lebanese refugee camp](#).



The [Mongolian Gender Equality Center](#) established in 2002 works to protect women and girls from human trafficking, in addition to also promoting women's rights and striving for gender equality. They have been honoured as a US State Department [TIP Report Hero](#) for excellence in their work.



[Kuna Mbarete](#) (which means strong woman) is a women's

empowerment movement started in Bolivia in 2017. Initiated as a protest against the government the group grew quickly overnight to be more than [165,000 women strong](#).



[SAYFTY](#) is an NGO in India that working on preventing violence against women by fostering more dialogue and open communication to make “fundamental shift” in how the VAW is perceived.

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# South Asia: Who made my clothes? Asian workers' diaries show 'human cost'

The largely female workforce in South Asia is often underpaid, faces verbal and sexual harassment on a daily basis and is forced to work long hours, campaigners say

By Anuradha Nagaraj

Thomson Reuters Foundation (21.02.2018) – <http://tmsnrt.rs/2HN2lJL> – Women making clothes for global fashion brands in South Asia are often yelled at by their supervisors and have to take out loans to make ends meet, hundreds of garment workers' diaries showed.

A year-long study of more than 500 workers in Cambodia, India and Bangladesh found women often work overtime or borrow money from their husbands to feed their families and pay rent.

"I wouldn't have enough money if we ate a lot," read one entry by Chenda in Cambodia, where researchers found most workers were in their 20s and married, with some primary education and

earned about \$45 for a 48-hour week.

Fashion industry manufacturers have come under pressure to improve conditions and workers' rights, particularly after the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh.

The largely female workforce in South Asia is often underpaid, faces verbal and sexual harassment on a daily basis and is forced to work long hours, campaigners say.

The research, published on Tuesday, was carried out by transparency campaigners Fashion Revolution and The C&A Foundation, affiliated with retailer C&A, which partners with the Thomson Reuters Foundation on trafficking.

The diaries' aim, they said, was to show "the human cost" of fashion and improve workers' lives.

"This gives brands something to consider above and beyond their margins when deciding where to make their clothes," Eric Noggle, research director at Microfinance Opportunities, said in a statement.

"Their decisions have a real and meaningful impact on the lives of these women and their families."

Researchers found that India had the best living and working



# schoolgirls missing after Boko Haram attack

*The Nigerian government on Sunday confirmed that 110 girls were missing after a Boko Haram school attack in the northeast, following days of silence on the children's fate.*

France 24 (26.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2Fyz1Gm> – “The Federal Government has confirmed that 110 students of the Government Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State, are so far unaccounted for, after insurgents believed to be from a faction of Boko Haram invaded their school on Monday,” the information ministry said in a statement.

The statement came after authorities were unable to account for 110 of the school's 906 students, the ministry said.

The kidnapping has raised questions about the military's repeated claims that the Islamist militants are on the verge of defeat, after nearly nine years of bitter fighting.

It has also revived memories of the 2014 mass abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok that shook the world.

On Monday night, terrified pupils fled the boarding school when heavily armed fighters in military fatigues and turbans stormed the town, shouting “Allahu Akbar” (“God is greatest”).

The authorities initially denied that any student had been kidnapped.

On Friday, President Muhammadu Buhari apologised to the girls' families, saying: "This is a national disaster. We are sorry that this could have happened."

### ***Targeting education***

Former military ruler Buhari was elected in 2015 on a promise to defeat Boko Haram, after the jihadists grew in strength under his predecessor, Goodluck Jonathan.

Jonathan was lambasted for his tardy response to the Chibok abduction, which saw 276 girls from the town in Borno state taken in the dead of night.

A teacher at the school, Amsani Alilawan, said there were soldiers in Dapchi until last month but they were then redeployed.

"One month back, they carry (take away) all soldiers, they transferred them to another side, they leave us without security," he said.

Enraged relatives of the missing girls this week tried to surround the convoy of the state mayor of Yobe, only to be

pushed back by the security forces.

The kidnapping is the worst jihadist assault to have hit Nigeria since Buhari came to power.

Schools, particularly those with a secular curriculum, have been targeted by Boko Haram, whose name roughly translates from Hausa as “Western education is forbidden”.

Boko Haram’s quest to establish a hardline Islamic state in northeast Nigeria has left at least 20,000 dead and made more than 2.6 million others homeless since 2009.

The jihadists have increasingly turned to kidnapping for ransom as a way to finance their operations and win back key commanders in prisoner swaps with the Nigerian government.

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# Rights coalition takes on female genital mutilation in Egypt

By Rahma Diaa

Al-Monitor (13.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2BzgNo6> – Women and human rights organizations in Egypt marked the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Feb. 6 by announcing an “Anti-FGM Action Plan” to create new policies and mechanisms to reduce these practices against women and young girls in Egypt.

According to the most recent gender-based violence survey conducted by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in 2015, 9 out of 10 women in Egypt have undergone FGM. In 2014, that figure was about 92% of married women aged between 15 and 49, with 78.4% of the operations performed by doctors and nurses.

Representatives of 146 organizations were present at the press conference, including the Tadwein Gender Research Center, the New Woman Foundation, the Centre for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the Women’s Center for Legal Guidance and Awareness, Salemah for Women’s Empowerment, the Cairo Center for Development, the Egyptian Coalition on the Rights of the Child and the Union of

Associations to Combat Harmful Practices against Women and Children.

Amal Fahmi, the director of Tadwein and the group's coordinator, told Al-Monitor that efforts by state institutions against FGM practices have not achieved the necessary changes. They have criminalized FGM without setting up a framework to enforce the law or raising awareness of the psychological and physical dangers of female circumcision.

"The situation is getting worse as 80% of FGM procedures are done at the hands of doctors, according to the stats obtained by the anti-FGM associations and organizations. The campaign that was recently launched aims to pressure the government to change its approach, raise awareness through sex education courses in schools in addition to media awareness campaigns against the medicalization of female genital cutting and develop a human rights discourse against FGM with a focus of women's rights to health and bodily integrity," Fahmi explained.

Fahmi also stressed the need for the government to enforce the laws criminalizing the custom to act as a deterrent and to stop its spread. She noted that the government will have to train health inspectors, police and prosecutors to monitor for and detect FGM and respond to incidences of it.

Since 2008, when the state added Article 242 to the Penal Code criminalizing FGM, only two cases have been brought to court. The first was in 2015, when the Mansoura Appeals Court sentenced a doctor to two years in prison with hard labor and

closed his practice for one year after a child death following a procedure.

Similarly, in July 2016 in Suez, a doctor, anesthetist and the victim's mother were prosecuted in the death of a girl during a circumcision surgery. They were charged with manslaughter, and each received suspended sentences of one year in prison.

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi issued Law No. 78 of 2016 to amend Article 242. Before that point, the article called for imprisonment between three months and two years or a fine of \$282. After the change, those accused of practicing FGM face harsher punishments: imprisonment for a period of no less than five years and no more than seven.

Reda el-Danbouki, the director of the Women's Center for Legal Guidance and Awareness, told Al-Monitor that the coalition will lobby for an amendment to close a loophole created by Article 61, which allows for violence committed to protect oneself or others against serious physical or moral harm. Danbouki said lawyers or judges could claim circumcision is done for necessary medical reasons, "basing their argument on this article."

Danbouki added that there is no need to increase FGM-related punishment as the real change will come when the existing law is enforced and the government starts inspecting hospitals and medical centers, punishing perpetrators and raising awareness on the dangers of this practice, which many Egyptians continue to view as necessary according to Sharia despite a fatwa by Dar al-Ifta declaring FGM haram (religiously forbidden).

According to a survey of Egyptian youth conducted by the International Population Council in 2017, 70% of young men and 57% of young women feel that FGM is necessary.

Azza Soliman, the director of the Centre for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance, told Al-Monitor that the campaign is intended to revitalize the efforts of the human rights organizations that took the first steps to fight FGM in 1997. Back then, their work brought about a drastic change in the rhetoric around FGM, and for the first time people started talking about it as violence against women.

“This group conducted thorough studies on the history of FGM to prove that it was not related to Islam or Pharaonic traditions but rather a practice that originated in Africa. Consequently, they worked to remove the religious framework and basis for this practice and demanded an end to it,” Soliman added.

“In 2003, the organizations’ efforts came to a halt, when the authorities took it upon themselves to combat FGM but failed to bring about a substantial change, prompting the women’s organizations to join hands and try to make a real difference to protect women and young girls against the dangers of this practice,” Soliman added.

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Also see HRWF’s work on FGM/c: [Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting & Religion](#)

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**Girls are a worry until death; هم البنات للممات**



Painting by SB OverSeas Beneficiary

*Written by Jenna Benferhat, SB OverSeas*

HRWF (21.02.2018) – Mariam's family was always known for being progressive. Her father allowed the girls to decide when to start wearing the hijab. Mariam didn't start wearing it until she was 11, when her Islamic middle school wouldn't allow her to attend without covering her hair. Her father received countless complaints from family members and friends, asking why his second eldest daughter hadn't put on the hijab, until she finally did at the age of 14. His eldest daughter, Lara, was married at the age of 19, when she found a husband she desired. Four months later, when Lara fled her marriage due to severe abuse at the hands of her husband, her father protected her from her abuser. When Lara discovered she was pregnant with her abuser's son, her father offered to raise him as his own.

Mariam's father died in 2010 after fighting a brain tumor. The following year, her family was forced to flee Syria as a result of the war. With the loss of her father came the loss of her freedom to choose her country, her husband, her future.

Mariam had been living as a refugee in Lebanon for three years when her mother arranged her marriage with her cousin, Nasr. She was seventeen and had hoped to go back to Syria to continue her studies. She had studied until the 10th grade, which is already beyond what most women in her farming village would complete. She begged to hold off the marriage, but her mother told her it was time to become a woman. It was still not safe to return to Syria, and her mother was concerned that she would not be able to provide for the family of 9.

Mariam and Nasr were married in 2014. She was 17, and he was 24.

Soon after their marriage, Mariam had her first pregnancy and, after three months, her first miscarriage. Her doctor said that her body was not ready for childbirth. Her second

pregnancy followed two months later and was laden with complications.

“I wasn’t ready for my first child. My son would cry, and I would cry,” she half laughed. “My son would cry, and I would cry,” she repeated, now with despair. “I didn’t know what to do. I wasn’t ready to be a mother. Every night, he would cry, and I would cry.”

“It was harder for my cousin, Eman” she explained. Eman was married at 12 to a 25 year old man. Eman is now 16 and recently gave birth to her second child. She had complications with both child births. Her first child was born two months premature, because, her doctor explained, her body was unable to support the full term.

Nearly every early marriage Mariam described, including her own, began with abuse. During the first year of her marriage, Mariam’s husband would hit her. She would run to her mother crying, telling her how she hated her marriage and how her husband would hit her. “My mother taught me how to be a wife,” she explained. She now knew to make his bath when he asked, to cook when he asked, to keep the house clean for him. Her husband was kind now. They got along now. Her husband stopped hitting her when she began “acting like a wife.”

Mariam’s friend, Fatima, was married at 12 to a 35 year old man. The neighbors would hear abuse at all hours of the night. She recalled their disdain, “She doesn’t understand how to be a wife.”

According to Mariam, the number of early marriages increased dramatically with the start of the Syrian war. When news spread of militants sexually assaulting and murdering girls near their village, parents feared for their daughter’s safety and hoped that marriage would serve as a form of protection for them.

Even without these threats, girls are still married young

outside Syria. Mariam explained that, like with her own, many families now struggle to support themselves. Marrying off girls at a young age means one less mouth to feed, one less body in their cramped rooms and one less child to worry about.

She said that people from her community have never cared much about girls. A common saying amongst those from her village is, “هم البنات للممات” meaning “Girls are a worry until death.”

When a man courts a woman in Mariam’s community, the man must ask the woman’s family for tea. If the girl’s parents accept, then the man goes to the girl’s family’s home with his own family. Over unsipped tea, the man proposes marriage to the girl’s father. If he accepts, they sip the tea. If the father rejects the proposal, the tea remains unsipped.

She listed girl after girl. Courting after courting ended in sipped tea. Child after child wed.

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## **FRANCE: Court says man who had sex with 11-year-old girl must face rape charges**

*A French court said Tuesday that a 29-year-old man on trial for having sex with an 11-year-old girl must face rape charges, declaring itself incompetent to rule in the highly controversial case.*

France24 (13.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2F56o00> – The man went



on trial earlier Tuesday for sexual assault rather than rape in a case that triggered an outcry after prosecutors judged that the sex was “consensual”, despite the girl’s young age.

France does not treat sex between an adult and a minor as rape unless there is proof that force was used, and the government has vowed to introduce an age of consent.

The local court in the Paris suburb of Pontoise said after a day of closed-door hearings that the man should be put on trial for rape, pushing the decision to a higher court.

The girl’s family were outraged by the initial decision not to try him for rape, and their lawyer Carine Diebolt hailed Tuesday’s ruling as “a victory for the victims”.

“There is no question of consent when we’re talking about a child of 11 years,” she had told reporters before the trial opened.

She has asked for the case to be adjourned and a rape charge to be applied, insisting that the child was shocked, intimidated and threatened by the defendant.

The father of two children, then aged 28, approached the girl in a public area of a housing estate in Montmagny northwest of Paris.

She performed oral sex in an elevator on the way to his apartment where they had penetrative sex.

His lawyer, Marc Goudarzian, cast doubt on the girl's testimony and insisted his client thought the girl was 17 because she had passed puberty. "She wasn't born yesterday," Goudarzian added.

In November last year, a man was acquitted of rape after having sex with an 11-year-old after a jury found no evidence that she had been forced into the relationship.

And in another widely publicised case in November, a teacher was given a suspended jail sentence, not a prison term, for having sex with a 14-year-old pupil.

President Emmanuel Macron, who is married to his former schoolteacher, has proposed a new law that would make 15 the age of consent.

**More information:** [Ages of Consent in Europe](#)

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