

TAKING THE FALSE STEP OF FAMILY BLISS: CASE STUDIES OF CHILD & EARLY MARRIAGE IN KORÇA AND VLORA, ALBANIA



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CANADA FUND FOR LOCAL INITIATIVES

TIRANA, JANUARY 2016

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II. List of Abbreviations

CEDAW:	Convention on elimination of all forms of the discriminations
CFLI:	Canada Fund for Local Initiatives
CSO:	Civil Society Organization
CRC:	Committee on the Rights of the Children
EU:	European Union
GoA:	Government of Albania
INSTAT:	Institute of Statistics of Albania
IOs:	International Organizations
IOM:	International Organization of Migration
IPA:	Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance
IT:	Information Technologies
LGU:	Local Government Unit
MoSWY:	Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
Observatory:	“Observatory for Children’s Rights”
UN:	United Nations Organization
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF:	The United Nations Children’s Fund
UN-Women:	United Nations Organization for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

I. Executive Summary

This undertaking analyses the early and child marriage in Albania with a view from the ground. It focuses in the towns of Korça and Vlora and the situation with the early marriage phenomenon in these areas. The study is an activity of the “Observatory for Children’s Rights” and is supported by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. It builds on the experience gained and the findings produced during the first phase of this project that undertook to assess the early marriage with a specific view to the Roma community in Albania.

What is presented in the following pages is an analytical description of women that have experienced early marriage and currently live in Korça and Vlora. In each town a case study is developed and enriched with statistical data that have resulted from focused interviews with a sample of early married women and focus group discussions including representation of local government, civil society and women that have experienced early marriage themselves. The data collected in each area, thanks to an excellent cooperation with local government units, police, hospitals, and courts, are compared with each other and similarities with other countries are also highlighted. The study tries to raise awareness on the issue of early marriage not any more as a

phenomenon of a singular ethnic group of minority but as an emerging issue that urgently requires the attention of all in order to be eradicated including ways and policies that would help in the process of integrating the women who have married early or underage effectively in the Albanian society.

This assessment aims to deliver an analytical tool that on one side provides a detailed snapshot of the early marriage phenomenon in selected units of local government, while on the other side, offers policy proposal interventions and actions at the central and local level that aim to address early marriage by bringing together local government, media and civil society organizations. Unlike other studies dealing with this issue, we try to provide a novel approach that is closer to women that married early and take them into consideration together with their needs while protecting their identity and rights to privacy. The case studies tend to provide a sound basis for a country-wide study and recommendations for action in order to eradicate this phenomenon. We believe that through a national campaign addressing this issue women that have married early could become the most effective spokespersons to increase awareness on this phenomenon.

This assessment identifies two types of early marriage situations that coincide with stages of socio-political transition in Albania. In Korça the age group is more mature and have married during the last decade of the 20th century, while in Vlora the early marriages have taken place during the first decade of this century. Thus, early marriage is a by-product of transition that accentuated itself at a time where social norms and values were questioned or simply did not exist.

The general outlook of Albanians seems to have improved significantly during the last 20 years, but pockets of underdevelopment exist that are enlarged by the prolonged transition. The case studies throw light on this issue and early marriage is a direct consequence of social underdevelopment and also a response to dire needs to survive. They show that culture of marriage has changed in Albania, but this needs to be further proved at the country level by disaggregating data related to education and marriage.

The two case studies developed do not victimize or make use of the women that married early. Instead, we look at their life experiences and try to analyze the effects of the process of early marriage on them and on the society in which they live. We also look at the legality of early marriage by providing some policy considerations in this area that could have immediate implementation and effect positively on the issue of early marriages. The discussion of early marriage related to teenage sexuality, trafficking and migration is inevitable as these are phenomena that accompany transition and linger for longer in the following developmental stages.

Women interviewed and considered in the case studies show that early marriage prevents their educational and professional advancement. Most of them have a low level of education and do not plan to return to school after giving birth. Furthermore they do not see themselves developing a professional life outside their household. Lack of education and opportunities have quite a negative impact on women who want to reintegrate after early marriage and the consequences of this are further suffered in the society.

This assessment defines the current state of early marriage as a dual reality existing in paper - Albania has a legal framework that prohibits the existence of this phenomenon and in actuality – the project that the Observatory undertook to understand the scope and intensity of this phenomenon. These two case studies reflect the international trend that early marriage affects girls rather than boys with strong gender biases and discriminatory attitudes in families and communities. Unfortunately, it becomes evident that early marriage clearly violates the development rights of girls (health, education, and professional growth), their rights to protection (risk of domestic violence and abuse) and participation rights as they evolve from teenage to adult age.

By analyzing factors that contribute to early marriage and its consequences in a framework characterized by dull forms of relationship with state and non-state actors we consider early marriage as an issue that is building into a problem that requires a multitasked solution response involving: central leadership cooperation to change the family code in order not to allow marriage below the age of 14 in courts; civil society coordination supporting awareness initiatives at the local level; active involvement of the local government and effective engagement of the women that married early to raise awareness at the national scale. The final sections of this study propose multi-tasked and multi-actor coordinated solutions presented in the form of recommendations and actions to be taken in a following phase that looks at the issue of early marriage at the national level.

This study was carried out by a group of experts in-

cluding key actors from the local government, courts and police in Korça and Vlora. We try to indicate that cooperation of the civil society and international donor with central and local government can be the key to provide long-term eradication of the early marriage phenomenon. The combination of the skills in this study team, including experience dealing with women and youth issues as well as statistical research helped in identifying and documenting characteristics of early marriage that were not captured earlier. Developing of team approaches to understand and deal with early marriage seems to be another contribution of this study, showing that a better understanding of a social phenomenon and solutions to deal with it when centered on the local level and utilizing local resources need not be either costly or timely. Effective cooperation among state structures supported by civil society and international partners using the local centered approach could make the process of dealing with early marriage and eradicating it successful.

II. Introductory Considerations

A. The road less travelled...

Tackling issues related to early and child marriages as societal problems of women and youth at the local levels, can be considered innovative in countries like Albania where transition to democratic and more representative governing has been prolonged. The less travelled path towards market economy and open society came with high social payments and sacrifices. There are many crossroads in the Albania society of the 21st century and choosing how to cross requires decisions based on learned policy determination— a process that in Albania has neither been, nor is expected to be easy. Such is the case with early marriage situation. Understanding this phenomenon beyond the statistical data and finding ways and means to deal with it socially requires courage and policy determination to take action to remedy the situation.

Transition to democracy from a dictatorial authoritarian rule in 1991–92 has been dramatic for Albanian population in terms of norms, codes and culture. Patterns of communist norms and behavior, while legally replaced with norms and behaviors of open and democratic societies, in actuality were taken over by the process of transition and

replaced with commonsensical customs combining imagined traditions of the pre-WWII Albania and norms of behavior learned by migration and transition. These norms and behaviors also have allowed for wide scale corruption, abuse of power in family relationships, trafficking of human beings, forced labor and prostitution on one side and effort to structure a socio-political system founded on the respect of individual human rights on the other. The complexity of an Albanian dual reality (paper and actuality), a common denominator of the prolonged transition towards a market economy and democratic political system, becomes evident in the area of child and early marriage as well. Legally and historically speaking Albanian governments have been inclined to produce laws and regulations that protected and enhanced women's rights including regulation of marriage at an appropriate age¹. In actuality, as it will become evident in this study, early marriage exists and it calls for policy and social attention.

In today's Albania, social cohesion is lacking together with the dominant role of the former paternalistic state. Within this unfortunate context, while economically and financially Albanian individuals are far better compared with the last quarter of the 20th century, social-

¹ The Constitution of the Albanian Monarch of 1928 abolished the covering of women's faces in public; the Communist regime launched a women's movement in 1968 to emancipate women and make them equal men; in the current system Albania has passed several laws and treaties for women's right including CEDAW in 1993 (Law 7769 / 9.11.1993). Nevertheless the implementation of all these laws related to women's rights either were either formally implemented in areas close to the central government of completely ignored in actuality leading to further gender inequality.

ly, the individual and the society have gone through ebbs and tides that have dwindled its foundations producing an amorphous system that lacks a moral and philosophical core.

Under communism, Albanian government invested itself in ideological and other forms of fights against what were considered “cradle” engagements- a form of committing a child to marriage with a particular person or family from birth. Evidence of this type of spousal commitment is not relevant. Child and early marriage has gotten other forms and shapes. Studies undertaken by UNICEF and UNFPA in Albania indicate that about 10% of women married aged 20 to 24 were married before they reached the 18– the legal age for marriage in Albania. According to another report of UNFPA in Albania (2011) about 31% of female Romani children between ages 13 and 17 were married.

Very common is also the vignette of a young girl either falling in love with, or being forced to marry an immigrant who then forces her into trafficking or worse². This initiative and the case studies undertaken around it are a reflection of the activities taking place on the ground to recognize this phenomenon. Better understanding of it will shed some policy light into proposals for the government, local government and civil society to deal with early marriage accordingly and in line with the best solutions

² According to Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 United States Department of State • Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (Albania report) – page 24. For more information see this link: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>

offered internationally.

The consequences of early marriage on girls, their physical and emotional wellbeing, including - as is the case in Albania, the disruption of education have been highlighted in research both regionally and globally with UNFPA and UNICEF being at the forefront of the effort. These negative impacts have led to the definition of child (early) marriage as a harmful practice by UNICEF in 2005. The denial of life changes, once a child enters into an early marriage is conceptualized as an infringement of human rights³.

³ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948) specifically refers only to the aspect of forced marriage without the consent of the parties as an infringement of the right to enter marriage “with free and full consent” (Art 16 (2)). The UDHR however also states “childhood (is) entitled to special care and protection” (Art 25 (2)). The same concepts of the right to freely consent to marriage, and the need for special measures for protection of children were also incorporated in the two International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) (Art 10) and Civil and Political Rights (Art. 23 (3) Art 24 (1)).

The UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women 1979 (CEDAW) addressed the issue of child marriage in a specific article. It clarifies that betrothal and marriage shall have no legal effect and that State Parties should set a minimum age of marriage and provide a system for compulsory registration of marriage (Art 16 (2)). The CEDAW Committee monitoring progress has adopted General Recommendations on Equality in Marriage (GR 21) and women and girls health (GR 24), which set standards on a State Party’s duty to prevent early marriage. These norms have been reinforced by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (CRC). The Convention’s concepts of a child’s right to life, survival and development, (Art 6) and the right to birth registration (Art 7) create obligations on the State to prevent early marriage. Rights to protection from exploitation and abuse, and the right to participate in making

decisions concerning the child's life, with evolving capacity and maturity, are also denied when early marriage takes place. The general norms of non-discrimination in Art 2 and the child's best interests in Art 3 also reinforce the prohibition on early and forced marriage. This interpretation is incorporated into the General Comments of the CRC Committee, which clarify, that early marriages violate the full range of child rights incorporated in this instrument. These include a General Comment on Adolescent Health (GC 2003 No. 4 para 9, 20) and General Comment No. 3 on HIV/AIDS. This interprets CRC Art 6 on the right to life as requiring measures to protect girls children from early and forced marriage on the rationale that early marriages makes them more vulnerable to HIV/ AIDS (GC 2003 No. 3 Para 11).

Human rights treaty standards have also been developed over a period of time, to conceptualize child marriages as a harmful practice, which must be eliminated even if it is approved and legitimized in customary law and tradition. Child marriage is thus described as a "harmful traditional practice" in international human rights law. Art 24 (3) of CRC refers to the obligation of a State Party to "take effective and appropriate measures to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to health." The CRC General Comment on HIV/AIDS (GC No 3 para 11) recognizes that early marriage comes within the meaning of a "harmful traditional practice". The General Comment on Adolescent Health emphasizes the importance of interventions to set minimum ages of marriage and sexual consent without discrimination on the ground of sex (GC No. 4 para 9, 20). This approach is reinforced in the standards of CEDAW. Art 5 of this Convention requires the State to take steps to "modify" social and cultural and customary practices that conflict with the right to gender equality and non-discrimination. Several of CEDAW's General Recommendations, on Health (No 24) Violence Against Women (No 19) and Equality in Marriage (No 21) consider early and forced marriages a "harmful" practice that must be eliminated, even if it is approved in local cultures and customs. Though human rights instruments including CRC recognize that the child of a minority ethnic community has a right to enjoy his/her cultures (CRC Art 30, ICCPR Art 27) and the right to freedom of religion (CRC Art 14, ICCPR 18) the manifestation of culture and religion is subject to the States duty to modify practices that infringe other human rights.

This paper developed around two case studies, represents the finalization of the second phase of activities organized by "Observatory for Children's Rights" in Albania supported by the Canada Fund for local initiatives. This initiative, build around the phenomenon of early marriage, has as a goal to clearly understand the scope and intensity of this phenomenon on the ground by doing field work and activities in two main towns in Albania: Korça and Vlora. The findings presented here will help in the process of developing a country-wide initiative that would seek to eradicate this unhealthy phenomenon from the Albanian society improving country's chances for European Integration even in terms of its respect for human and gender rights.

The latest political developments in Albania including the formation of a left-wing government (2013) and acceleration of the process towards EU joining have created new opportunities to reconsider and make better public policies to address the issue of child and early marriages. The Children's Observatory engaged with this initiative is in the forefront of the move to find solutions closer to people in cooperation with government and international partners. We are of the opinion that the new territorial reform that Albania is implementing will provide even greater opportunities to deal with the issue of early marriages locally. The creation of single units of local governments with clear scopes and duties will provide in the long run the effective structures to deal with human rights including safeguarding of children from early marriage. Thus, the central government, the entity that internationally represents Albania in forums and organizations protecting children's

rights, should develop clear policy solutions that the local government and other structures could implement in order to deal effectively with the issue of early marriage and its consequences.

B. The façade of short sightedness in marriage and family policies

The legal age for marriage in Albania is 18 years old, regardless of religion, while the age of sexual consent is 14 years. This regulation puts Albania in the group of countries with a low age of sexual consent⁴ and allows for statutory rape prosecution for those engaging in sexual relations with minors below this age. Albania has the same sexual consent age as its neighboring countries with the exception of Greece.

While doing the desk review and following up with the lessons learned by the study we prepared on early marriage in the Roma ethnic communities we found that sexual relations with minors below the age of 14 took place but were not clearly defined or considered as statutory rape. The Albanian penal code clarifies that minors below the age of 14 lack the legal capacity to express consent⁵. On

⁴. Based on a review of different sources dealing with age of sexual consent – 16 years of age seems to be the dominant age for sexual consent. Albania and its neighbouring countries including Italy have set the age of consent at the age of 14. Greece has it set at the age of 15. For more information see: <http://www.ageofconsent.com/ageofconsent.htm>

⁵ The Age of Consent in Albania is **14 years old**. The age of consent is the minimum age at which an individual is considered legally old

the other hand, if ordered by court, a minor could enter into a marriage and this automatically considers the minor an adult with all the rights and responsibilities of adulthood. This seemingly legal paradox between penal and family code and the legal and illegal practice of early marriage pushed us to explore the situation further in order to understand not only the changes that the local culture of marriage has undergone since socio-political transitions started (1991) but also to consider the social consequences of this phenomenon.

C. Why this initiative and the case studies?

Another statistical datum provided by Save the Children organization show that out of a population base of 604,000 adolescents (10-19 years of age), around 8 % (48,320) are married/in union⁶. As with the data provided by UNFPA and UNICEF the figure may not be seem threatening but could become alarming for the future– health and social risks included- if actions are not taken to regulate early marriage further and to develop programs for the young

enough to consent to participation in sexual activity. Individuals aged 13 or younger in Albania are not legally able to consent to sexual activity, and such activity may result in prosecution for **statutory rape**. Albania statutory rape law is violated when an individual has consensual sexual contact with a person under age 14. If a girl has not reached sexual maturation by age 14 however, sexual intercourse is still illegal. For more information see: <https://www.ageofconsent.net/world/albania>

⁶ For more information see: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/countries/albania>

girls in early marriage settings that will allow them to develop professionally. Supported by the Canada Fund for local initiatives we prepared this study considering and due to the following:

1. As we write this paper involvement of societal actors on this issue is rudimentary and confined only in the production of statistics that are required in order to comply with the international standards and agreements that Albania has adhered to. Studies related to this issue are limited and deal with the ethnic minority as it was the situation during the first phase of this initiative⁷.
2. We also believe in addressing informality surrounding early marriage in the new context developed since 1991 when the state abandoned its paternal role and tight control over social relationship including the institutions of marriage and family. Dormant traditions thought to be eradicated including cradle engagements and early marriage resurfaced also a result of the economic decline⁸.
3. On the positive side, Albania changed its family code and brought it more in line with the world standards. The existence of the State Agency for the Protection

⁷ To access this study please see: http://observator.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-Child_marriage_in_Albania.pdf

⁸ An author like Clarissa de Waal in her book *Albania Today: A Portrait of Post-Communist Turbulence* deals with the issue of withering traditions and paternalistic roles of the state and considers the issue of resurfacing of backward traditions. Another author, Artan Fuga, deals with this issue in his study related to internal migration in Albania in the book *Identité périphériques en Albanie*.

of Children's Right⁹ and of the Ombudsperson indicate that the formal steps are taken in securing a legal environment that protects children's right including sexual and other forms of abuse. Active engagement of the agency at the local level and implementation of children's right is still in the early stages due to the reformatting of the local structure of governing and lack of experienced staff at the local level.

4. Negative effects of early marriage tend to manifest later in life including issues related to health and mental wellbeing¹⁰. In Albania the negative effects of early

⁹ For more information on this agency see: <http://femijet.gov.al/al/>

¹⁰ **Higher maternal mortality.** This is the most serious of early marriage problems. Girls who are married before 18 will often have children long before they are physically ready. Each year, 13.7 million girls aged 15-19 give birth and **complications in pregnancy and childbirth are the leading killer of girls in this age range in developing countries**. Child brides also have higher rates of HIV/AIDS and other STIs than their unwed counterparts, contributing to ill health and premature death.

- Increased **infant mortality**. Adolescent mothers are more likely to give birth prematurely or have stillborn babies. Their children are at increased risk of death in infancy. **Infant death rates in babies of mothers under the age of 20 are 50% higher than those over 20.**

- Lack of **education**. Often overlooked when it comes to early marriage problems, the effects on girls' education are profound. Once married, girls are typically taken out of school as their lives become dominated by looking after children and domestic servitude. For every year a girl is married before adulthood, her literacy reduces by 5.6%. Daughters of young mothers are also more likely to drop out of school and be married young.

- Higher **risk of violence**. Early marriage robs a girl of her rights, freedoms and choices. Child brides are much more likely to be the victims of physical and sexual abuse - See more at: <http://www.plan-uk.org/because-i-am-a-girl/early-and-forced-marriage/early-child-marriage-problems-and-consequences/#sthash.t9EizXE6.dpuf>

marriage are accentuated by trafficking and migration.

5. This paper is the result of an initiative that started with the study of the early marriage phenomenon in the Roma communities. It considers lessons to be learned in the process of understanding early marriage as a phenomenon with Albanian characteristics. While developing recommendations for the Roma community we came to identify that the issue of early marriage transcended ethnic boundaries and expressed itself in the majority population as well mainly as a result of the legal paradox related to age of sexual consent and provision by early marriage in courts. It also came to our attention that Albania was asked to consider this issue in the framework of CEDAW and reporting on it¹¹. While UN related organizations are addressing the legal part of the issue and developing training for judges and notaries in order to address early marriage effectively, the need for a study on early marriage dealing with it as a manifestation of the majority population in more intrinsic and social terms became evident.
6. In order to develop informed policies and convince policy makers to address the changes that we propose further in this paper we found out that the issue of early marriage deserved more attention and that this initiative should be taken up at the country level. This paper and the initiative allow us to focus on a moment and to understand the social consequences of transi-

¹¹ For more information please see this link: http://www.un.org.al/editorfiles/file/CEDAW_C_ALB_4th%20report_Nov%202014_En.pdf

tion on Albanian families and communities. Reflections and lessons on how we dealt with transition and how we are dealing with its consequences including issues related to early marriage make us consider two policy interventions – the first related to a legal review of the age of sexual consent with the consideration to increase it to 15 and the latter related to social and educational aspects of women that married early in order to address their needs and enable them in their citizenry.

D. Why “Observatory for Children’s Rights” involvement?

“Observatory for Children’s Rights” with support from Canada Fund for Local Initiatives followed up the study of early marriage among Roma communities with this initiative. This organization works with Children’s Rights in Albania and report on issues through 12 Observatory units established in each qark (region) of Albania. It has close cooperation with local government units, line ministries and international donors working with children rights.

Currently the Observatory in cooperation with UNICEF and Ministry of Education and Sports is implementing the pilot phase of a national project that aims to bring every Albanian child to school and to identify out-of-school-children. It is also working with Committee on the Rights of the Children recommendations and plans to contribute to the upcoming CEDAW report on issues related to early and child marriage. The strong local presence

and effective cooperation with local structures of government, police, and health and education units were the cornerstone for the production of the data analyzed in this paper.

The “Observatory for Children’s Rights” plans to involve local institutions of government and key stakeholders in a joint process that addresses early marriage nationally in order to consider policy actions that will curb this phenomenon in the future, but that will also address the needs of the girls that have married early especially in terms of education and professional development. The proposals made, based on this paper and the case studies, are expected to be replicable both at the national and regional scale.

E. Rationale for selecting Korça and Vlora

The municipalities of Korça and Vlora are experiencing economic development, mainly as a result of tourism and agriculture that unfortunately has not translated into more opportunities for women. We started this project with the purpose of addressing the enhancement of *child protection mechanisms and services* to effectively reach, support and refer the cases of children and families in the situation early and forced marriages. These two areas, Korça and Vlora, are selected as bordering regions, which have experience children and women trafficking. The new municipality of Vlora, following on the new administrative division, has more rural (villages) areas where there is mentality and practise of marriage under the age of 18.

Vlora, in the past, was also a point of origin for children and women trafficking.

Korça on the other hand, represents the beginning of this project. We were there implementing an initiative that sought to bring every Roma child into kindergarten. In the process we realised that many of the mothers were very young and less than 18 years of age. Not only in the Roma community but also in the other communities the practise of early marriage is relevant and has a tradition that was criticized during the period of Albanian renaissance at the end of the 19th century¹². Furthermore Korça is a region that has a borderline with Greece – a route that has also been used in the past for illegal migration and trafficking.

On the positive side and building on the strong co-operation with local structures of governing we took into consideration the willingness of local structures in both municipalities to cooperate in addressing the issue of early marriage.

¹² A key writer of the Albanian Renaissance movement, Andon Zako Çajupi, addresses the issue of early marriage in a gendered context. He wrote a one-act comedy/poem titled “14 Years Old a Groom” (14 vjeç dhëndër) in which he criticized the practise of marrying boys early in order to have their wives as unpaid workers to deal with house chores and agriculture.

III. Methodology, Resources and Research Gaps

A. Research Methodology

In order to effectively analyze the early marriage as a social phenomenon, not a statistic that is internationally required we decided to employ the case study pilot and developed field work in the municipalities of Korça and Vlora for the reasons stated further and in order to get a more intimate view of the situation before developing a national initiative. The case study research model as employed in this paper centralizes the attention of those involved and those that participated in the issue of ‘early marriage’ as an experience that is in the process of taking place. This methodology supports moving away from the stereotypes or clichés observed in the way this issue has been addressed until now allowing for a 360-degree review of the situation. Furthermore the case study approach as used in the observations related to early marriage in Korça and Vlora allows for the following:

1. It helps to identify the issue and lay the foundation for countrywide data collection with a defined methodology that brings ACCURACY of the data to the forefront. The problem of having surface based data producing statistics only gets eliminated.

2. We are not looking at ‘early marriage’ as an ‘independent variable’, but as a social malaise to be cured. The study considers women in early marriage as social sub-strata that are particularly muted as a result of life enclosed within home/ street boundaries due to the withering of social ties that these girls had before entering early marriage¹³.
3. We prepared a questionnaire that was driven towards the unconscious results and during the interviews we were looking for moments that the respondents were achieving and understanding their own behavior. They themselves came to realize that early marriage is not a good thing without ever being asked an evaluative opinion on that.
4. Data collection was not done in one day. We have an on-going relationship with the participants in the questionnaire and they are asking for more opportunities and ways to get to those opportunities.
5. As indicated earlier we tried to avoid the obvious and went for multiple routes data collection processes in order to test for predictive validity in the process of developing the standards for a country-wide study with several samples to be tested over a considerable amount of time including the testing of expected policy outcomes geared to regulate early marriage in legal and social terms.
6. We noticed that not two cases of early marriage are

¹³ For more information regarding the health and social issues related to early marriage please consider the article by Nawal M Nour ‘Child Marriage: A Silent Health and Human Rights Issue’ accessible here: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2672998/>

alike in terms of the cognitive experience and we believe that they could have been prevented from happening or dealt better with. We realize that local knowledge in the local context (Korça and Vlora in this case) is precious and demands the construction of fieldwork and research that fits with the particular environment.

7. This methodology also dictates outcomes in the form of decision-making and includes system thinking on the issue as we look at it from all the aspects of the problem. It gives an opportunity for multi-party action enhancing the chances for successful policy implementation.
8. While considering the life of this initiative beyond these case studies (pilot phase) this methodology helps with two key questions: (1st) How to make decision makers improve their decisions and (2nd) how to make girl-children make more rational decisions when faced with the situation of being asked to enter into an early marriage.
9. The structure of this study includes policy proposals that come closer to the agenda setting and decision making for this issue in order to address the need for an increased awareness on early marriage in the local communities.
10. We also developed an ‘early marriage problematika’ figure in order to better conceptualize the situation and to propose effective policy intervention. The figure also brings up front the issue of gaps that exist in the policies and practices of early marriage in Albania.

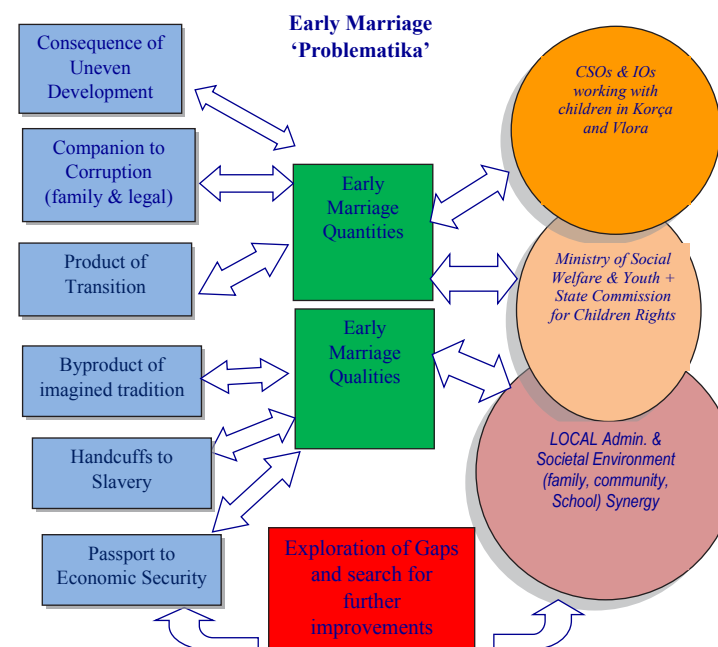
B. Child and Early Marriage Problematika

1. The term ‘*problematika*’ borrowed as a concept from Slavonic languages best captures the concept of identifying conditions or developments or occurrences that can be traced to a particular cause. In the case of this paper it is early marriage that we are trying to identify as an experience of those who are living under it in two areas in Albania. The early marriage problematika in this case is made up of three main series of elements that can be subdivided into more specific items.
2. The center of the picture corresponds to the core objectives of the project:
 - a. Identifying a consistent quantity of women in early marriage in order to understand the impacts of this event on her personal and family life and also to realize the pattern of relationship that has developed including number of children and other quantitative data.
 - b. The second center box represents the qualities of early marriage as experienced in Albania. Via questionnaires, focus groups and official data gathering we try to understand what these women represent; their qualifications and skills, their reasons for entering early marriage, their expectations for their family and themselves. The question that rises is what and where changes should take place in the formal channels of education, legal system and communities so that this phenomenon gets prevented?
3. The left side of the picture shows six derived early

marriage characteristics of prime concern for both the women in early marriage situation and for the communities around them:

- a. One relates early marriage as a consequence of uneven development taking place in countries like Albania where GDP¹⁴ ranks it in the upper middle-income countries. Pockets of underdevelopment especially in terms of societal emancipation occur when people run to get rich quickly. Albania in this respect represents a society that was devoid of changes to accumulate wealth. The concept of equality applied during the time of communistic dictatorship equated people in poverty and lack of opportunities. Standards and norms tend to get lost in transition for this very reason making opportunistic space for phenomena like early marriage to creep in.

Graph 1: Early marriage 'problematika'



- b. Another is relating early marriage as a companion to corruption taking place within the family and legally. Despite recent positive developments with the perception of corruption, Albania remains a country in which corruption has become an intrinsic part of the culture unfortunately. This has extended to issues of marriage and family life as in the cases of children being tricked by their parents into marriage and forced to lie in order to give their consent or in the cases of courts making decisions about early marriage without considering the long-term consequences of such unions.

¹⁴ Please see: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/albania>

- c. A third one sees early marriage as a product of prolonged transition marred by insecurities and inequalities that have a tendency to linger. In situations of this kind, people have the tendency to fend for themselves and develop their own norms and rules when an overarching institutional setting fails to provide it. This is also reflected in the early marriage situations in Albania.
- d. Another concern rises by looking at early marriage as a byproduct of an imagined tradition that helps people and communities to justify their course of action and forcing of young girls in such relationships. Customs of early marriage in Albania died with the progressive steps taken by the communist system to eradicate it entirely during the movement for the emancipation of women¹⁵. Our concern is that this is a new development that the communities that practice it try to present as a return to a tradition taking place vis-à-vis the growing age of marriage¹⁶, a pattern-taking place in Albania and Southeast Europe.
- e. In yet another stance we have a similar opinion to other scholars working on this issue that early marriage is often a modern form of slavery

¹⁵Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge, edited by Kramarae and Spender, page 751

¹⁶ Average marriage age for women in Albania has increased to 23 according to data from the census of 2011. For more information on this consult the INSTAT study on gender (page 25) accessible in this link: http://www.instat.gov.al/media/258326/perspektiva_gjinore_n_shqip_ri.pdfhttp://www.instat.gov.al/media/258326/perspektiva_gjinore_n_shqip_ri.pdf

for girls and women. According to UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, early and forced marriages are a form of slavery and in many cases represent women subordination to men and an act of discrimination against them¹⁷.

- f. Yet it can also be seen as passport to financial and economic security. This widespread belief especially in the communities where early marriage is practiced is yet to be proven scientifically¹⁸.
4. The right side of the picture is relating to action: What do all stakeholders have already done and what they could do in the various areas to address issues related to early marriage. What could and should be done to get better results considering the findings produced in this paper? On this right side, we consider three circles of stakeholders, who have something to state and actually do (who should be regarded as accountable for) in order to achieve these objectives and goals at the highest possible level of performance:
- a. The first circle is that of CSOs and IOs working Korça and Vlora (mainly the “Observatory for Children’s Rights” and its partners). The snapshot question is: what has already been designed in terms of policies and how are they being implemented in these two areas? In the course of this initiative we looked at the situation, actions

¹⁷ UNHCR (Sub-Commission), ‘Report of the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery on its 28th session (2003) UN Doc E/CN.4/Sub.2/2003/31, 5.

¹⁸ For more information on this issue see: <https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/research/charities-area/child-marriage>

already carried out and this led us to the critical question: what kind of possible (creative but realistic as well) improvements and new types of actions could be invented, promoted then put at work in order to improve the social and educational situation of the women who are in an early marriage? On the other side, what could we do to initiate policy change in order to limit early marriage legally starting with the courts and ending with an increase of the age of sexual consent? Who do we have to cooperate in terms of stakeholders and policy actors to achieve these intended goals. The representation of the early marriage problems like this makes us think on it as a policy issue leaving emotions aside.

- b. The second circle, quite extended, relates to the state structure of Albania and its core administration dealing with early marriage. On one side we have the Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare: what decisions have been already taken following CEDAW and CRC reporting about early marriage? Who have they cooperated with in terms of line ministries? Have they developed any strategies or incorporated early marriage solutions in any existing strategies? What the GoA could/should do in order to effectively tackle issues related to early marriage following a decision-making path based on informed processes and learned lessons from these case studies and countrywide studies?
- c. The third and last circle relates to the wider local environment that encircles a larger group of stake-

holders. Synergies created in this group are essential in the process of producing effective results related to the implementation of the proposals we make in this paper but also in pushing up the issue of early marriage in the agendas of the policy makers. A key stakeholder is the local government administration dealing with children's rights, already requiring better coordination with police, hospitals, courts, schools, media supported by CSO with the purpose of benefiting the individuals in early marriage situation. There is also an additional question: what level of synergy has been or can be promoted and supported between these various counterparts and expected beneficiaries, in such a way that formal decisions do not remain at purely formal level, but result into an effective and efficient environment to change things for the better for the persons in early marriage in one side and possible prevent early marriage from happening on the other.

5. Finally, the last elements of the picture, coming as a crosscutting concern for this initiative in line with its objective is: how to assess the gaps between policy and actuality? How could these gaps be filled in the future for the whole country?

C. Research and resources

This paper, focusing on fieldwork and interviews with women in early marriage in Korça and Vlora, was preceded by extensive desktop research and review of several

studies and policy documents related to early marriage in Albania and worldwide. Discussion and analysis of data and activities related to the municipalities considered in this assessment were observed closely in order to synthesize existing information and statistics regarding early marriage. This activity produced a comprehensive and summarized overview of the current state of the situation, which helped with the focus groups discussions and analysis. In such regards, methodology aimed to interlink and combine sources of information. It foresaw a top-down approach (literature and field research) combined with a bottom-up approach (interviews and focus group discussions). In this regard, the purpose of the interviews and focus group discussions was to provide a full profile in terms of geographic area, group characteristics, type of marriage and age gaps, education and professional outlook, family membership and number of children, all leading to a comprehensive view of early marriage and policy actions both in terms of the municipalities of Korça and Vlora and countrywide. The data gathered were filtered and analyzed according to the objectives of the initiative. Based on analysis this paper has produced findings and recommendations.

1. The research completed was instrumental in detailing the *early marriage problematika* and the policy proposals. In developing the section related to the “quantity of the early marriage” data gathered at the local level were instrumental in understanding the situation on the ground with early marriage. Primary data available local government, police, health institutions, schools, and

major Non-Governmental Organizations working with communities in the Korça and Vlora were perused to identify incidence of child marriage in each selected district. Obtaining this data is generally quite difficult as many officers were reluctant to share this information. As we employed local Observatory staff that has an excellent pattern of cooperation with these institution collection of information was effectively done. We recommend for the national level research that parallel to the above actions, to conduct interviews with officials from the agencies identified above to obtain information of specific cases and also to obtain information regarding the procedures that were followed in relation to such cases. Court records must also be examined if possible and this exercise could not be completed for this paper. On the other hand we were able to receive court information related to decisions early marriage occurrences in the specific municipalities. Our researchers also undertook perusal of newspaper reports on early marriage related to these areas especially when this occurrence led to trafficking or sexual exploitation. These data were also compared with data produced by UN related organizations like UNICEF and UNFPA.

2. Quality data related to early marriage was also limited. Our main source for data became the individual interviews (88 altogether in Korça and Vlora) and focus group meetings (two for each municipality). Interviews were conducted using structured interviews to gather information from the women in an early marriage union or relationship. Discussion of the legal

prohibitions on early marriage, procedures for checking age, during registration of marriages did not take place in order to gain interviewee's trust and protect their identity and rights. On the other hand, root causes that led to child marriage were discussed in detail without gathering personalized information including

- a. family factors,
- b. cultural,
- c. social,
- d. economic,
- e. school attendance for the girls and their parents,
- f. denial of opportunity to education and recreation,
- g. being compelled to engage in domestic work or in income-generation activities,
- h. responsibility for child care if there is a resulting pregnancy,
- i. health impacts particularly related to forced abortions,
- j. being subject to domestic violence and abuse,
- k. marginalization and discrimination.

3. What we have learned regarding early marriage in terms of qualities is that there is very little information related to this sub-group countrywide. Another piece of recommendation deriving from the gap of analytical data would be to produce national detailed data for the age group 14– 18 and 19- 25 in terms of early marriage correlated with education data.
4. The analysis of the concerns related to early marriage relied on fieldwork. The Observatory relied heavily on

the staff working in Vlora and Korça, who was trained on how to conduct interviews and focus groups. The field researchers were trained through a tele-workshop to familiarize them with the research objectives, to develop their skills of building rapport with respondents, and collect information needed for the case studies. Serious attention was also paid to the ethical issues in conducting research on sensitive topics in order to ensure that participants were not subjected to intrusive questioning. The senior coordinators monitored the researchers in the field closely and validated information collected through focus group probing. At the end of the field work the research group met in Tirana for a de-briefing session. The job done by the research team both in recording interview and focus group data and collecting information locally was impressive.

5. In developing a national methodology to research the early marriage phenomenon an extension of the group to be interviewed should be considered to include family members (husbands and children), social case workers, teachers, bridal parents, and representatives of the state structures. In order to increase awareness on the issue media representatives and artistic personalities who have gone through early marriage should also be involved.

D. Identification of research bias

The study was not designed to generate information about the prevalence of early marriage but rather its causes and consequences. The sample was purposively selected and the number of case studies restricted to enable in-depth, qualitative analysis. *There is a clear bias towards women in early marriage as this study tries to elicit information related to them in order to benefit them and their families.* The number of case studies was limited in order to facilitate in-depth study of each case. Assessment has a very clear scope and goals. Focus groups and questionnaires were a function of the research and initiative related to early marriage.

1. The fieldwork was limited to the time of the initiative. A longer period of research would have been more relevant and should be considered at the national level.
2. The nature of the subject being researched required that the researchers build trust among the research participants in order to elicit relevant information and to ensure that young women were comfortable to share difficult memories.
3. Researchers were also advised to do the interviews only when participants felt ready to share. They were asked not to proceed with the questionnaire if the participants felt stressed. They were instructed how to proceed if the young women felt disturbed by the questions.
4. Due to restricted access to records, official documentation pertaining to early marriage could not be analysed. Only publicly available, published material has

been analysed in this study.

5. Research of this nature has to be conducted sensitively and ethically. This is time consuming. Furthermore, obtaining qualitative information is necessary to understand the complexities of early marriage and not to fall in the trap of statistical generalisations.
6. Excellent report with the participants is the key to obtain this kind of sensitive information. It is also necessary to design studies of this nature giving sufficient consideration for the time that is required to deal with these issues.
7. This paper based on the case studies of Korça and Vlora is at best a piece of work in action, but it helped identify several gaps in dealing with early marriage while trying to assess the situation locally and learn lessons nationally.
8. Recognising these limitations, and the small sample, however should not prevent the findings of this study being used to reflect on the issues and concerned that must be prioritised. Those working on law and policy reform and programmatic interventions could use this study to address problems and work towards eliminating early marriage.

IV. Human Development versus Human Rights

This assessment also seeks to connect human development to human resource development. Transition to democracy and free market was not free for Albanians. The human costs that accompanied this process were large and unbearable at times¹⁹. Women in early marriages seem to be directly impacted by it as they experience retreat from social life and work outside home. Youth of today, 15 – 24 years of age can be easily considered as the by-product of transition²⁰. Furthermore macro socio-economic developments that took place in Albania were not accompanied with micro scale developments as the ones that we are seeking to intervene with. As a result vicious circles related to early marriage, unemployment and lack of opportunities have been created that prevent both exercise of human rights and human development. Women in early marriage represent segments that combine lack of skills required in the current labor market combined with lack

¹⁹ For a detailed assessment of transition and internal migration as experienced in Northern Albania please refer to research done by Clarissa de Waal in *Albania Today: A Portrait of Post-communist Turbulence*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005

²⁰ This age group grew and developed during a state of perpetual socio-economic transition during which situations continuously changed and nothing was defined.

of entrepreneurship. Connecting the training and learning experiences with the labor market will remain a challenge that we hope to address through policy proposals and actions that seek to eradicate early marriage and help educate women living in early marriage unions.

A. Human rights norms and legislation that address child and early marriage in the Republic of Albania²¹

According to the Constitution of Albania, children, young people, pregnant women, and young mothers have the right to special protection from the state. It is also stated that any child has the right to protection from violence and exploitation that may damage health or put its life and normal development at risk. Albanian legislation on children (Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child) defines child as ‘any person born alive who is under 18 years of age’. This definition is in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child²². The Law on

²¹ This part of the paper is based on the publication Child Marriage in Albania: Specific View to Roma Community accessible here: http://observer.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2015-Child_marriage_in_Albania.pdf

²² Albania ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 27 February 1992. On 25 September 2012, the Committee on the Rights of the Child examined the 2nd, 3rd and 4th combined periodic report of Albania. The representatives of Albania presented the new law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child issued on 4 November 2010 and the Action Plan for Children 2012-2015 as steps forward to fulfilling and observing the rights of the children in Albania. For the

the Protection of the Rights of the Child also defines all the rights and protection a child is entitled to, and defines the mechanisms and institutions that are responsible for guaranteeing these rights namely through the National Council and the National Agency for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, which were set up in 2010. The law sought to establish child protection units at regional and local level as venues where child rights violations can be reported.

According to the Albanian Family Code, the minimum legal age that an Albanian citizen can enter a marriage is 18 years old. However, according to the same article of the Family Code based on the approval of a local court, marriage can be entered by children under 18 years old on important matters including pregnancy or if the spouse is an emigrant who would like to contract a marriage with a person under 18 years of age. **In this case no minimum age is defined.** Following ratification of all the international instruments and in line with the Albanian legislation, marriages must be based on the free consent of both future spouses, and must be registered at an official register office.

The Civil Code of the Republic of Albania states that a person attains full legal capacity when he or she reaches 18 years of age. The code specifies, however, that if a girl marries before the age of 18, she automatically attain legal capacity. Legal capacity gives a person certain legal rights and obligations; for instance, to enter into legally binding

first time in this reporting the establishment of the Child Rights units at the local level and the State Agency for the Protection of the Rights of the Child were presented and were tasked with the monitoring of the implementation of both the law and Action Plan for Children.

contracts, receive medical treatment without parental consent, and to register the birth of children. However the Penal Code does not criminalize child marriage. There is a reference in the Penal Code in article 130 which states that forced, commenced or continued cohabitation as well as the demand of an adult to go out of the territory of the Albanian state with a child in order to oblige him in marriage is punishable by a fine or up to three months of imprisonment. According to the same Penal Code in article 100, sexual intercourse with a minor below the age of 14 is considered statutory rape, with a punishment of seven to fifteen years in prison, while forced sexual intercourse with a minor aged 14-18 years is punished by five to fifteen years of imprisonment.

B. Government representatives, civil society and children report in the 61st Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (17 September – 5 October 2012)

Regarding the issue of early child marriage in Albania, the CRC issued a list concerning additional and updated information, in which the Albanian State representatives were asked to submit in writing additional, updated information regarding the topics. In the 3rd paragraph of Part I, the Committee asked the State to provide information on the specific measures undertaken to address the problem of early marriages, which are reportedly still common in certain communities. The response of the state to this point was: *Regarding the problem of early marriage we men-*

tion that the Family Law, article 7 provides the marriage between a man and a woman who have reached 18 years old. Only for reasons of great importance, may the court permit the marriage before reaching this age. This field is already arranged with the provisions in the family law, which does not allow marriages in an early age.

Another reporting came from talks, interviews, questionnaires, workshops, trainings, and meetings that the “United for Child Care and Protection Coalition” (BKTF) organized with 26 children in Durrës on October 2011, who represented 14.534 children from Tirana, Vlora, Durrës, Kuçova, Elbasan, Peshkopia and Dibra. Their concern regarding the issue of early child marriage was that there were cases of arranged marriages for minor girls without their consent.

A. Concluding observations and recommendations of the committee on the rights of the child

After the reporting of different stakeholders in the UN Commission about the situation of the rights of the child, in terms of both the implementation and violation of these rights, *the early child marriage was categorized as a “Harmful Practice”* by the committee and the recommendation of the committee about this issue was as follows: The Committee, while noting that the minimum legal age of marriage is set at 18 years, expresses concern about the persistent practice of early and forced marriages, especially in the Roma community.

C. Continuation of the process after the observations and recommendations of the committee.

Since the Committee delivered the recommendations for Albania in October 2012, and particularly during 2015, in the framework of this initiative the Observatory for the Children’s Rights has entered into contact with many state and non-state institutions asking them about concrete steps related to the early-marriage phenomenon seeking to understand action of Albanian Government or the Civil Society to address the issue of early child marriage. Based on our information from October 2012, until February 2015 no mitigation measures have been undertaken to address in depth this phenomenon. Lack of action in this field presented yet another opportunity to address the issue of early marriage in the form presented in this paper and to look at beyond the ethnic boundaries as we did in the first phase of this study.

1. It is of prime importance to us (and our partners) to realize that human rights are blind towards color, ethnicity, gender and nationality. As such respect and implementation of such rights should not be confined into the above-mentioned categories; instead the spirit of human rights, as adequately addressed in Albanian laws and legislation should permeate through the society as a whole. In this regard, the legal discussion on early marriage is incomplete if it is not accompanied by an active research of the situation on the ground that would help judges in the future to enter into a deeper process of legal reasoning before permitting early marriage.

2. We intend to tell through this study that migration related reasoning or pregnancy do not provide enough cause to issue an early marriage certificate. Migration is an integral part of Albanian life and culture since 1991 and as such it should not be considered a special case any longer. Related to this issue is also the fact that early marriages entered into effect on the basis of migration have often ended in human trafficking or prostitution. A distinguished legal author raises this concern in her study “Gender Discrimination in Family and Marriage Matters²³” addressing her concern with the way judges issue decisions related to early marriage.
3. Dr. Mandro also rightfully addresses the issue of pregnancy as a prime reason for allowing early marriage. We join in her concern that simplification of the situation takes place in court when early marriage decisions are based on pregnancy and do not consider the full spectrum of the child (mother) and the expected one. There is a strong correlation in our study between pregnancy and school dropout that will be analyzed further. It was not the intention of this initiative to review the court decisions related to early marriage instead we are considering the child transformed into woman early as a result of this marriage. Yet, we could not fail to notice that most of the court decisions re-

²³ For a full discussion of early marriage please refer to: *Diskriminimi Gjinator në Çështjet Familjare dhe Martesore* by Prof. Dr. Arta Mandro (pages 71 – 78). The study can be accessed in this link: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/albania/docs/misc/Diskriminimi%20gjinator%20ne%20ceshtjet%20familjare%20A.%20Mandro.pdf>

- lated to the issuing of early marriage are related to pregnancy. We continue to consider this initiative as the means to raise concern and awareness about early pregnancies that carry in themselves according to numerous studies health dangers for both the child mother and the newly born infant.
4. Over-extension of early marriage juridical decisions is limited by the age of sexual consent set at 14 years of age in Albania. In other terms issuing a marriage below age 14 indicates the commitment of statutory rape. Dr. Mandro describes in her study the situation—common in countries when children are trafficked for prostitution purposes—of a 14 year old minor who was lured into trafficking via false promises of better life abroad. A countrywide study would allow us to consider the existence of a pattern correlating early marriage to trafficking. At least international experience and scholarly work performed outside Albania strongly argues for this. If the existence of such a pattern is proven in Albania we would like to raise awareness and develop a national campaign that would make the Albanian Parliament consider the change of the age of sexual consent from 14 years old to 15 years old. By taking this step Albania also moves closer to countries whose age of sexual consent is higher than 14 and closer to 16 years old.
5. We also strongly believe that human and societal development should not take place by violating human rights or by over-imposing the development of society on the shoulder of certain individuals including those who have entered or are forced to enter into a union

based on early marriage. We hope that this initiative and policy action we propose in the following pages would serve to increase awareness and take the necessary policy steps to address early marriage country-wide.

V. Analysis of the Cores

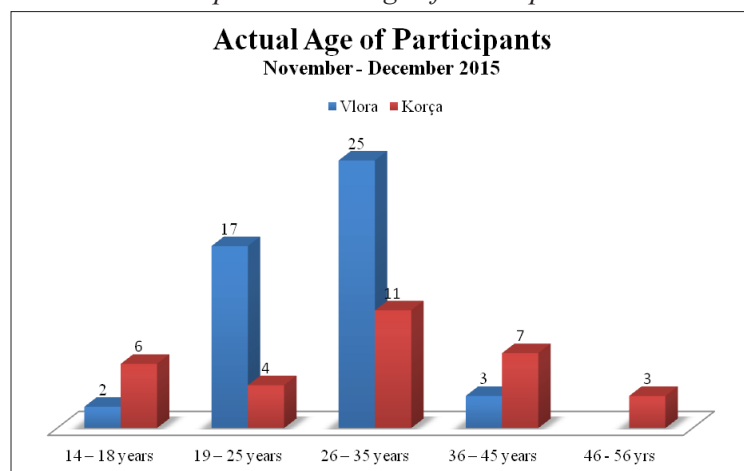
A. Demographic Characteristics of Early Marriage in Korça and Vlora

There were 102 women that were interviewed in the process of the initiative related to early marriages. In Korça, 52 early-married women were interviewed. Among them, there were women who married after the age of 18, who we did not consider in this analysis. The sample of interviews in Korça remained 31 and the questionnaire interviews took place in the suburb area (17 respondents) and in Pojan (14 respondents). In Vlora the number of early-married respondents was 50. All the women that were interviewed married before turning eighteen. The sample was located in the town of Vlora (25 respondents) and two peripheral areas Xhyerina (15) and Bishan (10 respondents).

1. **Respondents' Actual Age.** As it can be clearly seen in the figure below the dominant age group of the early-married women is that between the ages of 26 and 35 representing over 44% of the sample. In Vlora, this age group represents half of the respondents, while in Korça the group seems somewhat older as about 33%

of the respondents are over 36 years of age. This relatively young age among the early-married women indicates clearly that the early marriage phenomenon is in the increase and is closely related to the socio-economic shift that Albania underwent in 1991.

Graph 2: Actual Age of Participants



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December2015

- Respondent's Age when Early Marriage Took Place.** Most of the respondents from Korça married while 16 – 17 years old. This is the dominant age group with respectively 22 % and 39% or 19 cases together. In Vlora the same age group dominates for the marriage age respectively with 40% and 50% of the cases. *Worrisome is the situation with 3 cases in Korça and 2 cases in Vlora in which marriage took place at age 13 or younger.*

Table 1: Age when respondents got married

Respondent's age when she got married	Vlora	Korça
12 - 13 years old	2	3
14 years old	0	4
15 years old	3	5
16 years old	20	7
17 years old	25	12

Source: Survey from Observatory,
November- December2015

- Respondents' Age at First Birth.** Most of the women in early marriage are already mothers. In Korça the first child has come to life when the mother was 17 or 18 years of age (respectively 26% and 32%) in 58% of the cases. In Vlora the first-born came to life when the mother belonged to the same age group in 84% of the cases (42% in each age group). In 55% of the cases in Korça, marriage took place before the child was born, while in the rest of the cases marriage followed childbirth and is identified as the cause for marriage. In Vlora marriages before and after the birth of the first child are equally divided. In marriages following childbirth, that seems to be the reason for marriage after all. It is important to notice that there are two cases in Vlora that birth took place when mother was 14 years old.

Table 2: Mother's age when 1st child was born

Mother's age when 1st child was born	Vlora	Korça
14 year old	2	0
15 year old	1	2

16 year old	1	5
17 year old	21	8
18 year old	21	10
19 year old	1	3
20 years old		1

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

4. Early Married Woman Current Marital Status:

61% of the women interviewed in Korça are married while the rest are either divorced or widowed. 86% of the respondents in Vlora are married with the rest of them distributed as per categories in the following table:

Table 3: Marital status of respondents

Marital Status	Vlora	Korça
Married	43 respondents - 86%	19 respondents - 61%
Divorced	5 respondents -10%	4 respondent – 13%
Widowed	1 respondent	1 respondent
Unmarried	1 respondent	6 respondents – 16%
Divorce Process		1 respondent

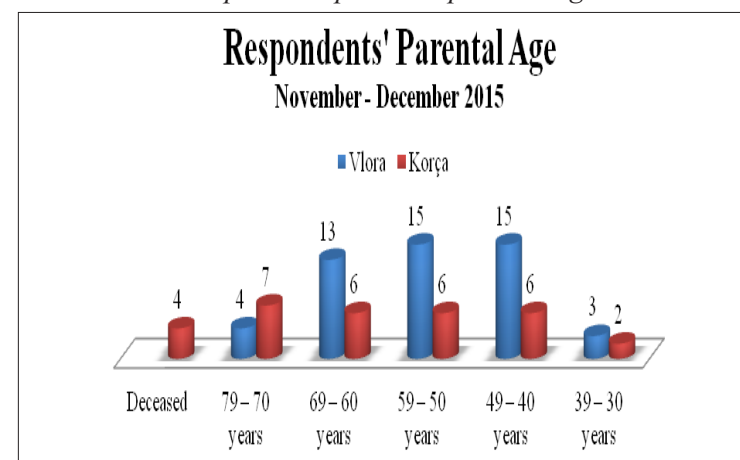
Source: Survey from Observatory,
November- December 2015

5. Spousal Age Difference. In Korça spousal age difference varies between 2 to 10 years. Age difference of 3, 4, 5, and 7 years is a respectively 10%. Groups that dominate with 26% and 16% are those with 2 years (eight cases) of spousal age difference and 10 years (5 cases). In the Vlora sample spousal age difference

is equally distributed and varies from 2 to 20 years—10% is the age difference with 3, 5, 6 and 7 years. The dominant group is the one in which the husband is 9 years older then the wife with 12% (6 cases).

6. Respondents' Parents Age. Parents of the women in early marriage seem to be between the ages of 40 and 59 and evenly distributed. This might be yet another indication that the decision for early marriage might have been taken due to financial and economic constraints. Looking closely at the figure below it becomes apparent that parents of early-married women in Korça seem to be older compared to parents of early-married women in Vlora. The group of parents, aged 70 – 79, represents the dominant group in Korça, compared to the situation in Vlora where the dominant groups are those of parents between 40 – 59 years of age.

Graph 3: Respondents parental age



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

B. Early-married Women Family Background Characteristics

- 1. Family Type.** Women in early marriage situations interviewed mostly grew up in families with both parents with over 70% of the cases. In Korça only 6% of the respondents come from one-parent families, while in Vlora the one-parent cases represent 16%. The rest of the women grew up in families that experienced divorce or those in which parents remarried. In Korça this parental situation represents 19% of the group while in Vlora 6%. What becomes quite apparent here is the fact that the respondents' family background is relatively stable.

Table 4: Family type of respondents

Family type	Vlora	Korça
Both parents	36 respondents - 72%	22 respondents - 71%
One parent	8 respondents	2 respondents
Divorced parents	3 respondents	5 respondents
Remarried parents	3 respondents	1 respondent
Orphaned		1 respondent

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

- 2. Number of Siblings.** In Korça the majority of women in early marriage situations come from families with four to six children at about 55% of the cases, while in Vlora this majority corresponds to women coming from families with five to eight children in 52% of the cases.
- 3. Birth Order.** Early marriage in Korça is characteristic for the second or third child in the family according

to our survey. This situation occurs in 61% of the cases. In Vlora on the other hand, early marriage befalls more on the fourth or fifth child with 46 of the cases.

Table 5: Birth Order of respondents

Respondent's Birth Order in the Family	Vlora	Korça
1 st Child	9	5
2 nd Child	7	11
3 rd Child	11	8
4 th Child and following	23 (4 th and 5 th dominate)	4 (7 th and 8 th dominate)
Last child	0	3

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

- 4. Employment Status of Parents.** As the table below indicates most of the parents of women in early marriage situation are unemployed. Although the correlation is strong and clear the survey data need to be crosschecked with welfare statistical data. Unemployment in the survey sample at a level over 60% is troublesome and as we will see below is also reflected in the employment status of women that married early.

Table 6: Parent employment of respondents

Are your parents working:	Vlora		Korça	
Yes	Employed = 20	40%	Employed = 8	32%
No	Unemployed = 30	60%	Unemployed = 21	68%

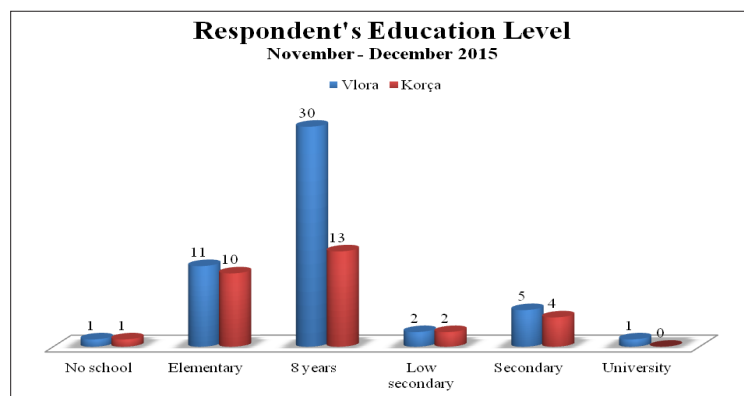
Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

5. **Migration** of parents does not seem to be a relevant factor related to early marriage. Only 8 of survey participants have had parents who migrated in Korça, while in Vlora only 13 participants have migratory parents. The featured countries for migration are Greece (13 cases) and Italy (5 cases).

C. Characteristics of Educational Background of Women in Early Marriage

1. **Years Spent in Education:** Women with low educational attainment dominate the group of respondents in both municipalities respectively with 74% in Korça and 82% in Vlora. This finding coincides with international data where correlation between low level of education and early marriage has been identified.

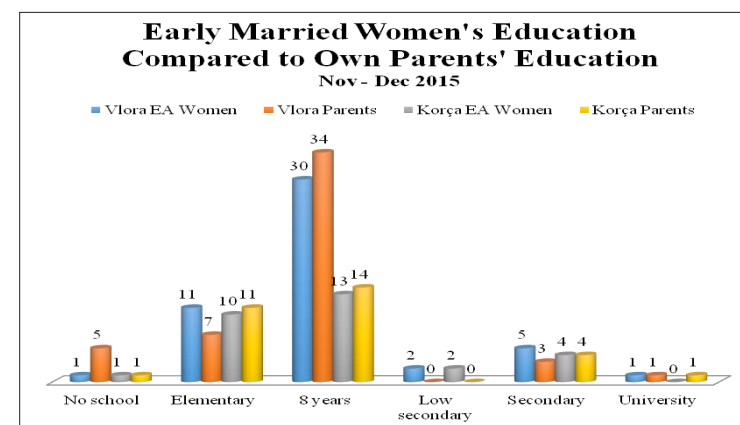
Graph 4: Respondent's education level



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

Comparison of parental education level with that of women in early marriages shows significant correlation. There is a very slight increase in the number of years spent in education by the daughters compared to parents. It is quite obvious on the other hand that the level of education of women in early-marriage strongly matches that of their parents. In order to make this comparison more accurate for policy making processes, the countrywide survey should ask education related questions for mothers and fathers separately in order to better understand this correlation.

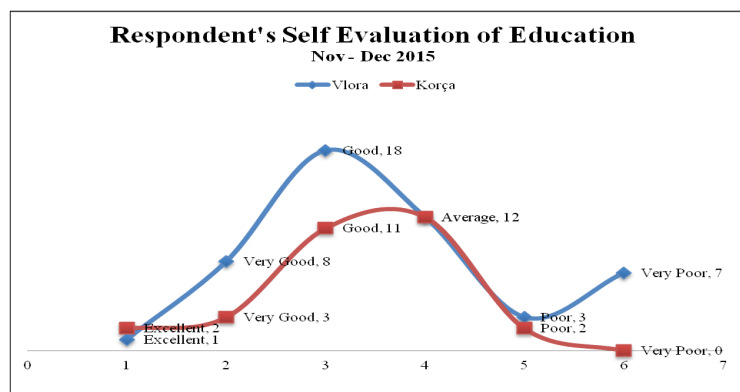
Graph 5: Early married women's education compared to own parent's education



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

2. **School Attainment and Results:** During the course of the survey the participants were also asked to consider a self-evaluation of their school results. The majority of them as the chart below indicates have average to good results 74% in Korça and 60 % in Vlora.

Graph 6: Respondent's self evaluation of education



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

- 3. Preferred Subjects:** In both samples, 80% of the respondents do not have any inclination towards exact sciences as they preferred reading and social sciences more than mathematics. In trying to get a clearer idea on this issue we also asked them about **reading habits** after school to note and also bring to attention the fact that most of women in early marriage– 52 % in Korça and 58% in Vlora do not engage in reading since marrying.

Table 7: The level and scale of reading after school of respondents

Reading after school ended?	Vlora		Korça	
Yes	21	42%	15	48%
No	29	58%	16	52%

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

4. Considerations regarding Going back to School:

As suspected and similarly to this situation in other countries, women who married early do not return to school after childbirth in 84% of the cases in Korça and 88% of the cases in Vlora. Although not recorded for the purposes of this survey, shame, embarrassment and spousal control are the key contributing reasons for this situation. The fact that in a few cases, in both municipalities, women have returned to school represents a silver lining of encouragement.

Table 8: Returning to school after the birth of respondents

Did you get back to school after the birth of the child?	Vlora		Korça	
Yes	6		2	
No	44	88%	26	84%

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

- 5. Professional Inclinations:** Neither school nor employment seem to be a priority in the life of women that married early after childbirth in most of the cases. The majority of women in early marriage do not work outside the house after giving birth in 64% of the cases in Korça and in 70% of the cases in Vlora. Half of the women in Korça do not show any interest for professional development while in Vlora the percentage is quite high at 92%. Although silent these figures are alarming and need to be considered more critically at the national level in order to develop strategies to remedy this situation.

D. Family Life of Women in Early Marriage

1. Legal Status of Marriage: Most of the survey participants (over 60% of them) are in a marriage situation. The figures are higher for Vlora 86% and lower for Korça 61%. Throughout the questionnaires the data related to the legal status of their marriage remains unclear due to the fact that the union in marriage has not been legalized. This raises the concern for the status of women in early marriages and their emancipation.

Table 9: Respondent's marital status

Respondent's Marital Status	Vlora	Korça
Married	43 respondents - 86%	19 respondents - 61%
Divorced	5 respondents -10%	4 respondent – 13%
Widowed	1 respondent	1 respondent
Unmarried	1 respondent	6 respondents – 16%
Divorce Process		1 respondent

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

2. Living Arrangements: families that have originated from early marriage cohabitate with spouse parents in 61% of the cases in Korça municipality. In contrast with Korça, families started as a result of early marriage live on their own in 54% of the cases. The respondents told us that they live with parents for up to two years after the first child has been born. It is also important to mention that the respondents were not clear when asked questions related to the extended family setup, an issue that needs to better be addressed

at the national level and crosschecked with household survey data of INSTAT.

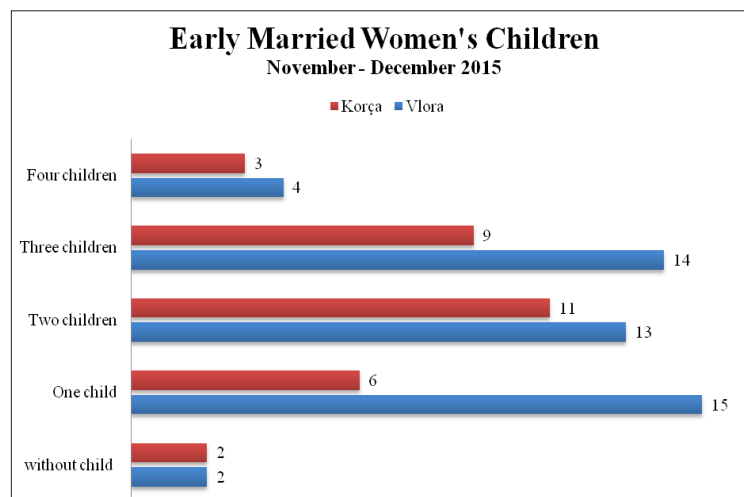
Table 10: Type of living of respondents

Do you live:	Vlora		Korça	
as a couple?	27 cases	54%	9 cases	39%
with parents?	23 cases	46%	19 cases	61%

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

3. Number of Children: Number 3 is the most popular in terms of the number of children in families started by early marriage. Families with more than four children did not show up in the Korça sample, which is dominated by those who have two or three children (64%), while 19% of them have a single child. In Vlora 30% of the respondents have at least one child and the percentage of women with two or three children is about the same. It is also interesting to note that not all the families are quick to start families– 4 cases, 2 in Vlora and 2 in Korça. In Vlora we also have represented in our sample singular cases of women who married early and have given birth to respectively 5 and 7 children.

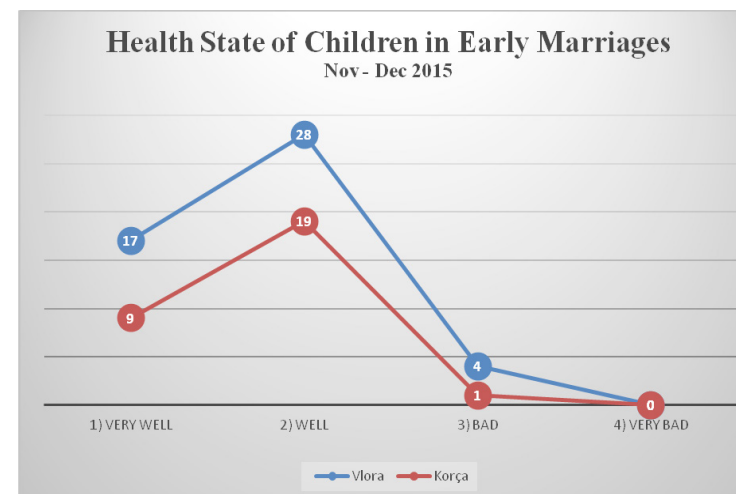
Graph 7: Number of children of early marriage women



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

- 4. Children's Health Situation:** When we asked women in early marriage to evaluate the health state of their children we were met with good news information that most of them evaluate the health situation as good or very good. Only in 6 cases for both municipalities the children were unregistered in the civil registry.

Graph 8: Health state of children in early marriage



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

- 5. Early-married Woman's Family Status after Birth of 1st Child.** Through this survey we also tried to elicit gender-related information correlating status of the early-married woman with the gender of the 1st born child. 35% of the respondents in Korça and 32% of the respondents in Vlora talk about a bettering of their family status after giving birth to a baby boy from the 1st birth. Women also report to having faced problems in at least 4 cases in Korça and 8 cases in Vlora when they delivered a baby girl.
- 6. Forced Abortion:** In a very courageous way women that we interviewed told our researchers that about 30% of them have been forced into abortion procedures. In order to maintain confidentiality further

questions related to abortion were not asked. Forced abortion took place in 11 cases (35%) in Korça and in 16 cases (30%) in Vlora. This situation represents another area of countrywide concern where awareness needs to be further raised.

7. **Child Rearing:** Close and extended family help the early-married mothers in the process of child rearing. In very few cases they rely on the help provided by health institutions or crèches, as most of them are staying home and not working outside the house. In 84% of the cases in both municipalities the close family is responsible for the child. This information brings our attention to the fact that more needs to be done towards the education of these early-married women in terms of infant health and their own health.

E. Social and Economic Status of Women in Early Marriage

1. **Contact with Friends:** following early marriage, women in Korça have an inclination to interrupt friendships created before marriage: 52% have not kept pre-marriage friendships while 48% maintain them. In Vlora 76% of the women interviewed have not kept pre-marriage friendships while 24% maintain them. These percentages can be seen as an indicator of these individuals withdrawing from social life.
2. **Working after Giving Birth:** women in early marriage situations have very limited expectations. This

international trend becomes evident in our survey as well. In the municipality of Korça 64% of the women interviewed neither work nor see their selves professionally engaged in the near future. In the municipality of Vlora the situation is a little worse as the percentage increases to 70%.

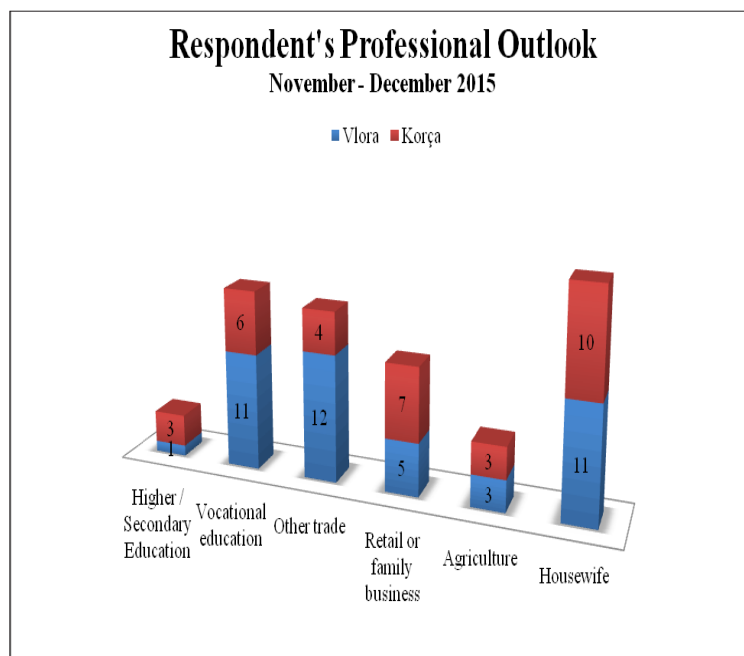
Table 11: Respondents work after childbirth

Do you work after the birth of the child?	Vlora	Korça
Yes	15 cases	8 cases
No	35 cases	20 cases

Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

3. **Future Professional Outlook.** When probed to think about future early married women that we interviewed were not without a response. Unfortunately their responses were quite limited and most of them already consider themselves in the permanency of housewife roles or other family oriented jobs including support for the family business or trade. It is encouraging to note that 42% of the respondents see themselves doing business or in vocational study and training. The number of women that see themselves as housewives corresponds with the number of women who contemplate vocational education according to this survey.

Graph 9: Respondent's professional Outlook



Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

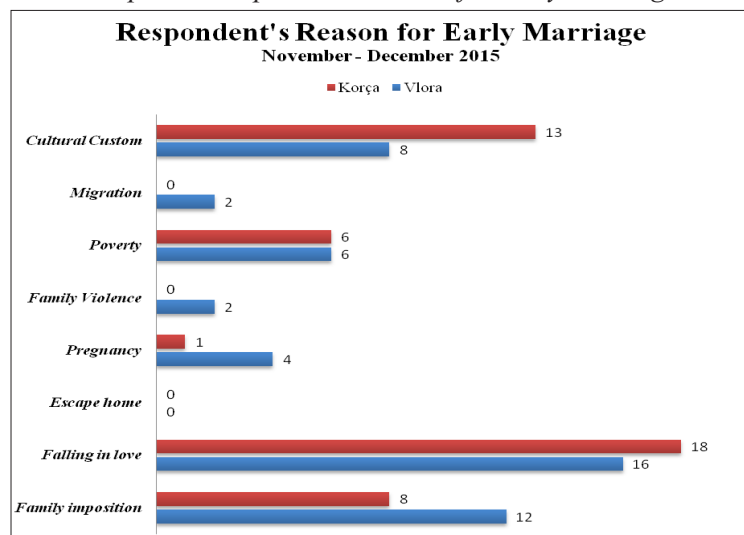
4. **Career Plans:** In contrast with Vlora, where everything professional comes to an end (92% of the cases) after going into an early marriage situation - in Korça, half of the respondents have further professional goals and a more optimistic outlook for themselves. The career fields include education, journalism, TV, music, trade and merchandise, hairdressing and health. Critical view on these findings is essential in making a strong appeal to increase engagement of state structures and CSOs to ensure professional trainings and further education for the category of women that are living the early marriage.

F. Reasons for Early Marriage

The final question we asked the women to consider reasons for early marriage. We presented them with the following list of reasons and asked them to rank them. Although the primary cause for early marriage seems to be related to women falling in love, we also noticed that many of them mentioned poverty and difficult economic situation as secondary causes. Mentality and cultural customs also seem to play a role in the decision to marry very early a situation that is in reverse with the national data reporting a growth in the marrying age for both genders.

1. **Family Imposition**
2. **Falling in Love**
3. **Escape from home**
4. **Pregnancy**
5. **Family Violence**
6. **Poverty and Difficult Economic Situation**
7. **Migration**
8. **Custom and Mentality**

Graph 10: Respondent's reason for early marriage



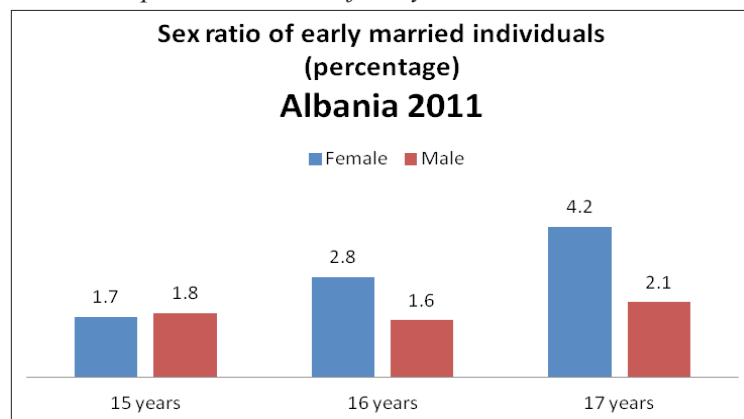
Source: Survey from Observatory, November- December 2015

VI. Prime Concerns for Early Married Women

A. Family vs. Personal Bliss

It is quite significant to note in the above chart that the main reason for early marriage, according to the women living in one, is falling in love. This is the case for 42% of the respondents in our survey. Following this trend and also based on the discussions in the meetings that took place in Korça and Vlora we can safely arrive at the conclusion that early marriage in Albania cannot be considered a traditional practice. The marrying age in Albania has a tendency to increase— a normal sign of socio-economic development clearly indicated by the small portion that early marriages occupy in the national data. This tendency is clearly expressed through the 2011 Census as well and is also shown in the chart below.

Graph 11: Sex ratio of early married individuals



Source: “Gender perspective in Albania”, Gender Analyze Census, 2011

1. By-product of Imagined Tradition. Girls in early marriage often believed that this practice was traditional and honorable. What is missing there is the tendency that we noticed in our study to consider cohabitation as a form of social marriage. Women in early marriage were quite often at a loss when asked about the legal situation with their relationship. On the other hand we noticed that early marriage starts as a form of approved cohabitation between men who is 3 to 10 years older than the underage girls. This form of cohabitation has parental approval and is in fact considered a ‘marriage’ by families and communities and in the best interests of the girls. While cohabitation without formal marriage is becoming a norm in bigger towns in Albania, the trend seems to be followed in smaller communities as described and is being en-

couraged and socially recognized very often due to the lack of financial means to organize elaborate wedding ceremonies²⁴. These situations might be safe covers for abuse and statutory rape and national data needs to be developed for this particular trend in the family life in Albania.

2. Consequence of Uneven Development & Transition. The evidence of early marriage as captured in this study and in preceding work completed by UNFPA and other civil society organizations show that this phenomenon is an undercurrent that is getting stronger and as such deserve the attention of the society and policy makers. According to the formal data we were able to collect in Vlora with the Directorate of Public Health there have been 62 cases of births in mothers under the age of 18 in the period 2013– 2015. This data correlates quite strongly with the court information about cases of early marriage Korça and Vlora. Pregnancy has been indicated as the justification for allowing early marriage. The cycles of data surrounding early marriage is quite incomplete and comparisons with national data are not possible. We are of the opinion that since 2011 the number of this kind of marriages has increased especially among the Roma ethnic groups and in poverty stricken areas. As such early marriage accompanies uneven development as evidenced by data gathered in the developing coun-

²⁴ This data is collected through the focus group discussions we had in the course of this initiative. While these findings might be indicative of Korça and Vlora national comparisons and data are missing and need to be developed.

tries in other parts of the globe²⁵.

3. **Passport to Economic Security.** Girls are made to believe that attractions that they feel are love combined with economic security and that would be the sure path of family and personal bliss. In fact we could not describe any of the 81 cases considered in this study as ‘forced marriages’. The girls have not been forced to marry unknown men. In situation of cohabitation and marriage alike economic comfort especially related to ‘migrant grooms’– men returning from migration to marry– girls are made to believe or convinced that they are securing a safe future. In our sample of married women we noticed that they are unemployed and take good care of their children – an indication that this might be the case.
4. **Companion to Corruption.** However, it was also evident that the consent of parties involved to marry or cohabit were obtained by family pressure or sometimes even law enforcement pressure particularly in the cases when early marriage comes as a result of unintended pregnancy. Transition towards a more open society was not accompanied by safety measures especially in terms of family planning and sexual education. Marriage is considered a golden solution even in front of the considerable pressure on girls to consent to marriage or cohabitation arrangement once their pregnancy /relationship became public knowledge. As

²⁵ Please consider information related to case studies of early marriage in Africa and Southeast Asia as indicated by the International Center for Research on Women. More information on this can be found in this link: <http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>

such there is a tendency not to consider marriage as a corrupt and illegal practice in such a case.

B. The Interrupted Dream of Education

The fact that women in early marriage do not return to school should become a matter of concern. Our case study also indicates that level of education of women in early marriage correlates strongly with that of their parents. This is another undercurrent when one takes into consideration that in the last decade the number of students has tripled in Albanian universities and the increase is mainly noticeable among female students. Although there might be interest and desire to return to school the practicality of it does not exist. Part-time programs and other venues for women in this category might exist especially in terms of job-training programs but they are not easily accessible or geared towards this category.

Women in early marriage relationships are not interested in reading or professional development. Our survey showed an unrealistic approach to professional outlook; responses we got for this questions were not well thought and offered some ‘ready-made’ opinions. In fact some of them felt quite surprised by the questions we asked making us believe that they had not thought about developing a professional life of their own after birth.

C. A job in or out of the house

There was no instance of early-married women that were working outside the house in our survey. Many of them consider themselves unemployed and in order to maintain their confidentiality we did not ask them if they were collecting unemployment or living on welfare. Another unfortunate correlation was discovered in terms of unemployment situation that is quite comparable with that of the parents' women in early-marriage. Although there might be dreams of work outside the house and making a big name on TV or show business the harsh reality these women face is a combination of lack of jobs for people with no qualifications and lack of opportunities to get experience or vocational education. There is no awareness or expectation to consider this category of women as part of the active working force outside the household.

D. The role of the local government and extended community

There seems to be a wide acceptance of early-marriage in the communities where women we interviewed lived. This acceptance, a coping mechanism with prolonged transition, is also justified as some kind of tradition invented or revived. Schools and other social institutions present at the local level do not seem prepared to deal with early marriages both in terms of preventing them from happening and in terms of reintegrating early married women. We also have found out that child protection units are not

ready to cope with early marriage situations either. This situation raises more concerns regarding women in early marriage as the social safety mechanisms that could support them in their new reality do not seem to exist outside the house walls.

E. What does the future hold?

This case study and the initiative to prevent early marriages from happening has let us understand that there are several gaps regarding information about this phenomenon that will remain if a countrywide study and action is not undertaken. The concerns we identified will not be addressed.

VII. Actions and Actors

A. Where strategies fail – troubles thrive

Albania of the 21st century is a country rich in natural resources and strategies alike. The tendency to allocate precious financial & human resources to develop even more a strategies continues. Yet it seems that early marriage has not surfaced in any of these strategies. We have realized that this is a multi-faceted problem and can be dealt with from the viewpoint of human rights violations, women's rights, children's rights, equal opportunities, migration, penal or family code, community development and out-of-school-children. It is a social, cultural and economic problem that demands the attention of government actors. On the other hand is not an ethnic or minority problem that can be ignored. Early marriage transcends ethnic group and has become a practice that cannot be ignored any longer.

In small countries like Albania there is a tendency to centralize thinking about policymaking including human rights and community development. The country is also undergoing a local government reform following a new territorial division and elections that took place last year. This presents an incredible opportunity to utilize the

existing central thinking to develop policies about early marriage in one place and develop implementation plans centred on the new structures of local government in the other. We believe that in this way the strategy will be implemented making use of an existing human force ensuring that the results will not haphazard.

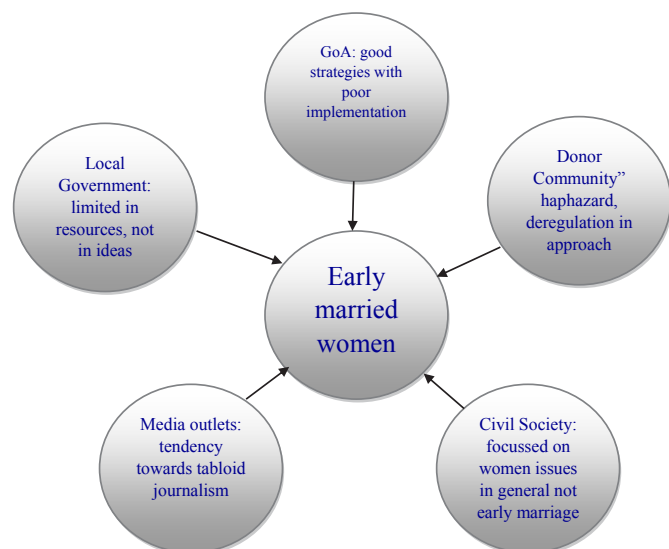
B. Circles of stakeholders and their positions towards early marriage

The multifaceted issue of early marriage both in terms of reducing its occurrence and in terms of reintegrating women in early marriages in at least in the education system represents a give-and-take process among different stakeholders groups including the Government of Albania and its host of institutions, the local government as implementer and supporter of central made policies, donor community interested in the issues related to early marriage, media outlets, community at the local level, and the civil society operating at the local level.

“Observatory for Children's Rights” has been working at the regional and local level and we are of the opinion that an understanding of the roles and position that each stakeholder has towards this issue is essential in securing optimal solutions. The figure below represents the connection of all these actors with early and child marriage and the actual position that each actor has taken so far. We are also aware of the fact that the central government agenda is busy with the European integration processes, and justice reform. This is yet another reason to think centrally

about early-marriage and implement locally in order to ensure results.

Graph 12: Actors involved in early marriage



C. International Community and United Nations Intervention

Development of the post-communist Albania cannot be understood by the ever-international presence both in terms of aid and aid related activities and in the form of direct foreign investment. This study would not have become a reality without the support of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives.

Presently there are very limited actors involved in the

early-marriage phenomenon. Following the one-UN model donors could come together to address both sides of the early marriage policy issue: measures to be put in place to prevent it from happening and measures to reintegrate early-married women of very young age in school and vocational training.

D. Local Government, Police, Hospitals and Regional Courts

In the course of this initiative and as described in this case study we have had excellent cooperation with the local government and units of central government operating locally. This partnership is important for early-marriage situations. The cooperation in the framework of this initiative revealed that training and awareness about this issue should be developed and spread among the local actors.

E. Civil Society and Women Organizations

Early marriage in this study has been treated mainly as a women's and children's rights issue. The gendered nature of the socio-economic characteristics was quite evident. The loss of societal status, stigma, shame and social withdrawal together with social pressure to conform with early marriage affected girls rather than men. Presence of CSOs at the local level following the trend of doing more locally is increasing. Support and cooperation exists in issues dealing with women rights. Awareness and training on

how to deal with early marriage occurrences has not taken place and needs to be considered possible in cooperation with the local government.

F. Media Outlets and Adolescent Sexuality

We noticed a tendency towards tabloid journalism when situations related or resulting from early marriage were reported in the Albanian media outlets. The situation with a village girl in Northern Albania who was pressured into an affair while in an early-marriage situation and who almost got suicide was the latest case reported. While lack of sensitivity and critical awareness about the role media can play in this matter, we think it important to raise awareness on the way media is dealing with adolescent sexuality and related issues.

Adolescent sexual relationships outside the framework of marriage are a reality in Albania. While moral stand on this issue can be debated as the society matures the issue of violation of child/ girl rights needs to get central attention. Female images, dressed or undressed, should not be the main source of viewership for the on-line media outlets. In a society with democratic values media needs to consider the ethical frameworks and avoid gendered descriptions of the situations. Yet again the need for training and awareness in dealing with early marriage becomes essential.

G. Migration Related Stakeholders

Early marriage is allowed for marriages involving a migrant. This justification is outdated and immature if one takes into consideration that a third of the Albanian population lives abroad. In Albania we have considered the use of human and social capital of migrants as the most important aspects of the migration-development nexus. We have also ignored dealing with the early-marriage situations that often become dramatic and turn into sexual abuse and exploitation. Migration did not occur in our survey or discussions as a prime element. Nevertheless, both qualitative studies and survey-based studies need to be developed in order to understand better the early-marriage migrant situation.

VIII. Policy Actions Proposals

A. Policy Proposals that may be facilitated by the “Observatory for Children’s Rights”

1. Developing a policy environment in which actors cooperate to develop a win-win situation about prevention and limitation of early marriage situation in Albania.
2. Cost interventions for effective activities leading to the eradication of early marriage.
3. Initiate a process to bring back to the education and formal training schemes women who have gone through early marriage and need assistance.
4. Expand the current initiative in the 12 regions where Observatory offices are present in order to have a national understanding of the early marriage phenomenon.

B. Stakeholder Actions towards Early Marriage as Violation of Human Rights

1. Start up a campaign in cooperation with the media to raise awareness about early marriage as an Albania

problem that knows no language or ethnicity barriers.

2. Work with the legal professional associations, human rights organizations and chamber of attorneys to propose actions related to the legal aspects of early marriage in line with the ideas that pregnancy or migration should not be the only determining logical points for approving early marriage.
3. Work with the national, regional and local actors to bring about change in the age of sexual consent raising it to 15 years old to coincide with the age of mandatory education actually set at the 9th grade.
4. Revamp policies related to school leaves to include early marriage as a violation of the rules related to mandatory education.

C. Stakeholder Actions Addressing Early Marriage Countrywide

1. Create a CSO coalition including women, children and human rights organizations to lobby changes in the laws regulating early marriage including interventions in the family code and penal code. This coalition should work closely with the parliament to make these changes.
2. Take steps to open up the school system nation wide to the early married women following the initiative of the current prime minister to consider the schools as effective community development centers.
3. Pilot the mechanism for the support and protection of early-married women within the child protection units

in each new municipality.

4. Work to develop a national mechanism in cooperation with the Observatory that helps in detecting and supporting women that are about to enter into an early marriage situation.

IX. Conclusions

A. Quantity and Quality of Women in Early Marriage

1. Although national data is needed this study concludes that early marriage affects girls, reflecting gender biases and discriminatory attitudes in families and communities;
2. The study supports the arguments for increasing the minimum age of sexual consent to 15 to coincide with the age of mandatory education and to move Albania closer to the majority of countries in the world whose age for sexual consent is 16 years old;
3. The current Albanian laws and policies on early marriage are in harmony with international obligations including CRC and CEDAW but the implementation force is lacking bringing negative impacts from early marriages as outlined in this study;
4. Early marriage clearly violates the human rights of the girls in these unions to human development by impeding health and education, their rights to protection and participation rights as they evolve from adolescence to maturity.

B. Addressing the Issue of Skills Provision for Early Married Women

1. Early marriage is a disincentive to school particularly in low-income families. It is our consideration and recommendation that vocational training and education opportunities should be created for the women in early marriage unions;
2. Proactive measures should be taken through the courts to make continuation of education part of the early marriage agreement;
3. Training of civil service employees should be considered to monitor and maintain standards on the duties and responsibilities regarding early marriage in order to prevent corruption relating to birth and marriage registration. Trainings should also be considered for health workers dealing with underage pregnant women.

C. International, National and Local Stakeholders

1. We are of the opinion that the new territorial reform that Government of Albania is planning to implement will provide even greater opportunities to deal with early marriage especially in the provision of training for public servants and police. There is an emerging need to clarify the laws on early marriage and age requirements in order to avoid statutory rape and other forms of abuse;
2. The study indicates that there is community and fam-

ily acceptance of early marriage including the illegal cases of socially accepted marriages. The social values in regard to teenage sexual relations are still evolving allowing opportunities for consensual relationships with a wide age difference. Law enforcement authorities and social and childcare workers must do a lot more to educate young girls about marriage and reinforce values on the importance of marriage and risks of early marriage;

3. While negative implications are similar for early marriage or early cohabitation, legal implications are different because a registered legal marriage confers spousal rights including property rights and legitimizes children;
4. Media, both written and electronic, should be used at the national and local levels to create awareness among adults on the negative impact of early marriage and cohabitation and should partner with CSOs to initiate legal amendments addressing specific problems that have emerged through this research as consequences of early marriage;
5. Where girls over 14 years of age are in sexual relationships, maximum effort should be made to provide support services including reproductive and sexual health services and counselling to ensure that the negative impacts particularly health related ones are minimized. Support should be also offered to women who want to leave abusive relationships or to those who want to legalize their cohabitation situation in order to fully emancipate themselves;
6. This study clearly shows that early marriage is prima-

ry a response to teenage sexuality. Its negative consequences on young girls should be widely recognized and discussed. Age appropriate and effective teenage reproductive and sexual health services need to be strengthened and teenage sexuality should not be viewed as ‘immoral’.

civil society organizations, donors, schools and the community in which they live. Let us give these girls a voice and let them be girls and not brides!

D. Concluding Epilogue

1. **Handcuffs to Slavery.** Based on the information obtained as afterthoughts following moments of reflection on the side of the interviewed women and considering the scholarly work on this topic, we strongly believe that early marriage cannot be a solution. Rather than justifying it as a traditional practice (which as this study shows it is clearly not the case in Albania), early marriage and cohabitation need to be recognized as a response to adolescent sexuality and corrupted normative standards of a peripheral society undergoing transition that insists that girls should engage in sexual relations within the institution of marriage.
2. **National Response.** We are keen to protect the identity of women who participated in this study. We believe that their problems together with the policy solutions presented in this study demand a countrywide review of the situation around early marriage. Further we strongly argue that concerted efforts to ameliorate the situation of women in early marriage can happen by bringing together policy makers in the Parliament, state structures enforcing laws related to marriage,

X. Appendices

A. Sample of the Questionnaire used with early married women in Korça and Vlora



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QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey was conducted by the “Observatory for Children’s Rights” (Observatory) within the project “*The prohibition of early marriages in Albania*”, October 2015-February 2016, funded by the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives. The contents are the responsibility of the author, the opinion expressed is not necessarily the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. The questionnaire aims analysis of early marriages in pilot areas which are Korca and Vlora. The questionnaire will be filled by local actors and members of selected areas. The questionnaire will be completed during the period 24 November- 4 December 2015. Personal data of this survey are confidential and will only be used for quantitative analysis of the purpose study. And analysis of the study findings will be made public in order to influence in the processes of local policy-making and will be posted at the implementing organization’s official website Observatory: www.observator.org.al

Thank you!

SESSION I: General information about respondents

City: _____

1. Current Age: _____

2. Current status:

- a) Married
- b) Divorced
- c) widow
- d) Single

3. Number of siblings in the family: _____

4. Family type:

- a) With both parents
- b) One parent
- c) With divorced parents
- d) With remarried parents

5. Birth order in the family:

- a) The first child
- b) The second child
- c) The third child
- d) The _____ child
- e) The last child

6. Are you married?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. If yes, you are married:

- a) Legally
- b) In the social order

8. Age when is married: _____

9. Number of children: _____

10. Age when first child was born: _____

11. Marriage happened

- a) Before childbirth
- b) After childbirth

12. If the answer is after childbirth, The child's birth was the cause?

- a) Yes
- b) No

13. You live:

- a) Only as a couple,
- b) Together with your spouse parents or your parents.

14. Number of years you have lived with your husband's family before childbirth _____

15. Difference in age with your husband: _____

16. Do you have social connections with former school friends / neighborhood or others?

- a) Yes
- b) No

SESSION II: General information on education (Under 4 class pass to Session III)

1. How many class school do you have ? _____

2. Your results in school were:

- a) Excellent
- b) Very good
- c) Good
- d) Weak
- e) Very Poor

3. What subject do you like?

- a) Mathematics
- b) Reading

4. Have you read books outside of school?

- a) Yes
- b) No

5. Did you attend school after childbirth?

- a) Yes
- b) No

6. Do you work after childbirth?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. Do you have goals for a professional career?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8. If yes, in which areas do you see yourself?

9. Where do you see yourself after birth, unless motherhood:

- a) secondary education / higher
- b) vocational school
- c) other craft;
- d) business or family business
- e) agriculture
- f) Other (specify) _____

SESSION III: General information about parents

1. Age of parent's _____

2. The legal status of the parents: _____

3. The education level of parents:: _____

4. Are you employed:

- a) Yes
- b) No

5. Have your parents been in emigration?

- a) Yes
- b) No

6. If yes, what is the place in which they migrated?

SESSION IV: General information on child/s

1. Who helps in raising the child / s?

- a) Family
- b) Relatives
- c) Advisory
- d) Doctors
- e) Other (specify) _____

2. Are your children registered?

- a) Yes
- b) No

3. How is the child's health?

- a) Very good
- b) Good
- c) Poor
- d) Very Bad

4. How many more children have been born after the first child? _____

5. If you have give birth to a girl, there were problems?

- a) Yes
- b) No

6. Are you required to perform an abortion (miscarriage) child?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. If you have give birth to a girl, has your family status changed?

- a) Yes
- b) No

SESSION V: General information on the reasons for early marriage

1. What is the reason that you're married to an early age:

- a) Liability family
- b) Love
- c) The way to escape from family control
- d) Pregnancy
- e) Domestic violence
- f) The difficult economic situation
- g) Migration
- h) Costum/Mentality in the area where I live

2. Do you have anything else to add?

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