Forced and Early Marriage: A Severe Human Rights Violation
Report by Barbara Devin, Adviser, Zonta International United Nations Committee, Vienna

Organization and Venue
Early on in Zonta’s Centennial Anniversary biennium, the idea was born to organize seminars on an issue of great importance to Zonta: child marriage, a crime largely affecting girls. Zonta will invest the biggest sum ever in a single biennium to ending this specific form of violence that has tremendous negative effects on societies. Ingeborg Geyer, Zonta International United Nations (UN) Committee Chair, conceived of a unique conference in Vienna. The organizational committee also included Margot Fleck, Zonta District 14 Foundation Ambassador, Claudia Exenberger, President of Golden Z Club Vienna and Zonta International UN Committee member, as well as Gertrude Wanivenhaus, Conference Chair. The four were greatly supported by the Zonta Club Wien. The committee chose as the location the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, a center of excellence for the study of international affairs. The Vienna School of International Studies is the oldest professional school in the world, having launched talented men and women into international careers and positions of leadership over the course of more than two centuries. The activities as a professional school are complemented by first-rate research, world-renowned executive training programs and its function as a hub for public lectures and debates. With the number of persons related, affiliated and working with the Vienna School of International Studies totaling more than 4,000, the Zonta International Seminar could benefit from this reach.

Participants
The Zonta International conference in Vienna attracted participants from 19 countries, including Afghanistan. Zonta members attending represented nine countries and eight districts. The organization committee honored, in particular, the numerous participants from
Asian countries as well as three participants from Ghana. In total, the organizing committee received more than 100 registrations.

**Reason why for the topic**

In examining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the context of child marriage, it becomes obvious that achieving SDG 5 – the prime objective of Zonta International activities - which targets gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, as well as SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8, will not be achieved unless we search and find culturally sensitive ways to end child, early and forced marriage.

Worldwide, almost 650 million women alive today were married before their 18th birthday and an estimated 280 million more girls are at risk of becoming brides. If current trends continue, the number of girls and women married as children will reach nearly 1 billion by 2030.

The conference started with the introduction of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. The objective was to transfer knowledge and to broaden and deepen the awareness about the subject within the Zonta community and beyond. Building upon the successful project in Niger last biennium, Zonta International has committed US$2,000,000 to UNICEF USA to support the program which is run in 12 countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ghana, India, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Yemen and Zambia. Zonta International is the first private sector donor to the Global Programme. Seven of the 12 countries have Zonta members who are contributing in various ways to success of the initiative.

**Welcome Address**

**SUSANNE KEPPLER-SCHLESINGER,** Deputy Director, Diplomatische Akademie Wien

In her welcome address on behalf of Ambassador Dr. Emil Brix, Susanne Keppler-Schlesinger underlined the right to have a choice as an unalienable right of every human being. Globally, child marriage is a human rights violation that disproportionately affects young women and girls. More than 650 million women alive today were married as children – it clearly reveals this harmful practice remains widespread despite a broad range of regional and international legal standards aiming at elimination of this phenomenon.
SHAMS ASADI Human Rights Commissioner and head of the Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna – Moderator of the Conference

Shams Asadi, Human Rights Commissioner and head of the Human Rights Office of the City of Vienna, was the ideal moderator of the seminar “Forced and early marriage – a severe human rights violation.”

KEY SPEAKERS

Zonta’s International President, experts from the UN, politics, science and civil society shared findings of their research, experience and suggestions. They also discussed some “open problems” during the panel discussion. The afternoon was dedicated to the ideas and challenges that the young Zontians from the Golden Z Club presented and involved the participants respectively. On these “marketplaces” – indeed outside of the conference room in the “Academic Garden” accompanied by warm sunshine – Z Club members explained and exchanged suggestions and best practice examples and future activities with groups of the audience.

(1) Intervention “Launch of the Conference”

H.E. KHOJESTA FANA EBR AHIMKHEL, Ambassador to the Republic of Austria and Permanent/Resident Representative to the UN and other International and Regional Organisations in Vienna, opened the conference. She also represents Afghanistan in four other countries as a non-resident Ambassador: Croatia, Hungary, Liechtenstein and Slovenia. The Ambassador spoke vividly of her experience with organisations like OSCE, UNIDO, UNODC – among others – and expressed her deep esteem to be asked to join the International Gender Champions, a leadership network that brings together female and male decision-makers determined to break down gender barriers and make gender equality a working reality in their spheres of influence.

“I am greatly honored to be able to join the International Gender Champions, which gives me the opportunity to continue my work -- now in my new role as Ambassador of Afghanistan in Vienna – in promoting equal rights for men and women. Previously, I, inter alia, campaigned as a social activist for Afghan refugees and for women’s rights, and I published articles on women’s rights. Also, I have established the Association of Afghan Women Diplomats. I am fully committed to the empowerment of women and to gender equality, and I will undertake to make significant contributions to prevent violence and abuse against women.”

She accepts as one of her most important tasks to “fight” for women’s and girls’ future. In the context of forced/early marriage, H.E represents a country that is concerned with the topic in
question: tradition, inequality, lack of education and poverty – to name the most decisive causes that seriously interfere when it comes to marriage.

In the year 2017, the Afghan Government took a concrete step towards addressing child marriage by launching a “National Action Plan to Eliminate Early and Child Marriage.” The plan was implemented in detail by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Ministry of Information and Culture, with support from UNFPA Afghanistan, the Canadian government and input from a range of stakeholders. This is an encouraging development in a country where one of three girls are married before the age of 18. Also, the First Lady of Afghanistan, Rula Ghani, expressed her support for the national action plan, urging families to stop marrying their daughters: “...girls face a huge risk when they get married at a young age, ... robs them of their childhood and future opportunities.”

The plan of action revolves around two approaches: developing and supporting initiatives to prevent and end child marriage, and improving the implementation and enforcement, resp. of laws and provision of services to people affected by child marriage. Now that the National Action Plan has been officially launched, it will be crucial for all actors to work together on leveraging the funding and resources to ensure it becomes a reality. Indeed, more and more countries are in the process to launch new rules and policies to delay marriage.

Ambassador Ebrahimkhel is confident that with collective action and mutual cooperation, in Afghanistan, regionally and internationally a significant positive change will be achieved.

Women are the majority and moving reality for the future of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a young democracy where over 65% of the population in Afghanistan is under the age of 25 and more than half of this young population is girls and young women. This is the reason for optimism for the future of Afghanistan - the youth, girls and boys.

Afghanistan is witnessing an unprecedented involvement of women in all aspects of life. The most effective way to combat violence against women is to make women messengers of peace instead of victims of violence.

(2) Co-Initiator and Host

SUSANNE VON BASSEWITZ: Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage

Dr. Susanne von Bassewitz is the 2018-2020 President of Zonta International and the Zonta Foundation. In 2012, she developed Zonta Says NO to Violence Against Women, a campaign that has been running since then worldwide in all 63 countries where Zonta International has members. She started to work on women’s issues when preparing for her master's and Ph.D. degrees. She is a communications consultant and has been a frequent lecturer with focus on communications management at German universities.

“Zonta’s founders were pioneers. In the year the U.S. Congress passed the bill that would give U.S. women the right to vote, they knew that societies can only prosper if women can actively contribute. They were courageous and already represented the change they wanted to bring about. This year, Zonta celebrates its 100 years. Let us continue to work for gender equality and for providing girls with an education, so that they can reach their potential and decide for themselves on the number of their children and when they are going to have them.”

Child marriage is a global violation of human rights that can be found in cultures, religions, ethnicities and countries around the world. Recognizing that only a long-term strategy will ensure the desired outcomes, UNICEF and UNFPA have joined forces and formally
launched a multi-country initiative to protect the rights of millions of the world’s most vulnerable girls. Zonta International has become a partner in this effort and made it Zonta’s first ever major project in Zonta’s 100-year long history. The global program is turning commitment into tangible action to effect lasting change in girls’ lives by focusing on these five main strategies -

1. Building the skills and knowledge of girls at risk of child marriage
2. Supporting households in demonstrating positive attitudes towards adolescent girls
3. Strengthening the systems that deliver services to adolescent girls
4. Ensuring laws and policies protect and promote adolescent girls’ rights
5. Generating and using robust data to inform programs and policies relating to adolescent girls -

which are based on specific information and personal consultation and advisory service by experts and professionals. The program brings together governments, civil society, families and young people in a collective effort to prevent girls from marrying too young and to support those already married as girls.

To date, more than 1 million girls have been reached through life skills and school attendance support and 1.67 million individuals have been engaged in community-based behavior change and sensitization activities.

(3) QUENTIN WODON: The Economic Impact of child Marriage on Society

Dr. Quentin Wodon is a lead economist at the World Bank, Education Sector. Previous roles include managing the unit on values and development, serving as Lead Poverty Specialist for Africa, and working as Economist/Senior Economist for Latin America. He conducted research projects and wrote papers on population growth, child marriage, early childbearing and girls’ education.

Dr. Quentin Wodon, Adviser at World Bank’s Education Department, presented research on the economic implications of child marriage. Child marriage is still seen as a social issue versus an economic issue. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target ending child marriage by 2030. Based on the African Union campaign, many African countries have meanwhile drafted strategies to end child marriage; however, actual investments in effective programs and policies are still limited. The World Bank research estimated “impacts” and costs entailed in activities to end child marriage.

There has been a slow decline in child marriage rates in sub-Saharan Africa. However, compared to Asian countries, early marriage happens to a distinctly higher degree in African countries with a prevalence of about 35 percent in 2017, which equals 3.4 million girls married before the age of 18.

Quentin Wodon focused the presentation on the overall benefits of educating girls and – following - ending child marriage and early childbearing. Education matters for all children, but even more so for girls: If they drop out of school to be married (before the age of 18) they are more likely to have children early (before 18). The study reveals that primary schooling is necessary but not sufficient; primary education does not make a large difference with regards to having children very early in life versus having no education at all.

The World Bank research defines six key domains having an impact on early marriage:
**Earnings:** Women with primary education (partial or completed) earn only 19 to 30 percent more than those with no education at all. Women with secondary education make more than twice as much. Secondary education is the key.

**Child marriage/early childbearing:** Each year of secondary education reduces risks of child marriage and early childbearing by about 7 percentage points. Universal secondary completion could virtually put an end to child marriage and also reduce early childbearing by 75 percent.

**Fertility:** Universal secondary education could reduce total fertility by a third (two thirds of the effect from education, one third from ending child marriage.) Lower population growth could usher the demographic dividend.

**Health, nutrition and well-being:** Universal secondary education could increase women’s ability to make decisions about their healthcare and knowledge of HIV/AIDS. It would also reduce under-five mortality and stunting.

**Agency or individual's decision-making ability:** Universal secondary education could increase by one tenth women’s decision-making ability within the household, among other agency gains.

**Social capital:** Universal secondary education could enable more women to display altruistic behaviors (volunteering, donating to charity, helping strangers) and it could enable them to rely on friends when in need.

The findings reveal that child marriage has an enormous influence on monetary costs of a country - particularly in Africa. The largest impact concerns the human capital wealth i.e. lifetime earnings for labor force amounting to a loss of US$63 billion for 12 countries that account for half of the continent’s population. The next most important impacts are population growth and total wealth per capita: The benefit is estimated at US$26 billion in the first year of the elimination of child marriage for 13 countries. This benefit would increase quickly over time.

Quentin Wodon depicts three areas where the states need to become active - but education is at the center and should be given key priority.

- General basic conditions for access to education and learning; including schools nearby, affordability, good learning performance, knowledge transfer in life skills.
- Targeted interventions for vulnerable girls; particularly effective are “safe spaces” for girls, incentives to remain in school.
- Efforts to change gender-based social norms - although research reveals limited evidence, such efforts are extremely important to influence long term development regarding gender equality! See details of Zonta International’s project with UNFPA/UNICEF which includes counseling, tutoring, mentoring – www.zonta.org.

Lessons can be learned from successful interventions as there are:

- Center for Girls’ Education in Nigeria is delaying marriage and improving transition to secondary school.
- “Safe space plus”: safe spaces, but focusing in part on core literacy and numeracy skills with provision of stipend as incentive to stay in school.
- Building on the aspirations of parents and communities: when girls learn in school, parents want them to succeed and communities become supportive!

Three types of interventions are appropriate to improve Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) and delay marriage and childbearing:

1. Provision knowledge on SRH and life skills (in “safe spaces”) will achieve important intermediary benefits or outcomes related among others to aspirations and self-esteem, confidence, and reproductive health knowledge. It may not be sufficient to delay marriage and childbearing without additional interventions (like livelihood training opportunities/incentives for schooling).
2. Availability of Economic opportunities may improve reproductive health outcomes
and delay marriage or childbearing, but not systematically so. Economic opportunities are important since they are often the only option for out-of-school girls.

3. Again - substantial **Incentives for schooling** are the most likely to help delay marriage and childbearing - some interventions also focus on delaying the age at marriage. BUT there is a

Need to have schools nearby or provide transportation –
Need for water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for girls –
Need to reduce violence/sexual harassment in school -
Need to actually learn in school – must be worth it!

Quentin Wodon summarizes the research-based conclusion: there exists a strong economic cause for investing in the education of girls to end child marriage.

(4) PETRA BAYR: Female Genital Mutilation FGM – A Harmful Traditional Practice

Worldwide, more than 200 million women have no access to effective contraceptives. Worldwide about 300,000 women lose their lives due to complications with pregnancy and giving birth. Nearly 13 percent of those death are caused by insecure abortions. These facts clearly reveal that a legal framework has a direct impact on life and death. Petra Bayr urges politicians around the world to closely cooperate concerning women's health - the only way to abolish the cruel ritual FGM and thus return women their freedom, their right to self-determination and their dignity. In Austria, the platform to end female genital mutilation “Stop FGM”. Since 2018, she is a Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and Vice President of the European Parliamentarian Forum on sexual and reproductive rights (EPF). “Women’s health calls for an institutional and legal framework that focuses on women’s rights – worldwide.”

Circumcision among women has no relation to religion but is an expression of machismo and a weak social position of women. This practice solely brought and still brings severe harms, violating persons psychologically, physically and socially.

Poverty, a cause mentioned often, represents only an indirect driving factor for child marriage. A more significant deciding factor is parents’ concern to protect their daughter, to substitute with another social status. In firmly established and tight traditions, girls need to be given their commonly acknowledged social status – being the key for many issues girls and women are affected by like supporting the family income, becoming integrated in the community, taking care of children and the household. The audience brought up an interesting development in India: while support via education for girls increased, education for women - at a later age – dropped. In summary, women and girls should be granted education, no matter at what age. Only then empowerment of women becomes complete.

Petra Bayr mentioned the Security Council Resolution on women and peace and security in 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. The Resolution urges member states to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts. In the context of the “role” women and girls are “forced to play” in cases of conflicts special measures need to be taken to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.
particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. Here the presenter underlined that the support of projects like the ones Zonta sponsors need to take into account men as well as boys, the latter particularly often involved in armed conflicts in African countries. The educational system within the Zonta project in question includes boys. In the context of early marriage boys - being often of young age as well - need to learn about what they get into with early marriage.

Stop FGM underlines as a key issue the provision of “safe spaces” - houses to take shelter in when it comes to circumcision. “Safe spaces” indicate no tolerance of violence, harassment and hate speech, particularly urgent in “conflict” situations - irrespective whether armed or in case of forced/early marriage. Although many countries have legal provisions according to the UN convention on the rights of the child - however the law is rarely enforced, no monitoring takes place, lack of consequent persecution. Petra Bayr mentioned that Nepal introduced the registration of birth to find out the age of the mother – and then follow up with persecution. Again, the registration does not happen regularly. Enforcement of law appears extremely difficult in countries where FGM and early marriage are deeply rooted in tradition.

(5) GERALD TATZGERN: Organized Crime and Forced Marriage

Point of departure of Gerald Tatzgern’s speech was the fact that Austria has become increasingly a nerve center relative to migration, trafficking in persons, particularly of minors. In that context he extrapolated most vividly, almost frighteningly, where and how forced marriage happens. “Marriages” happen by fraud. Unaccompanied refugee children get “lost” – because they are not registered. In fact criminals advise them to declare their age over 18 years with the consequence that they are “free” to move where they want. In that situation they are captured by smugglers who on their part can do what they want with the children with the objective to exploit them to make money. For example, Tatzgern’s Austrian Office found out that young Nigerian girls are granted priority place on the smuggling boats because they promise good profit. The most profitable sources are labor exploitation, sex exploitation, begging, other criminal activities like fraud or theft and marriage with girls. If forced marriage is the “destination,” girls should not be harmed, no sexual abuse should happen since only “safe the virgins” are profitable for forced marriage. Girls are good for “begging” themselves or as “watchdog” of forced beggars to collect and render the money to the final “patron.” Gerald Tatzgern defines this relationship as slavery bondage, a situation from which the “beggar victims” can barely escape.

As to the forced married girls – torture and violence continue because the so-called husband abuses the girl for sex and/or other work. Considering the entire “journey”, from leaving the homeland via smuggler gangs and capture upon arrival, refugee girls and young women in particular have next to no chance to break through the circle. Having realized this inhumane development, Gerald Tatzgern implemented a system to talk to young refugees, in particular girl refugees in respective camps and houses in Austria. The objective is to find out details
on children in their especially vulnerable situation. Only a most sensitive approach provides a chance to depict the true actual and emotional situation the girl is captured in. Gerald Tatzgern summarized that the approach of sensibility talks represents an effective way to collect indicators to break in to smuggling gangs and to retrieve and save the members of especially vulnerable refugee and migrant groups – here girls under 18 years of age.

(6) RIME ALLAF: Insights into the circumstances which are leading girls and young women to child marriage in humanitarian crises settings

Gender-based violence takes many forms around the world, and this is all exacerbated in times of conflict and humanitarian crises. When girls and young women are displaced, living in a makeshift shelter or a refugee camp, when they are exposed to danger from every side, when they are out of school and subject to child labor, then they are more vulnerable to gender-based violence. More importantly, they are much more likely to become “child brides.”

Whether or not they are fully conscious of their decisions, and whether or not they are even able to influence the decision, girls who end up marrying early, or being forced to marry, tend to perceive that marriage may bring them some protection (physical and financial). Sometimes, this marriage is imagined as an escape from the current situation of displacement in the worst circumstances. This makes the reality of marriage even harsher for these girls, when they discover that their life did not improve and that they are not better off physically, psychologically, emotionally or even financially.

Depending on the region around the world, girls are sometimes forced to marry relatives, or even combatants (in situations of conflict), and at other times they marry older men, an option which some parents believe will relieve the financial strain on their family (through a dowry, or by the mere fact of reducing the family’s expenses). Forced marriage is also one of the consequences of sexual violence (when a girl who has been molested or raped has to carry that “shame” and that stigma herself), making girls double victims.

The case of Syrian refugee girls has received some attention in mainstream media and from concerned NGOs, but nowhere near what is needed. In addition to the common factors leading young girls to early and forced marriage in many regions of the world, female Syrian refugees find themselves vulnerable to regional circumstances as well, especially in the numerous camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In these neighboring countries, young Syrian girls and women are often taken as “second wives” by local men, who think (rightly, unfortunately) that it is easy to marry a Syrian refugee girl whose family will not put difficult conditions for this marriage to take place. Men come to take their pick and choose, as if in a market, finding many families willing to present their young daughters for marriage, without even taking the time (or having the luxury) to better study the situation of the groom.

In addition to being forced to marry early, Syrian refugee girls are also often in fake marriages (with men pretending to submit the paperwork) or in unregistered marriages (made “religiously” without any formal registration). This absolves the men of the already generous conditions they officially enjoy in the region in case of divorce, even in terms of child support. Not only can men divorce the girls in a matter of minutes, even verbally, but in the worst-case scenario the men can even completely disappear after a few weeks or months, having abused the young girl or woman. This means the young women may find
themselves divorced or abandoned after brief periods of “marriage” – leaving them in an even worse situation, sometimes with children. Sometimes they do not even know if they are still married, if they ever really were.

The suffering of women in these circumstances becomes even greater; they often find themselves without a support network (their families unhappy to now have to deal with a divorced woman), without means to live, and with a higher probability of allowing (or even encouraging) their own children and girls to follow that route one day, out of sheer despair.

When some of the region’s biggest refugee camps include bridal shops in their makeshift shopping areas, alongside necessities for daily subsistence, this means there is something seriously wrong with the support system, and that the international aid community has failed these girls and young women. Without a sustained program to protect these girls and young women, without a support system taking them in hand and leading them to education and vocational skills, we can only expect the situation to get worse.

Every speaker at this conference clearly mentioned, in one way or another, the need to have clear sets of laws, and the need to implement the rule of law relative to early marriage and the age of the girls. This means passing laws which include a minimum age for girls and boys, and the required registration not only of births but also of marriages. Only strict law enforcement and monitoring will enable the protection of girls and women, and of society.

There are of course other ways to help change societies which have turned a blind eye to early marriage. Indeed, a sustained long-term campaign to promote a different way of thinking is urgently needed, with education being one of the pillars of such an approach.

UNODC’s Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration has the mission of promoting a culture of lawfulness around the world, using a number of components to achieve that goal. This is done through supporting judicial integrity, through rehabilitating prisoners, through crime prevention for youth through sports and life skills programs, and of course through education. Of course, education does not end with reading, writing and counting, but also extends to the knowledge transfer about the country’s social and legal system.

Education for Justice is founded on the principle that the best prevention is education. The initiative develops tools which are age-appropriate, innovative, varied and contextualized, freely available online or as publications, and multilingual and globally accessible.

In order to enable and empower girls (and boys) to break the wall of fear and speak up in case of harassment, and before it becomes a bigger violence, children need to be taught to know when and how to seek help, to understand that different situations require different actions, and to feel empowered when they need to act alone, and protected when they can act through others.

One of the tools to achieve this, developed by UNODC, is a video game called “Chuka, Break the Silence” which is helping children identify how they can fight gender violence, and handle physical, psychological and sexual abuse and violence. The creative game also raises boys’ awareness and helps them recognize such situations. By playing as the character Chuka, a 13-year old female YouTuber and gamer who encounters haters and monsters in a nightmare, children learn to be assertive and to take actions which help them defeat various forms of gender-based violence.

This is of course but one of the examples of innovative, creative and tailored ways to tackle one of the many aspects and manifestations of gender violence, and it does depend on the availability of basic educational settings and technological tools. But this example from
UNODC is meant to illustrate how wide the possibilities are to teach children what is normal and acceptable, and what is not.

In the case of early and forced marriages taking place in already desperate circumstances, such as displacement or refugee camps, there is a need for direct protection while simultaneously providing alternatives to the girls falling prey to these marriages. The awareness needs to extend to the parents, who need to believe that a girl’s potential for safety (in all the senses of the word) is greater when she receives education, and when she is able to support herself after a few years. This is a task for the humanitarian aid community, for NGOs working in the field, and for all of us who are rightly horrified by the many abuses needlessly endured by far too many young girls and women.

(7) NAJWA DUZDAR: Support for affected women and girls – an Austrian Perspective

Najwa Duzdar joined Orient Express after completing her studies in business, economics and social sciences with a focus on socioeconomics in Vienna. She is currently enrolled in a part-time European Master Programme “Social Economy and Social Work”. She worked as a social counsellor and project assistant and is responsible for the organization and human resources management at Orient Express.

Orient Express is a non-profit, neutral and religiously unaffiliated organization that operates a women’s counselling centre, a language learning centre and emergency shelters: safe and anonymous accommodation for up to three months threatened or affected in case of forced and early marriage. Furthermore, transitional (long-term) housing allows accommodation up to one full year for a successful transition to self-sufficient living. Counselling services are offered to women with a migration background, mainly from Turkey and the Arab region. In cases of forced and early marriage, counselling and safe accommodation is provided for girls and young women of all nationalities.

In addition, the institution operates a coordination center that takes care above all of problems concerning abduction like:
• nationwide coordination of cases
• awareness-raising work with professionals
• building and maintaining networks with relevant professionals

Abduction, for the purpose of forced marriage or as a form of parental punishment, means to bring a person abroad by their own family and to prevent the “victim” from being able to return. Then the person is often – not always – forced into marriage.

Orient Express realizes that forced marriage receives increasing awareness in the public. Some ethnic statistics on the target group of Orient Express: In the year 2014, 71 percent of women needing support came from Turkey and Arabic countries, 15 percent had refugee background, the remaining group came originally from other countries. Four years later, the picture is reversed: 14 percent were of Arabic and Turkish nationality, 69 percent came as refugees – a clear “portrait” of the refugee “waves” during the last years. During the same period, the target group changed from primarily adults, i.e. 70 percent, and 30 percent minors, to the reverse relation: now the majority asking for support are minors - 69 percent. In total, Orient Express itself noticed a distinct increase of cases from 20 clients in the year 2008 to 120 clients in the year 2018.

Najwa Duzdar concluded her presentation with a case study. A 19-year-old girl from Syria wanted to make a summer trip to visit her grandmother in Turkey. Amina travelled voluntarily with her parents. Upon arrival her personal documents were taken away and she was locked in her room. She could make contact to Austria and received a message from her boyfriend. The Orient Express Coordination Centre was informed and started cooperation with embassies and ministry of foreign affairs. After a few months the victim was brought back to Austria - already married in a religious ceremony. The main challenges for Orient Express in such cases: to maintain the contact with the victim, to deal with countries with no Austrian Embassies, to take into account dangers and threats.

Najwa Duzdar’s presentation clearly emphasized the need and effectiveness of the Orient Express help-system that was successfully implemented to achieve awareness-raising activities. Most important: forced and early marriage is clearly perceived as a form of violence against women and girls that is found in mainstream society and it is not simply described as a “cultural” phenomenon, only to be dealt with within certain communities.

(8) WAFA DAOU: Insight into Zonta Work in Beirut

Many countries have legislation dealing with marriage, divorce, child-care and related personal status issues. The situation is different in Lebanon: given the religious diversity in the country, we have 18 recognized religious groups and each of them has its own personal status laws that govern their processes of marriage, divorce, inheritance, child-care, etc.

In Lebanon, the current situation culturally and legally continues to allow for child marriage, especially in rural areas where parents usually think that early marriage protects their girls from sexual violence; that’s why in many communities this “marriage” is seen as a way to protect the girl’s virginity or “honor” and by extension the reputation of the family.
At the national level, the issue of early marriage takes place in the following groups:
- those who are not registered in the Lebanese personal status law who are called the non-ID’S and
- those whose fathers or mothers are anonymous but are born on Lebanese territory and whose parents have not registered in the community, either because of ignorance or negligence, the result being that they are deprived of their most basic rights such as health care, education, work, marriage, ownership of land or houses, inheritance, election and participation in any public activity.

Therefore, the parents of these girls marry them at an early age to men who hold the Lebanese nationality so that they also get a nationality and an ID. Many poor parents believe that marriage will guarantee the future of their daughters by ensuring that another family is held responsible for their care and thus most of the times early marriage of non-ID’s girls is often the result of their few options, most notably the lack of acquiring the Lebanese citizenship.

Virginity in Lebanon is still a very important issue for parents, especially in rural areas. They push their daughters to early marriage in order to avoid sexual violence. Religion in Lebanon plays a very important role in the increasing number of early marriages. The girls’ personal status law according to the three dominant religions in Lebanon is:
- Christians allow marriages at 14 and some at puberty.
- Muslims allow marriages at 9 with some exceptions.
- Druze allows marriages at 17 with some exceptions also.

An additional problem Lebanon now faces are the Syrian refugees. They live in Jordan camps and are not allowed leave the camps without a permit. This situation increased the ratio of child marriage to reach 53 percent of the refugees in camps: parents agree to marry their young daughter to a Jordanian man regardless of his age because that marriage allows the girl to leave the camp with all her family backed by the Jordanian man.

“Therefore, the Zonta Club of Beirut deems it necessary to amend the law on the registration of personal status in documents issued on December 1951, especially in some articles to include the status of the ID’s and facilitate the legal procedures for their registration so that the status of children born of Lebanese parents will not be similar to others born outside the framework of a legitimate marriage and not to have the word “bastard” or a “nickname” on his statement of registration in a state that leaves many of its citizens without an identity or describes them with non-respectful adjectives of their human dignity.”

Lebanon has signed the International Convention for the limitation of the non-ID but no implementing of any treaty or constitution or the human rights charter takes place. Lebanon also violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that are ratified but not implemented. The convention could represent a radical solution to the problem in the absence of the cooperation of the state to transform this issue into gender-based sectarianism for ID’s under international law as persons who have no nationality and are not considered citizens of any country.

In Lebanon, people are divided into three categories in general:
 a) The category of persons whose parents or descendants have any nationality and are registered but their birth certificates are not registered and therefore they don’t exist for the authorities,
 b) And those persons who are of a stateless origin historically which means that their descendants do not have any defined citizenship. There is also a new category of non-ID’s that will appear soon, namely
 c) The births resulting from the civil marriage held on Lebanese territory, who cannot be registered by the Ministry of the Interior (because civil marriage is not legalized in
Lebanon due to religious issues) so the child born out of civil marriage is in the same situation as a child born out of wedlock.

Waafa Daou summarized: “It remains a lot to do. The actual situation as well as the outlook does not give reason for a soon and sustainable relief. At the same time the Zonta Club of Beirut has planned to take action in these ways:

- Education and awareness building for boys and girls.
- Empowering girls who already got married underage through orientation to avoid other early marriages.
- Create an awareness network with other NGOs to support girls and women in several issues related to the side effects of early marriage and its consequences.

For change to happen, the values and norms which support the practice of child marriage need to shift. Working with families and the wider community to raise awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage can change attitudes and reduce the acceptance among those who make the decision to marry off girls as children.

Working with men and boys is a critical part of the Zonta Club of Beirut's efforts to end child marriage. In many communities it is the men who hold the power and who are the decision makers. Interventions targeting fathers, brothers, husbands and future husbands are important in order to help men and boys reflect on the status quo and see the benefits of a community which values and supports girls and women to fulfill their potential.

The Zonta Club of Beirut is committed to continue this fight by raising the awareness level among the thousands at risk of getting married early and the already married girls to teach them to be aware of their children so they would not go through the same problem. We look forward to sharing our experiences and good news, hopefully in next year’s conference as progress continues to happen in Lebanon.
The Golden Z Club of Vienna conducted a break-out session on ending child marriage that can serve as a workshop template for Zonta clubs around the world. Golden Z Clubs are student clubs and a sub organization of Zonta international. Their activities include own service projects and staging events like panel discussions and workshops to raise awareness about women’s issues.

Presentation of a workshop template to introduce the topic of forced and early marriage

After a morning with an incredible amount of new and interesting information, members of the Vienna Golden Z clubs set up three boards outside of the conference room. Experience a session that introduces the topic of child marriage in an engaging and inspiring way.

The participants gathered in groups in front of the boards (“Market Places”):

1) **Lives of women**
   Two Golden Z Club members presented four women who were forced to marry early: First they gave two contemporary examples: Jasvinder Sanghera – British born, Indian descendant and Fraidy Reiss – American, activist against early and forced marriage and founder of “Unchained at Last”. The last two testimonials were historical ones, one from the late 14th century, the other from the late 19th: Isabelle de Valois was married at age six to the English King Richard II, and later to her 11 year old cousin before she died at age 20 after giving birth to her first child; Dr. Rukhmabai Bhikaji, in the late 19th century, was married at age 11 and later, after famous trials, got her marriage dissolved.

2) **Countries with highest rates of early marriage**
   Facing a map, participants had to guess the five countries with the highest rates of child marriage. The correct answers (Niger 76%, Central African Republic 68%, Chad 67%, Bangladesh 59%, South Sudan 52%; followed by position 6,7,8 - 52%: Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso (Source: UNICEF)) were given along with explanations, also on the 12 countries in which the UNICEF/UNFPA – Zonta International Project „Ending Child Marriage“ is conducted.
What we can do to help prevent early marriage

3) The last board had examples what we as citizens can do to prevent young girls from getting married. The Golden Z club members presented a guideline on how to help girls in familiar surroundings, who fear to get married early and by force. In Austria, Orient Express is an organization, which helps affected girls and informs people how to act in the case of forced marriage.