

# “Education is like light. The opposite is darkness.”<sup>1</sup>

## Education and Female Youth in Displacement in South Sudan and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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# Overview

Globally, one in five girls marry under the age of 18.<sup>2</sup> However, rates of early marriage are believed to *increase* during conflict and humanitarian crises.<sup>3</sup> Early marriage may have devastating consequences for the child bride, including higher rates of child and maternal mortality, poor physical and mental health outcomes, loss of access to education, and increased exposure to violence and poverty.<sup>4</sup> While the problem is clear, the solution is less so. One barrier is the lack of empirical knowledge on early marriage in conflict settings. Research conducted to date is very limited; what does exist arises mostly from development settings, is anecdotal, or is based on one-time assessments.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, girls who are already married, married as children and then divorced or were widowed, or are living with disabilities are rarely included in studies on early marriage. To address some of these gaps, Save the Children Denmark and the Feinstein International Center (FIC) of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University created the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) research project in 2019 to study female youth and early marriage in displacement and conflict settings.

The LNOB project is currently conducting research in South Sudan and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

(KRI). South Sudan has experienced multiple decades of conflict, ongoing political insecurity, extreme environmental events, and regular economic crises, which has left more than two-thirds of the population in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 2.3 million South Sudanese have become refugees in neighboring countries. An estimated 2 million more South Sudanese are internally displaced persons (IDPs), with humanitarian conditions reportedly worsening as of early 2022.<sup>7</sup> As of 2020, South Sudan's rate of child marriage was higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa average, with 52% of girls estimated to be married before the age of 18.<sup>8</sup>

The KRI has hosted Syrian refugees since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, with approximately 253,000 Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in the territory by early 2022.<sup>9</sup> The KRI also hosts about 600,000 IDPs, predominantly those from the Yazidi minority group, seeking refuge from internal conflicts, including the 2014 ISIS occupation of Sinjar and Mosul and subsequent military interventions.<sup>10</sup> Many of IDPs these populations live in substandard housing, are unable to access social safety nets, and have little opportunity to achieve durable solutions.<sup>11</sup> Rates of early marriage are lower within the KRI than in South Sudan, but these averages mask differences

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, "Child Marriage," October 2021, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, "A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan 2014" (UNICEF Jordan Country Office, 2014); Jennifer Schlecht, Elizabeth Rowley, and Juliet Babirye, "Early Relationships and Marriage in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings: Vulnerability of Youth in Uganda," *Reproductive Health Matters* 21, no. 41 (2013): 234–42; UNICEF, "Falling through the Cracks; The Children of Yemen," 2016; Girls Not Brides, "Child Marriage in Humanitarian Contexts," Thematic Brief, August 2020.

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA and UNICEF, "Addressing Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings," February 2021; E El Arab and M. Sagbakken, "Child Marriage of Female Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon: A Literature Review," *Global Health Action* 12 (2019): 1–12; Yvette Efevbera et al., "Girl Child Marriage, Socioeconomic Status, and Undernutrition: Evidence from 35 Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa," *BMC Medicine* 17, no. 55 (2019); Save the Children, "Too Young to Wed: The Growing Problem of Child Marriage among Syrian Girls in Jordan," 2014; World Bank Group, "Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity," 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Dyan Mazurana and Anastasia Marshak, "Addressing Data Gaps on Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Humanitarian Settings" (Save the Children and Tufts University, December 2019).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "South Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot," February 2022, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/south\\_sudan\\_humanitarian\\_snapshot\\_february\\_0.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/south_sudan_humanitarian_snapshot_february_0.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, "Some Things Are Not Fit for Children-- Marriage Is One of Them," Press Release, October 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/press-releases/some-things-are-not-fit-for-children>.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, "UNHCR Syria and Iraq Situations: 2022 Response Overview," 2022, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/1799>.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OHCA), "Iraq: Humanitarian Dashboard for KRI (January to December 2019)," 2020, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iraq\\_humanitarian\\_dashboard\\_2019\\_summary\\_for\\_kri.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iraq_humanitarian_dashboard_2019_summary_for_kri.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OHCA).

in early marriage rates among refugees, hosts, and IDPs. In a representative study conducted by the Women's Refugee Commission, IDPs showed the highest rate of early marriage among the three groups, with 13% of those currently aged 20–24 having married as minors.<sup>12</sup> This study also showed a potential increase in the rates of early marriage for refugees after displacement.<sup>13</sup>

**The Project** This briefing paper is one in a series of outputs arising from the LNOB research.<sup>14</sup> LNOB relies on longitudinal, participatory research methodologies to understand the wide range of experiences, difficulties, opportunities, and constraints faced by female youth who have been displaced by or have experienced conflict. While the project's focus is holistic and multisectoral, particular attention is paid to the practice and experience of early marriage. The project examines multiple displaced and conflict-affected populations. These include internally displaced South Sudanese living in formal and informal camps, and Syrian refugees and displaced Yazidi and Arab Iraqis located in camp and non-camp settings in the KRI. Four local researchers from affected communities (two from each case country) were central to the design of the study, participant interviews, and analysis of data.

LNOB's main source of data comes from a cohort of female youth, predominantly between

the ages of 14 and 23,<sup>15</sup> who were regularly interviewed in 2020 and 2021 using surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participatory methods that include drawings and photographs. Members of the cohort are unmarried, married as minors, divorced, or widowed. The cohort also includes female youth who became pregnant under the age 18, and female youth living with physical, emotional, or intellectual disabilities, regardless of marital status. Family members of participants were interviewed when possible. LNOB also interviewed key informants, which included representatives from government entities, the United Nations, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), camp managers, teachers, health workers, and community and religious leaders. At the time of this brief (April 2022), 600 interviews have been conducted. One hundred and thirty-nine female youth have been interviewed as part of the cohort. Each participant was interviewed an average of four times (range: 1–13 interviews). In addition, 87 key informants were interviewed, as well as 17 family members of female youth. LNOB is currently seeking funding to continue following the cohort into the future and to expand the number of country cases, methodologies, and sample size.

<sup>12</sup> K Hunnerson et al., "Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in the Arab States Region: Study Results from Djibouti, Egypt, Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Yemen" (Women's Refugee Commission, 2020). For this same age group the rates of early marriage were 3.4% for Syrian refugees and 4% for the host community. However, for girls aged 10–19 at the time of the study, 1 in 8 IDPs were married and 1 in 10 host and refugee communities were married.

<sup>13</sup> Hunnerson et al.

<sup>14</sup> See additional briefing papers on the project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>

<sup>15</sup> The sample also includes a subset of participants over the age of 23 because they represented an interesting group of characteristics such as: widows who married as children and have teenage daughters; unmarried women above the "typical marriage age."

# 1. Introduction

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This briefing paper analyzes education in the context of displacement for all female youth participants in the study (n = 140). Through in-depth, multiple interviews with female youth, we analyze the influence of gender norms, community perceptions, and family attitudes on adolescent girls' ability to access education. We consider the role of marital status and motherhood on schooling experience, educational interruption and attainment, and aspirations for education and beyond. We also present the unique challenges faced by female youth living with intellectual, emotional, and physical disabilities. We unpack some of the factors that facilitate adolescent girls' access to education

in displacement and provide several examples of positive deviance. As with the other briefing papers in this series, findings are grounded in the perceptions and lived experiences of research participants. It should be noted that we did not conduct an independent evaluation of educational services or shortcomings in either study location. To note, this research did not set out to investigate, document, or analyze the role of education in displacement contexts or emergency settings. Experiences with and the role of education emerged as one of the important themes in our analysis of the interviews and hence is the topic of this stand-alone briefing paper.

## 2. Overview of the educational context in South Sudan and the KRI

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**South Sudan:** In 2021, UNICEF estimated that more than 2.8 million South Sudanese children were out of school, or 70% of the school-aged population. Girls are over-represented in this proportion.<sup>16</sup> A series of recent household studies (including those conducted in our study areas) estimate the rate of enrollment for school-aged children by age and gender and quantify the main barriers to school attendance. In the Juba protection of civilians (POC) camps, the attendance rate for adolescents 14–17 years old was 25.6% for adolescent boys and 14.4% for girls.<sup>17</sup> In the Bentiu POC camp, rates were similar to Juba for girls, with 14.6% attending school, but lower for boys at 19.1%.<sup>18</sup> The main factors that exclude females attending school in both the Juba and Bentiu POCs, as reported by those surveyed, were financial constraints. In addition, and in Juba in particular, one study found that girls who married

and/or became pregnant often did not continue with their education.<sup>19</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic closed most schools in South Sudan for approximately 14 months, from March 2020 to May 2021. International organizations reported that these school closures contributed to increased poverty, early or forced marriage, and unplanned pregnancies—presenting obstacles for female youth to returning to school once classrooms reopened.<sup>20</sup>

**KRI:** In 2022, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 70% of school-aged children in the KRI who are displaced or recently returned home from displacement are not enrolled in school. COVID-19-related school closures and lockdowns, which took place for nearly two years in the KRI, disproportionately affected girls and those living

<sup>16</sup> See website: <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/what-we-do/education>. Accessed September 14, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> DTM South Sudan, “IDP Site Multi-Sector Needs and Vulnerabilities Survey (FSNMS+): Juba Camp 1 & 3” (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix South Sudan, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> DTM South Sudan, “IDP Site Multi-Sector Needs and Vulnerabilities Survey (FSNMS+): Bentiu IDP Camp” (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix South Sudan, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> DTM South Sudan, “IDP Site Multi-Sector Needs: Bentiu”; DTM South Sudan, “IDP Site Multi-Sector Needs and Vulnerabilities Survey (FSNMS+): Juba Camp 1 & 3.”

<sup>20</sup> Oxfam International, “COVID-19 and Female Learners in South Sudan” (Oxfam Briefing Paper, August 202).

with disabilities. As with South Sudan, there are several reasons for low enrollment rates for displaced school-aged children and returnees. These include the need for teens to contribute to their households' livelihoods and the high prevalence of early marriage. In addition, several official policies do not favor children who experienced displacement. These policies include a prohibition that prevents children who miss two years of school from attending regular school, and another that places those who have had school interruptions with their age-mates without providing additional academic or remedial support.<sup>21</sup>

During the course of the study, Syrian refugees living in camps in KRI had access to education through a parallel educational system, in which Syrian refugees were accommodated separately from Iraqi children. Outside of camps, Syrian refugees and IDPs were mixed with host community children in schools. Even before the pandemic, Syrian refugees residing in camps had relatively low enrollment rates (51% for primary school and 29% for secondary school). Urban areas had an even lower

enrollment rate (29% for primary school and 8% for secondary school).<sup>22</sup> The main reasons reported for these low enrollment rates were economic difficulties and parental concerns about the poor quality of schools.<sup>23</sup> Interruptions in education due to school closures, child labor, and early marriage also contributed to low enrollment levels.<sup>24</sup>

**Sample characteristics:** Participants across the sample reported having completed an average of 6.5 years of education at the time of the study. Differences in educational attainment between the two countries were statistically significant despite the groups being of approximately the same age, with participants in the KRI having completed an average of 8.3 years and participants in South Sudan having completed 4.7 years.<sup>25</sup> During the data collection period, just over half of the sample from South Sudan (51.5%) was enrolled in school, and just under a quarter of the sample in the KRI (22.2%) was enrolled. We considered participants enrolled in school even if schools were temporarily closed due to COVID-19.

### 3. Findings

The following section outlines the main factors as described by female youth that influence their ability to access, attend, and stay in school, or have successful educational outcomes. Many of these interrelated factors are covered in depth in the literature on education in emergencies. Here we therefore summarize our findings and prioritize the voices of the participants. We then turn to marriage, motherhood, and education, and cover in greater depth the findings from this study. Factors that facilitated access to education and educational outcomes will follow this section.

#### *Gender inequalities and negative parental attitudes towards girls' education*

**Familial attitudes and concerns played a pivotal role in whether or not participants attended school, dropped out of school, or succeeded in school.**

In South Sudan and the KRI, familial attitudes toward schooling were highly gendered, with adult males often seeking to control or limit educational

<sup>21</sup> Alison Oswald, "Migration, Displacement and Education: Building Bridges, Not Walls" (Background paper prepared for the Arab States 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Humanitarian Needs Overview IRAQ" (OCHA, March 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Gender disaggregation by age is not available.

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR, "Iraq Country Chapter: Regional, Refugee & Resilience Plan 2021-2022" (UNHCR, 2022), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91211>.

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR, "Iraq Country Chapter"; UNHCR, "Regional Needs Overview 2022" (UNHCR, 2022), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89828>.

<sup>25</sup> p value = 0.0000

access by their daughters, sisters, or wives. This 20-year-old, displaced participant in South Sudan recalled turning school aged: “I was very sad because I wanted to start school. My father did not want me to go, and he took my younger brother and left me at home. When I asked him why, he told me that school was too hard for girls and I could not handle it.”<sup>26</sup> In the KRI, this 23-year-old Yazidi participant regretted not having continued school beyond third grade. She described, “My parents said it was shameful for a girl to go to school ... I really loved school and wanted to continue[but] they took me out.”<sup>27</sup> Several participants reported that their brothers were encouraged to attend school, while they were kept home instead.

Such familial attitudes are influenced by many factors, including long-standing cultural norms and gender inequalities. In addition, conflict and the resulting displacements, losses, and economic deprivations have forced many families to adjust their priorities in ways that may be detrimental to daughters. For example, in South Sudan, the transfer of bridewealth to the bride’s family is an economic driver for early marriage<sup>28</sup> and may also discourage families from investing in girls’ education. As explained by this NGO worker in South Sudan, “[As a parent], why would you send your daughter to school if you can get 100 cows [by marrying her]? You have to choose between your daughter and your son. Most would invest in their son.”<sup>29</sup> Unlike a daughter who will marry and leave home—taking her educational attainment and return with her—a son will remain in his natal homestead either permanently or for an extended period.

Several participants in both countries explained that their entrance into adolescence provoked a marked attitudinal shift for their parents in regard to education. In South Sudan, a common fear is

that a girl will become pregnant before marriage, thus precluding the family’s chances to secure the union of their choice and to maximize bridewealth.<sup>30</sup> Parents can prevent unsupervised mixing between the sexes by keeping adolescent girls out of school; several participants reported that they were pulled from school at age 15 because their parents feared they would become pregnant. In the words of a 16-year-old displaced adolescent girl in South Sudan, “My father refused to take us to school, and instead sent my sister and me to live in the village and take care of the cows. He said girls who go to school get spoiled [pregnant].”<sup>31</sup> Fear of unwanted pregnancy also motivates parents to wed their daughters early in South Sudan—i.e., before they can fall pregnant out of wedlock.<sup>32</sup>

In the KRI, key informants explained that some parents of Yazidi girls, particularly those in rural areas, pulled their girls from school after completing primary level or at the start of adolescence (age 13 or 14). Parents took this step either to marry off their daughters and/or to prevent mixing with boys. A similar attitude was reflected in interviews with Arab Iraqi participants. One widow explained that girls in Mosul are often only allowed to attend school until they can read and write.<sup>33</sup>

Sexual harassment of school-aged girls was a regular complaint in IDP and refugee camps in the KRI. Girls and female youth who are on the receiving end of sexual harassment are often seen as provoking or deserving this abuse. Being a victim of sexual harassment can have devastating social repercussions for the girl, her family, and her future prospects for marriage.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_38\_F\_DIV\_20, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_21\_F\_M\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>28</sup> See our briefing paper, “Perspectives on Early Marriage” on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with # SS\_KII\_6, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>30</sup> See our briefing paper, “Experiences of Early Pregnancy” on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with # SSB\_CO\_5\_U\_16, Bentiu, South Sudan.

<sup>32</sup> See our briefing paper, “Perspectives on Early Marriage” on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_30\_F\_W\_35, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

## Physical barriers to school access

***In some locations, schools were nonexistent or prohibitively far away. Distance to school is gendered and has a greater impact on female than male students.***

Some of the study participants in the KRI were not able to physically access school due to lack of facilities, distance, or disability (discussed in section on education and disability). For example, Bardarash Camp in the KRI did not have a school for the first year of its establishment. In other locations, primary schools might have been accessible while secondary school was not; this was the case for Yazidi IDPs in Essian Camp. Distance to school has gendered impacts, whereby girls are at greater risk of sexual harassment when walking long distances to and from school. Others who had to travel by foot faced shame as a result of their arduous daily journey, as described by this displaced Yazidi youth: “I was going to school, but the road was dirt and muddy. When I arrived at school my shoes and my clothes were dirty ... Everyone knew that we were displaced from our clothes and shoes and our bad psychological condition.”<sup>34</sup>

## Financial barriers to school access

***Economic hardship resulting from the conflicts undermined the ability of students and their families to afford education, especially for girls.***

Our research underscores that economic hardship prevents female youth from engaging in school. In South Sudan, participants of all ages, marital, and motherhood statuses cited the lack of financial resources as the main barrier to attending school. The decision to prioritize non-school expenses over education was taken at times by the girls’ parents and at other times by the girls themselves. Participants described how school had to take a back seat to more pressing needs like food and medicine. A 21-year-old widow who was forcibly married at 14 explained, “My tea-selling business

will not be enough for me to take my children to school. [What I earn] is just enough to provide for them ... I can’t go back to school either because of this [cost].”<sup>35</sup>

Importantly, girls play versatile and essential roles in their households, and the choice to send a girl to school often comes with steep opportunity costs due to her lost labor. A number of girls in the study in South Sudan explained that they dropped out of school because they saw how hard their mothers were working and wanted to help them. At least three participants from the KRI left school to help support their families economically.

## Loss of home and family

***Displacement and death of family members had profound impacts—financially and emotionally—upon female youth. This often negatively influenced their ability to pursue education.***

Some participants described the direct ways in which conflict had negatively affected their educational trajectories. The death of fathers in particular—who are most often the primary household breadwinners—led to interruptions in school. A 20-year-old displaced youth in South Sudan described the impact of the death of her father: “We did not have a lot of financial support at home. This caused me and my siblings to stop going to school. I felt very sad because school is a good thing, and if you don’t go to school you just sit at home and don’t do anything.”<sup>36</sup> She is now married and trying to support her younger brothers’ education because “I want them to understand the importance of education ... I want them to stay in school because it is our only hope in life.”<sup>37</sup>

In both countries, some female youth explained that their emotional states following experiences of conflict prevented them from attending school. A participant in South Sudan described that being forcibly separated from her family at age 15 meant

<sup>34</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_117\_F\_U\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_12\_F\_W\_21, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with participant # SSB\_CO\_2\_F\_DIS\_20, Bentiu, South Sudan.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with participant # SSB\_CO\_2\_F\_DIS\_20, Bentiu, South Sudan.

that “I was so distressed. I was going through so many emotional difficulties, I couldn’t go to school.”<sup>38</sup> An 18-year-old displaced Yazidi participant explained that after her father’s death in a “terrorist attack” and the family’s subsequent displacement, her “life was so bad in general that I didn’t feel the joy of school or anything else.”<sup>39</sup> For some girls, the experience of displacement was enough to make school attendance difficult, as explained by a 17-year-old Yazidi participant who failed out of school in sixth grade: “I wasn’t doing my homework at home. The teachers were good, but we were displaced, and in the camp life wasn’t normal ... I wasn’t encouraged to study or go to school.”<sup>40</sup>

## ***Prohibitive terms of inclusion***

***Formal and informal policies place additional constraints on school-aged children affected by conflict and displacement.***

Several participants in the KRI described how it was nearly impossible to catch up after missing years of schooling due to displacement. Specific terms of inclusion make it difficult for displaced or marginalized populations to attend school; these terms of inclusion are usually gendered.<sup>41</sup> Yazidis, whose education is managed by the Ministry of Education for Iraq, are reportedly barred from attending regular courses if they miss more than two years of school. Under such circumstances, they are expected to “self-study” at home and then attempt to pass exams in order to requalify for their grade level. The “self-schooling” option generally includes little-to-no educational support, and exams must be taken in Mosul, which is at a great distance from most displacement camps. Many participants found that self-schooling was simply too difficult. A 19-year-old who felt strongly about her educational goals explained: “I cannot do home schooling. I can’t catch up on my own. I missed so much school. I want

to go to school and have teachers teach me directly. It is hard to motivate alone. I am so far behind.”<sup>42</sup> These terms of inclusion are particularly difficult for girls to surmount; this is due both to expectations regarding a girl’s time use at home and the much greater cultural restrictions for girls who need to travel to take exams.

A requirement for students to show school records is another barrier to inclusion for some displaced youth who do not have official transcripts. Participants reported that refugee children without documents in the KRI must take placement exams. Two respondents in this study were placed in lower grades than they had attended in Syria; they found this placement demoralizing and very demotivating. School advancement in the KRI is tied to passing exams at various grade levels, and most Yazidi and Syrian participants in the study stopped schooling because they were unable to pass exams. The multiple impacts of displacement, school closures due to COVID-19, and poor instruction all contribute to exam failures for participants.

Requirements for attendance serve as a barrier to inclusion in South Sudan as well. Many of these are related to materials that are unattainable for poor families. Many participants reported that they did not have the requisite school materials such as pens, paper, books, or school uniforms. A lack of menstrual hygiene products for girls was also described as a barrier to school attendance, a phenomenon that has been widely documented in multiple Sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>43</sup>

## ***Marriage, motherhood, and education***

***Separated, divorced, and widowed female youth had particular difficulties in returning to school. Widows’ children were less likely to enroll in school because of financial difficulties.***

<sup>38</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_17\_F\_M\_23, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_42\_F\_U\_18, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_115\_F\_U\_17, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>41</sup> C. Dyer, “Does Mobility Have to Mean Being Hard to Reach? Mobile Pastoralists and Education’s ‘Terms of Inclusion,’” *Compare—A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 43, no. 5 (2013): 601–2.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_25\_F\_M\_19, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>43</sup> S. Jewitt and H. Ryley, “It’s a Girl Thing: Menstruation, School Attendance, Spatial Mobility and Wider Gender Inequalities in Kenya,” *Geoforum* 56 (2014): 137–47.

A variety of studies have shown that adolescent girls without access to secondary education are at risk for early marriage and that adolescent girls who marry early are more likely to drop out of school.<sup>44</sup> In addition, young mothers face a host of challenges in returning to school, although some are successful in doing so.<sup>45</sup> While there is little existing research on this topic, young women who are separated, divorced, or widowed face great challenges in returning to or continuing with their education.<sup>46</sup> Findings from this study add empirical support to these causal relationships, and we provide additional fine-grained and nuanced insights grounded in the words and lived experiences of female youth.

## *The relationship between being in school and early marriage*

*Delaying marriage significantly correlated with increased educational attainment in the KRI. In contrast, female participants out of school were more likely to marry early. Similarly, those who married early were more likely to drop out of school.*

Within our own sample in the KRI, for each year an adolescent girl waited to marry, her educational attainment increased by approximately one half-year.<sup>47</sup> In other words, girls who delayed marriage were—by and large—able to stay in school longer. Such effects were not found at statistically significant levels in South Sudan, but the relationship between schooling and early marriage was visible in the qualitative data.

In contrast, some participants in both South Sudan and the KRI described that not being in school contributed to their early marriages.<sup>48</sup> Participants described that, in the absence of school, they had few meaningful activities to fill their time and hence marriage seemed appealing and natural, even if they were underage. For example, this participant in South Sudan who married at 14 years of age explained, “I had refused to go to school. I was just home doing household chores and nothing else. I loved my boyfriend and when he mentioned marriage, it was the only thing I wanted.”<sup>49</sup> Her story echoes that of others in South Sudan who described marrying underage because they “had nothing to do.”<sup>50</sup> Similarly, family members who forced girls to marry underage often used the lack of school attendance as a justification. This 17-year-old, who had been forcibly married at 14, said, “My uncle told my mother and me that there was a man who wants to marry me, and I must get married ... because I was not studying or doing anything. Marriage was the only thing I could do, so I got married.”<sup>51</sup> Being out of school was also a driver for early marriage in the KRI.<sup>52</sup> One underage Syrian refugee who married during the course of the study explained that she married in large part because she felt socially isolated, had no access to school, and felt depressed about her future.<sup>53</sup>

In a few cases in the KRI, early marriage was linked to the continuation of studies, at least theoretically. Several participants who married underage explained that they had agreed to marry men already living in Europe or North America, in the hopes that resettlement would bring about the ability to pursue education.

<sup>44</sup> Efevbera et al., “Girl Child Marriage, Socioeconomic Status, and Undernutrition”; Bruce Rasmussen et al., “Evaluating the Employment Benefits of Education and Targeted Interventions to Reduce Child Marriage,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 65, no. Supplement (2019): S16–24.

<sup>45</sup> J. Birchall, “Early Marriage, Pregnancy and Girl Child School Dropout” (K4D Helpdesk Report, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, 2018), <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14285>.

<sup>46</sup> Action Against Hunger, “Violence against Women Is Also: Stigmatizing and Neglecting Widows and Divorced Women” (December 2017), <https://actionagainsthunger.ca/violence-against-women-widows-divorced/>.

<sup>47</sup> Coefficient .47 with a p value of .029.

<sup>48</sup> For a complete description of the drivers of early marriage in the KRI and South Sudan, see our briefing paper, “Perspectives on Early Marriage” on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_28\_F\_M\_20, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_29\_F\_M\_20, Juba South Sudan and # SS\_CO\_20\_F\_M\_23, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with participant # SSB\_CO\_8\_M\_17, Bentiu, South Sudan.

<sup>52</sup> We outline these drivers more substantively in the briefing paper “Perspectives on Early Marriage” available on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings>. We also profile the life of one participant who married early during the course of the study, in part because she had no access to school.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_11\_F\_U\_17, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

## Early pregnancy and education in South Sudan

*Female youth in South Sudan who had unintended premarital pregnancies dropped out of school, although half re-enrolled in school in subsequent years.*

Early pregnancy outside of marriage was common among study participants in South Sudan. As described in an accompanying briefing paper,<sup>54</sup> these pregnancies were not only unintended but were also a direct consequence of a lack of knowledge on conception or reproduction. This lack of knowledge was coupled with a complete dearth of sexual and reproductive health services. Falling pregnant was one of the main causes of dropping out of school for female youth in the study, including for those who had previously been highly committed to their studies. Often the parents of a pregnant teen would force her to leave school as a “punishment” for the pregnancy and the loss of anticipated bridewealth. For example, one participant who had been raised by her brother and sister-in-law fell pregnant at 14 while still attending school. Her sister-in-law explained, “The brother of [participant’s name] had been supporting her for her whole life. We wanted her to at least get married and bring bridewealth ... But now my husband cannot get any benefit from his sister. Even though I think she should go back to school, he said that there is no way he will ever allow her to go back to school again.”<sup>55</sup>

Some youth described feeling ashamed to be in school while visibly pregnant. They reported that no other girls went to school when pregnant and feared that going to school would increase the already high degree of community ostracism experienced by unmarried pregnant teens.<sup>56</sup> A teacher in the PoC in Juba explained: “Girls are not required to drop out if they fall pregnant ... but they are ashamed and can be bullied.”<sup>57</sup> Other schools directly discouraged or prevented pregnant girls from attending.

## Early motherhood and education in South Sudan

*Many participants expressed the desire to return to school after giving birth, despite the odds and logistical difficulties.*

Many participants in South Sudan who had been in school at the time of their pregnancy expressed a desire to return to school after becoming mothers. This was regardless of their marital status and was often geared towards both immediate gratification and long-term goals. One 19-year-old who fell pregnant at 16 when in Class 8 explained, “My only hope is to go to school. I don’t see anything else I can do with my life. If I go to school and work hard maybe I can achieve something ... It’s the only thing I am thinking about right now.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite huge odds, half of the girls in the South Sudan sample who had become pregnant while attending school managed to return to school after the birth of the baby, at times months or even years later. Being able to return to school required being able to find both adequate childcare (usually with their family or neighbors) and sufficient funds, normally from supportive immediate or extended family members.

Inversely, the absence of financial or childcare support prevented young mothers from re-enrolling in school. One participant wanted to return to school but lacked funds and did not have family support: “If I could afford the school fees, I would go. My mother said that because I got pregnant, she would no longer pay for my tuition.”<sup>59</sup> Others explained that they had to use their limited finances for basic necessities like food, rather than school. An 18-year-old participant who was experiencing social isolation and shame since becoming pregnant, wanted to go back to school, but explained, “I have not gone back because there is not enough money for me to go. The little money I get, I take care of my child with it ... I feel bad, it makes me lose hope in

<sup>54</sup> See the briefing paper on “Experiences of Early Pregnancy,” available on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with family member of participant # SS\_CO\_15\_EP\_19\_FAM, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with participant # SSB\_CO\_13\_EP\_20, Bentiu, South Sudan.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_KII\_19\_M, South Sudan.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_18\_F\_EP\_19, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_9\_F\_EP\_20, Juba, South Sudan.

life sometimes because I don't know what to do.”<sup>60</sup> Even for those who did have practical and financial support from relatives, girls who returned to school after giving birth could experience bullying and ostracism. Returning to school thus required large amounts of both dedication and emotional reserves.

Some participants who married and/or became mothers wanted to return to school but were unable to do so because of household duties. Others went back to school but found they were not able to consistently attend, such as a 22-year-old who married at 16: “I still go to school, but I miss a lot [of days] ... If my child is sick, I cannot go to school. I must stay and take care of him. Even if my husband is sick, I stay and care for him until he is better. Then I go back to school again.”<sup>61</sup> The feeling that marriage and pregnancy precipitated a move away from education was common among the study population in both South Sudan and the KRI.

## ***Early marriage, motherhood, and education in the KRI***

***Most participants in the KRI were unable to stay in school once becoming engaged due to cultural norms and school policies. Some had success in continuing their education following marriage if and when this guarantee was included as part of the marriage negotiations between families.***

In the KRI, the majority of participants who married underage left school when they became engaged. Some described that doing so was a cultural expectation. Others were prohibited from attending due to unofficial school policies: a youth who married at 15 described that she and “five or six” other girls her age were forced to leave school after the school director learned of their engagements.<sup>62</sup> A number of participants described having to leave school upon marriage, including one who married at age 13.<sup>63</sup> A few participants expressed regret at the loss of educational opportunities, while others saw it as an unfortunate but normal transition for adolescent girls.

Other participants associated their changed circumstances with the larger impacts of conflict and displacement. A 20-year-old who left school to marry in 11th grade explained:

Education was everything in my life, but now it is very far away from me. It is not in the plan at present because I am married and am going to have a baby. Education was everything in our life—it was going to school and at home we did our homework. All our thinking was about school when we were in Syria. But then things changed, and we came here and now are refugees and my father and sister went alone to Germany. These things have made education be less of a priority in life. This is a sorrow for me.<sup>64</sup>

There were a few exceptions, however, to the general rule that female youth in the KRI left school upon engagement, marriage, and childbirth. In these instances, engagement negotiations included provisions for the prospective bride to continue school. These provisions most often took place in families where all parties—the adolescent girls, their families, and their prospective in-laws—placed a high value upon education. One participant who married at 17 described that a guarantee for her continued schooling was part of the engagement discussions. She had two children in quick succession after marrying but managed to complete her university degree due to the strong support of her husband, who took over many of the household responsibilities while she studied. However, several participants explained that the provision for girls to continue school is not always respected after a marriage is completed.

## ***Separation, divorce, widowhood, and education***<sup>65</sup>

***Accessing education is particularly challenging for young women who are separated, divorced, or widowed due to cultural, economic, and social factors.***

<sup>60</sup> Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_8\_F\_EP\_18, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>61</sup> I Interview with participant # SS\_CO\_6\_F\_M\_22, Juba, South Sudan.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_107\_F\_M\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_41\_F\_D\_24, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_113\_F\_M\_20, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>65</sup> For a full analysis of the situation of separated, divorced, and widowed female youth, see our briefing paper “Circumscribed Lives” on our project website: <https://fic.tufts.edu/research-item/child-marriage-in-humanitarian-settings/>.

In South Sudan, widows reported having inadequate funds to cover both food needs and school fees for their children, let alone to pay their own school fees. In the KRI we had a small sample of widows in their 30s. Most reported that their male children were working to contribute economically to the family instead of going to school. These widows were struggling to cope in a number of ways, as indicated by a Syrian refugee widow who herself left school at 16 to marry. She described her daughter's recent underage marriage: "I am feeling badly about her marriage. She had an early marriage because I couldn't take care of her."<sup>66</sup>

Separation and divorce in these contexts carry enormous social burdens for women, with many participants detailing experiences of abuse and harassment. Many divorced female youth in the KRI completely disengaged from society as a protective measure, while others were prevented from leaving their homes by their parents. Not surprisingly given the prevalence of harassment, most divorced girls did not opt to attend school even if they had the choice. For example, one divorced female youth in the KRI who had stopped school when she married described her hesitation to resume education:

I am afraid of the community. They would say, "She's already married and divorced and has a child ..." If anyone saw me talking to a boy [at school] they would say, "She wants to go to school now to meet boys." It already happened to me when I was doing a recreational activity. They started to talk and because of that, I stopped going.<sup>67</sup>

## ***Education and disability***

***Female youth with physical, psychological, or intellectual disabilities were consistently unable to access, attend, or succeed in school due to a lack of adapted supports and services.***

The educational experiences of female youth living with physical, psychological, and intellectual disabilities reflect the greater weaknesses inherent

in the educational systems for displaced youth in South Sudan and the KRI. However, for youth living with disabilities, educators and educational systems failed them in additional myriad ways. Their conditions made them the target of physical and emotional abuse; there are few-to-no learning adaptations provided; there is no support to facilitate physical accessibility. As a result, few of the youth living with disabilities in the sample were able to attend or stay enrolled in school.

In the KRI, we spoke with a 14-year-old participant with a learning disability and her older sister and mother about the difficulties the participant faced in trying to attend school:

Participant: Because they were not good with me, I will not go to school anymore.  
Mother: The teachers were beating her. She has learning problems. The teachers kept asking me to come and talk to them ... They always said the same thing. That [participant name] has trouble learning, and they beat her. She didn't want to go to school, so I kept her home ...  
Participant's 17-year-old sister: In Syria, it wasn't like this. I have never been beaten by teachers ... but here, the school director slaps the girls on their faces. She tries to pull out the hair of boys.<sup>68</sup>

While the narrative of the participant's mother implies that the girl was beaten due to her disability, the sister's experience implies that corporal punishment is common in schools but may be particularly harmful to those with disabilities. Punishments were not always physical, as indicated in the narrative of a 20-year-old Syrian refugee with a visual impairment: "I attended school for only one year and then I was 'fired' because the school director said I couldn't see well."<sup>69</sup>

Female youth with disabilities that impacted mobility had trouble getting to and from school. In the KRI one female youth described that she completed primary school because it was near her home, but "middle school was far from our

<sup>66</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_38\_F\_W\_35, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_9\_F\_D\_20, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_22\_F\_DIS\_13, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_23\_F\_DIS\_20, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

house ... and my father couldn't afford to pay the fare to get me to school."<sup>70</sup> Without access to additional support in the form of tutoring or physical accommodation, such participants were on the verge of failing out of school or had already dropped out despite their strong wish to continue their education.

Some female youth with disabilities faced bullying when attending school. A 23-year-old Yazidi participant described her experience starting school: "I wasn't equal to the people around me. Everyone was looking at me as a person 'less than' [them] ... Even when I got to secondary school ... there were so much bullying that I had to change schools."<sup>71</sup> This participant managed to complete university with the strong emotional support of her family, but most other participants who experienced bullying dropped out of school early on.

## Factors that facilitate educational success

Many of the factors that facilitate educational attainment for female youth in displacement settings are the inverse of the barriers described in the previous pages, including a lack of economic resources, discouraging attitudes rooted in gender inequalities, and cultural norms around pregnancy and marriage. The remainder of this briefing paper focuses on a few configurations of facilitative characteristics: personal and family attitudes, practical support, and shifting gender norms.

### *Family attitudes and support*

***Even in communities with marked gender inequalities, mothers play a significant role in whether and how their daughters are educated.***

Positive family—and especially parental—attitudes towards girls' education are essential for the educational success of female participants in this study. Female participants reported that it was thanks to their parents' emotional, material, and learning support that they were able to prioritize their studies throughout their lives, regardless

of motherhood or marital status. An 18-year-old Syrian refugee in her last year of secondary school described what had helped her to succeed in school:

At the beginning of my life, my mother was teaching me everything. I was learning everything in a good way—literacy, numeracy, Arabic, Kurdish. I get a lot of support from my family. Whenever I feel tired and done with studying, they come and tell me things to motivate me to keep going.<sup>72</sup>

A number of participants highlighted the specific roles of their mothers in supporting their educational goals. For instance, a 21-year-old university graduate who is a Syrian refugee explained that while her father was a teacher and prioritized her education, it was her mother who provided daily practical support to her and her siblings: "When we got home from school she would have us sleep for one hour and then wake up and do our studies. She always encouraged us to finish school and graduate. If it were not for my mother, I would be nothing now."<sup>73</sup>

Interestingly, the level of education of the girls' parents was not a direct determinant of the extent to which the parents prioritized their daughters' education. Some participants described that their parents had not attended any school themselves but wanted their children to do so. These dynamics were particularly poignant in the Yazidi community, as many mothers of participants had been forbidden from attending school. As described by a displaced Yazidi youth, "My parents were pushing us to go to school, they wouldn't let us drop out. My mother was always telling us, 'Go study, I want you to have a better life than us. We didn't attend school; we don't know anything.'"<sup>74</sup> Another Yazidi female youth in Sinjar described: "My parents encouraged us so much. They said, 'Because we are not educated, we have worked in very difficult jobs just so we can survive. Study so you don't need to become tired like us, and you can work an easier job.'"<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_106\_F\_DIS\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_20\_F\_DIS\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_5\_F\_U\_18, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_101\_F\_M\_21, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_18\_F\_M\_25, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_20\_F\_DIS\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

As discussed earlier, family attitudes were central in determining whether female youth were able to remain in school after marriage and/or becoming mothers. The support of husbands was key for those who had married, as was the case for an 18-year-old displaced South Sudanese participant who married at age 15: “After I got married I just focused on my household chores and my marriage ... but I wanted to go back to school and even my husband supported me ... because he is still in school himself.”<sup>76</sup> She is now in the 7th Class and has one child. The husband of a Syrian refugee participant who completed university after an early marriage described how he actively supported his wife’s goals and encouraged others to do so:

*Husband of participant:* The relatives on both sides were surprised that she was continuing her studies—they said that she was now married, had kids, and should get on her life [and not go to school]. Sometimes I ignored it, sometimes I said it was her dream, and sometimes I told them to stop talking about it.

*Interviewer:* And how do you feel now in retrospect?

*Husband of participant:* Thank God she has her certificate and now she can have better opportunities in life. I would encourage other [husbands] to help their wives get their certificates and work for their goals. It will be difficult, but it is short term.<sup>77</sup>

A common denominator in both countries is that while it is possible for female youth who marry young and/or become mothers to return to school, returning to school normally only occurs under certain, select conditions. Having financial means and childcare support are essential, but the most important condition is to have a supportive family environment.

## ***Personal attitudes: education as a path to economic independence and gender equality***

***Female youth who were successful in their education goals had high levels of perseverance and resilience. Some participants, especially in the KRI, saw education as the key to both economic success and improving gender inequalities.***

Unsurprisingly, female participants who succeeded in educational attainment showed high levels of perseverance in the face of hardships related to conflict, displacement, and early marriage. We found a statistical relationship between years of schooling and resilience, as measured by the Child and Youth Resilience Measure.<sup>78</sup> The more years of schooling a participant completed, the higher her resilience score.<sup>79</sup> Causality may run in one or both directions. For example, female youth with higher resilience levels may be more able to stay in school, or the experience of schooling itself may boost resilience.

For many such participants in both countries, education was a source of pride and a way to give meaning to their lives, particularly in the context of loss and the experience of traumatic events. In South Sudan, female youth spoke about education as a possible means to bring about a more stable financial situation for themselves and their natal families. A 16-year-old participant reflected the sentiments of many others:

My mother always mentions marriage to me, but I told her I want to finish school first ... because I want to change my life and also help my mother ... If I finish school one day, I will get a job that will help me and my family. I will take my mother outside the PoC.<sup>80</sup>

In both contexts, participants viewed education as a solution to problems faced by female youth in displacement and as a means to combat gender

<sup>76</sup> Interview with participant # SSB\_CO\_14\_M\_18, Bentiu, South Sudan.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with husband of family member # KRI\_CO\_101\_HUS\_F\_M\_21, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

<sup>78</sup> For more information about this measure, see: <https://cyrm.resilienceresearch.org/>.

<sup>79</sup> For each additional year of school a female youth completes, her resilience score increases by .68 points. P value=.013.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with participant # SSB\_CO\_5\_U\_16, Bentiu, South Sudan.

inequalities and patriarchy. Participants felt that education could lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. In the KRI, several participants described education as the only avenue that would enable females to be taken seriously and to have their opinions respected in the community. Some participants in the KRI who were enrolled in school talked about education as “arms” or weapons to fight against the challenges they faced in their daily lives. A 17-year-old described a sentiment repeated by others: “I love education so much ... Through education and a diploma a girl will be armed ... to face all the ignorance in the community.”<sup>81</sup>

### ***Conflict as a driver of positive change***

***Conflict acted as a catalyst for positive change regarding access to education, especially for girls, in some instances in both countries.***

While conflict and displacement are generally detrimental to the well-being of individuals and families, some participants in both countries described conflict as a catalyst that both disrupted restrictive gender norms and improved access to

school for females. These stories were particularly poignant for Yazidis, some of whom detailed how displacement had exposed their communities to people from other cultures and new ways of thinking, including about girls’ education. For example, the mother of a participant said, “We saw the negative result of our thinking ... Yazidis found that all people [men and women] are doctors, engineers ... except for us Yazidis. Before, people were saying that a family was bad if their daughter is studying, and now the opposite is shameful.”<sup>82</sup>

In South Sudan, some participants described that one of the benefits of having been displaced to a camp was their ability to access school, sometimes for the first time in their lives. For some, their pre-conflict locations did not have schools, or the schools were too distant to access by foot daily, or it was too dangerous to attend them because of the conflict. Moving to the camps provided access to school, to others who were also in school, and—for some—to financial resources that allowed them to pursue education.

## **4. Recommendations**

Female youth that participated in this study, regardless of marital or parental status, struggled to access, attend, and stay in school. Many had difficulty attaining successful educational outcomes. Based on the barriers and facilitative factors identified as part of this study, we propose the following recommendations to support female youth with educational attainment in displacement contexts:

- » Expand informal and formal educational support for school-aged children with physical, psychological, and intellectual disabilities.
- » Recognize that barriers to schooling require a multisectoral approach to deal with health concerns (sanitary products, water and hygiene facilities in schools, sexual and reproductive health), financial shortfalls, and protection, among others.

- » Consider providing cash support for school attendance for female youth who are unmarried, married, divorced, or widowed. Consider extra provisions for mothers, regardless of marital status, to support her and her children with educational needs.
- » Work with local authorities and school administration to provide safe passage for female youth (of all marital statuses), and zero tolerance for sexual harassment and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in and around camps, communities, and schools.
- » Provide remedial support for children and adolescents who have missed school (at times multiple years) due to conflict and displacement.
- » Humanitarian organizations should advocate with relevant government and non-governmental entities to promote policies

<sup>82</sup> Interview with participant # KRI\_CO\_28\_FAM\_F\_M\_23, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

that support, rather than undermine, school attendance for conflict-affected school-aged children.

- » Community leaders and NGOs could identify patterns of positive deviance and support these pathways by:
  - » Advocating for marriage arrangements that include a provision for continued education;
  - » Sensitizing communities to the long-term economic benefits of females continuing their education;
  - » Providing leadership opportunities to parents who prioritize their daughter's education to help support normative change.
  - » Recognize that at times, conflict and displacement may loosen restrictive gender norms and facilitate school access and design programs around such openings.
- » Continue to support contextually grounded and participant-focused research to understand the nuances of early marriage, motherhood, and educational attendance. Research could be expanded to include perspectives of males (brothers, fathers, husbands, community leaders), and solicit research participant solutions to educational barriers.

