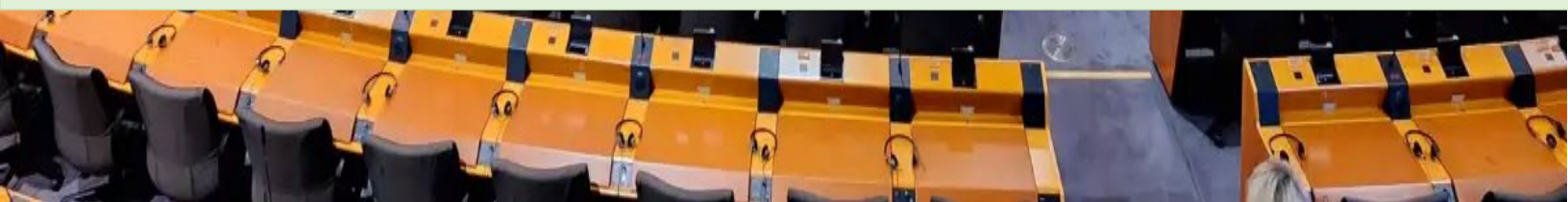




## UNWomen

**Topic 1: Exploring the Social Culture of Child Marriage in Indonesia.**

**President: Sersa Janbek**



## President's Letter

Dear Delegates,

My name is Sersa Janbek, a student at the Modern Montessori School, serving as Secretary-General and President of the UN Women Committee for MontessoriMUN 2025 alongside my deputy Mira Sehwal, and my chairs, Alisha Zakarneh and George Musleh.

As MontessoriMUN 2025 approaches, I would like to take a moment to address you all. This conference holds a special place in my heart, as it marks the conclusion of my own MUN journey. For me, Model United Nations has always been more than just a conference. It has been a space of growth, learning, and transformation, and I hope that throughout this experience you will come to see it in the same way.

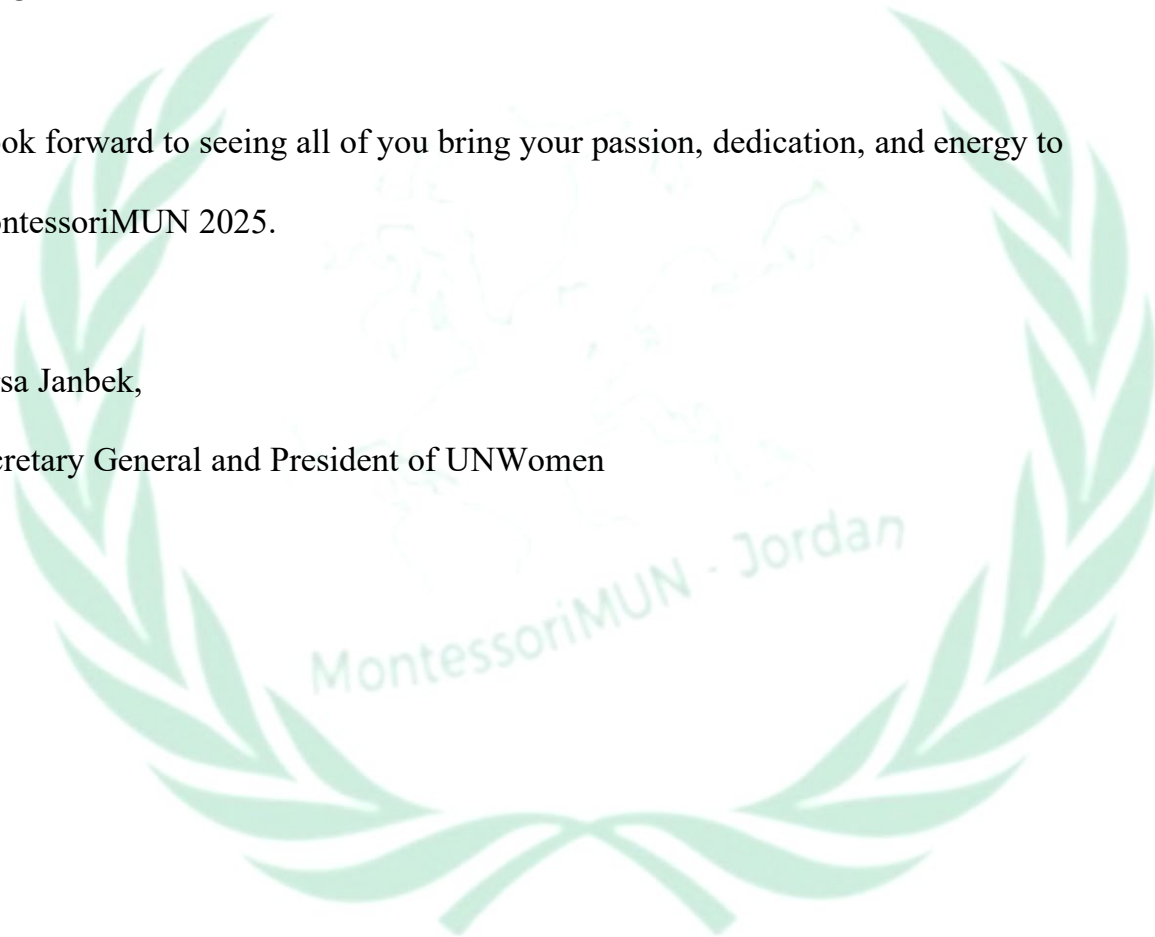
MUN is not only a forum for debate and diplomacy, but also a platform you can evolve, develop, and push beyond their comfort zones. It may sound like a cliché, but I truly mean it when I say that without MUN I would not be who I am today. The experiences I have gained are permanently engraved in my identity, and they are something I will always miss and cherish. Along this journey I have built lifelong friendships and met incredible people who shaped me into the person I have become.

To my delegates in UNWomen, I can promise you that this conference will be an unforgettable experience filled with meaningful debate, collaboration, and of course, moments of joy. To make the most of it, do not allow the conference to come to you unprepared. The success of your experience depends on the effort you put into it beforehand. Arrive fully prepared, and you will find yourself excelling not only as delegates but also as individuals.

I look forward to seeing all of you bring your passion, dedication, and energy to MontessoriMUN 2025.

Sersa Janbek,

Secretary General and President of UNWomen





## Terminology

- **Child Marriage:** Any marriage or union in which one or both spouses are under 18 or are unable to give free and informed consent.
- **Poverty:** Having insufficient income and resources to cover essentials such as food, housing, clothing, and healthcare, resulting in deprivation and reduced quality of life.
- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Treaty (CEDAW):** A landmark UN treaty created in 1979 obliging countries to eliminate discrimination against women, promote women's rights, and advance equality across political, social, and cultural spheres.
- **Child Exploitation:** The unfair use of children for labor or forced marriage, which denies them access to education and basic rights.
- **Cultural Violence:** Occurs when traditions or social norms justify harm against women, such as early marriage, treating these practices as normal despite their damaging effects.

- **Structural Violence:** When unfair laws, policies, or systems create inequality for women, such as unequal pay, limited education, or restricted access to services.
- **Gender Roles:** Society's expectations based on gender, influencing behavior, responsibilities, and opportunities.
- **Societal Pressures:** Norms or expectations from the community or family that influence behavior or decisions, often limiting women's autonomy.
- **Patriarchy:** A social system in which men hold primary power and dominate leadership and decision-making, while women are often given subordinate roles.
- **Discrimination:** The unfair or unequal treatment of women based on gender, limiting their opportunities, rights, or access to resources.
- **Marginalization:** When women are pushed to the edges of society, denied equal power and access to resources, and restricted from fully participating in social, economic, or political life.

## History

Child marriage in Indonesia stems from a long history of customary practices, religious beliefs, and evolving legal reforms. Historically, many communities believed that girls were ready for marriage once they were physically mature and capable of managing household duties while upholding family honor. Early marriage was frequently viewed as a means of ensuring social or financial stability, preserving family reputation, and strengthening familial bonds.

Practices such as Kawin antang (a marriage arranged at a young age but consummated later) and merariq (an elopement tradition among the Sasak in Lombok) reflected local norms that accepted or encouraged early unions. Religious teachings discouraging premarital relationships (zina) further reinforced the belief that marrying girls early protected their families' honor.

Efforts to challenge these traditions began during the Dutch colonial period, when reform-minded Indonesians and women's groups criticized early marriage. The first Indonesian Women's Congress in 1928 called for raising marriage ages, planting the seeds for legal reform. After independence, the 1974 Marriage Law introduced the first national minimum marriage age (16 for girls and 19 for boys) but its impact was limited because courts often granted exceptions, and many marriages went unregistered.

Decades of advocacy by women's rights organizations led to a major change in 2019, when the minimum marriage age was raised to 19 for both sexes. Despite this progress, child marriage continues in many rural and low-income areas due to poverty, gender inequality, limited access to education, and cultural beliefs that view early marriage as a source of protection or financial stability. Weak enforcement of the law and persistent traditional attitudes have allowed the practice to endure even after modern reforms.



## Current situation

Child marriage remains a pressing social and cultural issue in Indonesia despite recent reforms raising the legal marriage age to 19. A significant proportion of girls are still married before 18, with higher rates in rural and economically disadvantaged regions. This is often linked to long-standing traditions, economic pressures, social expectations, and early pregnancy.

In many communities, early marriage is perceived as a means of stability or protection, yet it exposes girls to a high risk of school dropouts, health complications, and long-term limitations in social and economic opportunities. Despite stronger legal protections, child marriage persists due to local customs, religious allowances, and deeply rooted cultural beliefs, leaving a clear gap between formal legal standards and social realities.

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## Parties involved

- **Indonesia:** Approximately 10% of marriages involve someone under 18, primarily affecting girls. Poverty, cultural norms, and limited education drive early marriage, with families often seeing it as a way to reduce financial burdens. Enforcement of the legal minimum age of 19 is inconsistent, while NGOs work to raise awareness and support girls' education and rights.
- **Bangladesh:** Around 15% of girls marry at 16, and 51% by 18. Despite the Child Marriage Restraint Act setting the legal age at 18 for females and 21 for males, cultural expectations and family honor continue to drive the practice.
- **Nepal:** About 35% of girls marry before 18, with higher rates in rural and marginalized communities. Poverty, traditions, and limited schooling access contribute to early marriage. Nepal has pledged to eliminate child, early, and forced marriage by 2030 in accordance with SDG target 5.3.
- **India:** Roughly 27% of girls marry before 18, especially in rural and low-income areas. Poverty, limited education, and weak law enforcement contribute to child marriage. Government programs such as “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” aim to raise awareness and delay marriage, though cultural norms still reinforce the practice.

## Guiding questions

- What is the justification behind child marriage in Indonesia?
- Do cultural influences pressure women and families to continue child marriages?
- How do cultural norms affect the prevalence of child marriages?
- What does the law state regarding the age of Indonesian children's marital status?
- How widespread is child marriage among different areas in Indonesia?
- Does the prevalence rate of child marriages differ from one area to another?
- To what extent can women express disagreement with an arranged child marriage?
- How are young Indonesian girls raised regarding marriage and the proper age for it?
- Are any rights being violated through child marriages in Indonesian culture?

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## Helpful resources

<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/indonesia/>

[https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/1446/file/Child\\_Marriage\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/1446/file/Child_Marriage_Factsheet.pdf)

<https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/child-protection/stories/saying-no-child-marriage-indonesia>

<https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/news/government-indonesia-commits-end-child-marriage>

<https://www.fillespasepouses.org/documents/1080/UNICEF-Indonesia-Child-Marriage-Factsheet-1-1.pdf>

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11226054/>

