

### 116TH CONGRESS 1ST SESSION

# H. R. 2140

## **AN ACT**

To prevent child marriage in refugee settlements administered by the United Nations, and for other purposes.

- 1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
- 2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

### 1 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

- This Act may be cited as the "Preventing Child Mar-
- 3 riage in Displaced Populations Act".

### 4 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

- 5 Congress finds the following:
- 6 (1) According to UNICEF, 12 million girls
  7 marry before the age of 18 every year.
  - (2) Early marriage denies children, especially girls, their right to make vital decisions about their well-being, including relating to their health, family, and career. Child brides are less likely to finish their education, and are at higher risk for abuse, contracting HIV, and dying while pregnant or giving birth.
    - (3) Child marriage also imposes substantial economic costs to developing countries, impeding development and prosperity gains.
    - (4) Displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to child marriage, in communities where poverty, instability, and displacement put pressure on families to marry children, particularly young girls, off at a young age.
    - (5) One United Nations (UN) study found that child marriage rates were 4 times higher among displaced Syrian refugees than among Syrians before

- the crisis. This indicates that displacement, instability, and poverty are driving child marriages.
- 3 (6) United Nations agencies, including 4 UNICEF and UNHCR, have acknowledged the dan-5 gers of child marriage and taken steps to address its 6 risk in the populations they serve.
  - (7) The UN Joint Program on Child Marriage supports this work by building the resilience of populations to indirectly prevent child marriage and by generating new data and evidence on the prevalence of child marriage in humanitarian and fragile settings. For example, in Uganda, the UN Joint Program on Child Marriage helped 27,000 adolescent girls strengthen critical skills through school clubs and Go Back to School campaigns, as well as lifeskills and financial literacy training.
  - (8) After the UN Joint Program on Child Marriage identified Yemen as one of its focus countries, 65,000 people, of whom 45,000 are adolescents, were reached with awareness raising activities on the harms of child marriage in 2018 alone. As a result, local council representatives, elders, and community leaders from six districts signed a pledge to support advocacy efforts to end child marriage.

### SEC. 3. PREVENTING CHILD MARRIAGE IN DISPLACED POP-2 ULATIONS. 3 (a) IN GENERAL.—The President shall direct the United States Permanent Representative to the United 4 5 Nations to use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States at the United Nations to call for an adoption of an agreed-upon definition of "child marriage" across 7 8 United Nations agencies. 9 (b) Strategy.—The President shall direct the United States Permanent Representative to the United 10 11 Nations to use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States at the United Nations to call for the development of a comprehensive strategy to address child marriage in 13 refugee settlements administered by the United Nations. 15 Such strategy should include the following: 16 (1) A mandate to regularly collect and report 17 data related to the number of known or suspected 18 child marriages taking place inside each such settle-19 ment. 20 (2) Protocols for United Nations personnel re-21 garding prevention and monitoring of child mar-22 riages inside each such settlement. 23 (3) A description of United Nations programs

administered at such settlements that include—

24

| 1  | (A) physical, mental, and emotional reha-                    |
|----|--|
| 2  | bilitation and support to children who have ex-              |
| 3  | tricated themselves from child marriage; and                 |
| 4  | (B) alternatives to child marriage, such as                  |
| 5  | education initiatives.                                       |
| 6  | (4) Protocols regarding how United Nations                   |
| 7  | personnel should—  |
| 8  | (A) report adults participating in illegal                   |
| 9  | child marriages in each such settlement; and                 |
| 10 | (B) monitor the prosecution of such adults                   |
| 11 | by the authorities of the country in which the               |
| 12 | settlement at issue is located.                              |
| 13 | (c) Research.—The President shall direct the                 |
| 14 | United States Permanent Representative to the United         |
| 15 | Nations to use the voice, vote, and influence of the United  |
| 16 | States at the United Nations to advocate for the United      |
| 17 | Nations and its appropriate agencies to include, as appro-   |
| 18 | priate, in all of its research into child marriage the rela- |
| 19 | tionship between child marriage and violence against girls,  |
| 20 | including young children and infants.                        |
| 21 | (d) Definitions.—In this section:                            |
| 22 | (1) CHILD MARRIAGE.—The term "child mar-                     |
| 23 | riage" means a formal marriage or informal union             |
| 24 | involving at least one person younger than age 18.           |

| 1 | (2) Illegal Child Marriage.—The term "il-            |
|---|--|
| 2 | legal child marriage" means a child marriage that is |
| 3 | illegal under the laws of the country in which the   |
| 4 | child marriage occurs.                               |
|   | Passed the House of Representatives June 10, 2019.   |
|   | Attest:  |

Clerk.

# 116TH CONGRESS H. R. 2140

# AN ACT

To prevent child marriage in refugee settlements administered by the United Nations, and for other purposes.