

## CHILD MARRIAGE

# Indonesia inches closer to outlawing child marriage



**Indonesian president Joko Widodo's ruling party has been pushing for girls to marry at the age of 19 instead of 16. (Reuters pic)**

Indonesia moved closer to ending child marriage on Friday (September 13, 2019) after the government secured a key nod paving the way to raise the age for girls to wed in the world's most populous Muslim country by three years.

About one in every seven girls in Indonesia is married before the age of 18 and the country is among the 10 countries with the highest numbers of child brides, according to the UN children's agency, UNICEF.

The government said a parliamentary law committee has agreed to a proposal on raising the minimum marriage age for girls to 19 from the current 16, a key step before it is put to a vote among lawmakers.

"It's a decision that the Indonesian society has been waiting for to save our children from the practice of child marriage," Women's Empowerment and Child Protection minister Yohana Yembise said in a statement. The reform has been pushed by lawmakers including those from the ruling party of the Indonesian president Joko Widodo.

Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled in favour of a petition by women's rights groups last year to change the law after they argued the current rule discriminates against girls, who can marry at 16 whereas the legal age for men is 19. The ruling did not specify an increase and gave legislators three years to decide what the new minimum age should be.

The proposed change would allow exceptions for underage marriage in unspecified "pressing" situations with a court's consent, said researcher Maidina Rahmawati at the non-profit Institute for Criminal Justice Reform.

"We ask the government to tighten the restrictions on this but it is a very good start," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Jakarta.

Poverty and tradition often lead families to marry their children in the Southeast Asia archipelago of 260 million people, according to UNICEF. On average over 3,500 Indonesian girls are married every day and in some cases religious courts have endorsed the marriages of Indonesian girls younger than 16.

Globally, 12 million girls become child brides each year, according to the campaign group Girls Not Brides, exposing them to greater risks of exploitation, sexual violence, domestic abuse and death in childbirth. – **Reuters, Jakarta.**

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