
Horn of Africa: Unicef, poverty, child marriage and female genital mutilation increase with drought

“The number of young girls, some as young as 12 years of age, forced to marry and to have genital mutilation is reaching worrying levels in the Horn of Africa, while the worst drought of the last forty years is pushing families to the edge”. This has been stated by Unicef in a long release which says that, in the Ethiopian regions that have been hit by drought the hardest, child marriage “has generally more than doubled in one year’s time. The number of children at risk of dropping out of school in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, due to the impact of the crisis, has tripled in three months – leaving a high number of teenage girls exposed to a number of risks in relation to child protection”, which include precisely female genital mutilation and child marriage”. “In the Horn of Africa, families are making desperate choices to survive the drought, due to the climate change that is drying up the water springs and killing the cattle and due to the domino effect of the war in Ukraine, which is making food and fuel prices spiral out of control”. According to Unicef, “in the region, over 1.8 million children are in desperate need of treatment for severe acute malnutrition that is threatening their lives, with 213 thousand people now at risk of famine in Somalia, according to the Famine Early Warning Network. A rising number of parents or guardians of children marry the little girls to get hold of a dowry that may help feed the rest of the family, to have one less mouth to feed, or in the attempt to help the bride marry into a wealthier family”.

Valentina Bombelli