



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 14, 2019

## Report: Child-bride Import Business Is Thriving in the U.S.

In a shocking but as-yet largely unknown report, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has revealed that the United States government is helping manage and support child marriage for immigrants.

Entitled "[How the U.S. Immigration System Encourages Child Marriages](#)," the report concludes that "major loopholes in U.S. law have allowed thousands of minors to be subjected to child marriages. Under the Immigration and Nationality Act ("INA"), a U.S. child may petition for a visa for a spouse or fiancé living in another country, and a U.S. adult may petition for a visa for a minor spouse or fiancé living abroad."



Though most of the brides were 17 years old, some were as young as 13.

And U.S. immigration authorities, the committee reported, rarely reject a child-bride application.

### The Numbers

Frighteningly, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services can't or doesn't block the child-marriage business.

"USCIS approved 8,686 immigration benefit petitions for a spouse or fiancé involving a minor" between fiscal 2007 and 2017, the [committee revealed](#). The agency OK'd 7,083 of 8,032 petitions — about 88 percent "for spousal visa eligibility with either a minor as the beneficiary or Petitioner." The agency also rubber-stamped 1,603 of 2,229 petitions — about 72 percent — of the applications for the immigration of a fiancée.

Unsurprisingly, in 95 percent of the cases, the girl was the younger spouse or fiancé.

Though 75 percent of those approved petitions involved minors who were 17, some of the petitions the government OK'd were for 13- and 14-year-olds.

The agency OK'd two petitions for 13-year-olds, one for a spouse, and one for a fiancée. It approved 38 petitions for 14-year-olds, 30 for spouses. The agency approved 269 petitions for 15-year-olds, 216 of them for spouses and 53 for fiancées, and 1,768 for 16-year-olds — 1,427 for spouses and 341 for fiancées.

Last, the agency OK'd 6,609 petitions for 17-year-olds — 5,409 for spouses and 1,200 for fiancées.

Most of the petitions, unsurprisingly, came from adults in the United States who petitioned to import minor spouses or fiancées. USCIS OK'd 5,556 petitions of those. The agency approved 2,926 petitions from minors to bring in adults.

The vast majority of the petitions, however, were not for immigrants from Islamic countries where child brides are common. Most, 3,461, were for Mexicans. The next highest number, 743, were for Pakistanis.



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## Asking for Fraud

One would think the system was purposely set up to promote fraudulent immigration claims.

A key finding? “The INA does not prohibit minors from petitioning on behalf of a spouse or fiancé to receive immigration benefits, nor does it prohibit a U.S. adult citizen from petitioning on behalf of a minor spouse or fiancé.” the [committee reported](#). The only question USCIS considers is whether the “petitioner’s age at marriage violates the laws of the place of celebration or the public policy of the U.S. state in which the couple plans to reside.”

And that’s just one problem. More disturbingly, “USCIS does not require the minor to demonstrate parental or judicial consent, even if the state in which they will reside would have required it to marry.”

And even worse, the committee reported, “USCIS’s process for reviewing immigration benefit petitions for spouses or fiancés does not require an in-person meeting or, in the case of a minor, a parent to co-sign the petition.”

Thus, the agency cannot “identify and prevent forced marriages, child exploitation, or fraud.”

To get a picture of that problem, the committee wanted to know how often the agency waived the requirement that a couple prove they met each other, and how many visas issued for marriage were valid; i.e., how often did the petition and beneficiary follow through with a legal marriage, as the law requires, within 90 days of the immigrant entering the country.

Answer? USCIS doesn’t keep track.

“This creates the potential for applicants to fraudulently or inappropriately obtain immigration benefits,” the [committee rightly concluded](#), “particularly when minors are the applicants or beneficiaries.”

Last, despite modern technology, the agency is still pretending it’s 1965. The agency’s “continued reliance on a paper-based system for adjudicating immigration benefits hindered the agency’s ability to conduct an analysis to understand whether the U.S. immigration system encourages child marriages.”

Aside from exposing what might be widespread fraud in obtaining visas for child spouses and fiancées, the data also show how many immigrants are getting into the country using spouses or future marriage as an excuse.

USCIS approved 3.6 million such petitions through the 10 years, or an average 360,000 annually. Nearly 850,000 of those were for Mexicans.



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