

UNFPA-UNICEF  
GLOBAL PROGRAMME  
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

# ACT NOW:

Accelerating gender equality  
by eliminating child marriage  
in a pandemic



2020  
COUNTRY  
PROFILES

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**2020 COUNTRY PROFILES**  
**UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE**





# BANGLADESH

COUNTRY PROFILE





# BANGLADESH



## The country context

Bangladesh is home to 38 million child brides. Of these, 13 million married before age 15. Today, the prevalence of child marriage stands at 51 per cent of all young women in the country being married before their 18th birthday, putting the country among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of child marriage prevalence. However, the practice of child marriage is less common today than in previous generations: the prevalence of marriage by age 18 was over 90 per cent around 1970. However, meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030, or the national target to end child marriage by 2041, will still require a major push. The rate of progress must be at least 8 times faster than the rate observed over the past decade to meet the national target, or 17 times faster to meet the SDG target.<sup>1</sup>

Globally, over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming child brides. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment, with progress observed in for example Bangladesh, is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls across the world will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) further estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic's economic impact.<sup>3</sup> During 2020, UNICEF Bangladesh adapted the ongoing research, 'Keeping girls in school to reduce child marriage in rural Bangladesh', to the realities of COVID-19 to test interventions aimed at keeping girls in school and measure the impact of the pandemic on the prevalence of child marriage. Early evidence prompted the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child

Marriage (the Global Programme) to connect with 50 per cent of the targeted adolescent girls through mobile phones to provide remote learning support in the form of customized lesson plans and content. The education sector will further use the research findings to select and introduce evidence-based interventions with the potential to keep girls in school longer, thereby reducing the likelihood of child marriage.<sup>4</sup> The economic impact of the pandemic also needs to be addressed, as it is a key risk factor for child marriage. In Bangladesh, the decline in child marriage has been observed across wealth groups, but with more progress seen among the richest quintile.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these challenges and setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under goal 5 on gender equality in the SDGs. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.



## Key highlights



**88,770**  
adolescent girls and



**29,473**  
adolescent boys aged 10–19 years engaged in life-skills training and comprehensive sexuality education in **1,695 adolescent clubs** (of which 193 were virtual safe spaces in line with COVID-19 pandemic restrictions). Among the adolescent girls empowered, **3,633 are living with disabilities**.

### A national adolescent strategy with ending child marriage as a key priority area has been developed.

In addition, a Costed National Plan of Action for the Adolescent Health Strategy 2020–2030 was finalized, and training for health service providers on gender- and age-specific adolescent-friendly health services was initiated. The Global Programme also supported the costing and the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the national action plan on ending child marriage.



Given the pandemic restrictions, the Global Programme continued to model gender-transformative programming by engaging **44,529 men and boys** in dialogues on positive gender norms.

Close to **130 social workers** were recruited and trained and reached more than **306,000 vulnerable girls** and boys. In addition, **65,683 adolescent girls** and **33,242 boys accessed adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services**, while child protection case management supported **75,013 girls**.

An estimated

**11.3 million**

**individuals** engaged in regular dialogue through online platforms and community networks created during the pandemic so as to prevent and respond to child marriage, violence, exploitation and abuse of children.



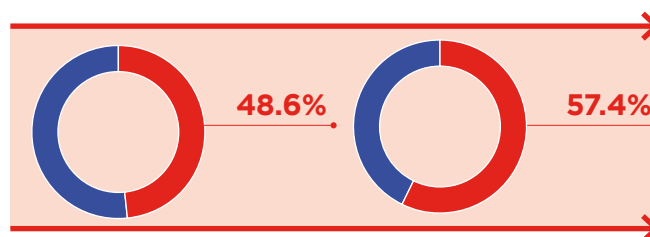
The **'#Raisethebeat4ECM/Dhol Campaign'** continued broadcasting of the existing public service announcements to foster public resistance against child marriage, reaching over

**136 MILLION**  
people and engaging over

**94 MILLION**  
through mass and social media.

The second season of the 'Icchedana' ('On the Wings of Wishes') drama series has been broadcast on four television channels and social media platforms, reaching more than **67 million people** and engaging about **17 million people**. Further, community engagement initiatives using alternative platforms (e.g., interactive radio programmes and local media activities and participation of adolescent radio listeners groups) reached over 260,000 people.

The entertainment–education campaign end-line survey results show a significant increase in knowledge on the legal age of marriage among targeted groups from **48.6 per cent** prior to the campaign launch to **57.4 per cent** by the end of the campaign.



In addition, there has been a **10 percentage-point** increase in knowledge on emotional changes of adolescent girls and a **5 percentage-point** increase in knowledge on punishments for sexual harassment among boys and girls.



During the year, the report on **'Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Bangladesh'** was launched on the Day of the Girl by the State Minister of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs – a welcome addition to the evidence-based planning and programming approach.

## 2020 Achievements



During the year,

# 88,770

**adolescent girls** benefited from life-skills training and comprehensive sexuality education, through 1,695 adolescent clubs (of which 193 were virtual safe spaces).

About

# 4,200

**adolescents** were trained to disseminate COVID-19 messages and messages on staying vigilant against gender-based violence and child marriage via a mobile application called 'Digital Application for Adolescents', with

# 132,846

**adolescents** (70 per cent girls), **27,962 parents** and **63,517 other community members** subsequently reached.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Global evidence on good practices in gender-responsive and gender-transformative programming, as well as findings from a Global Programme-commissioned review<sup>6</sup> underline the importance of interventions that enhance girls' human capital (such as schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities. In Bangladesh, life-skills trainings continued to be delivered in 2020 through a COVID-19-adapted approach (ensuring adherence to physical distancing protocols) to equip adolescent girls with the knowledge, attitudes, skills and values to make appropriate and healthy choices that will empower them.

The Global Programme has adopted life-skills training as a key strategy to strengthen adolescent girl empowerment and to create an enabling environment by engaging parents and community members in support of girls. During the pandemic, life-skills programmes were used as conduits to communicate awareness messages on COVID-19 prevention and response services, including messages on violence against children. During the year, 88,770 adolescent girls benefited from life-skills training and comprehensive sexuality education, through 1,695 adolescent clubs (of which 193 were virtual safe spaces). In addition, 13 individual lessons from the life-skills curriculum were video recorded and aired on national television, along with the Ministry of Education's regular education programme, to reach adolescents all over Bangladesh during the COVID-19 lockdown.

About 4,200 adolescents were trained to disseminate COVID-19 messages and messages on staying vigilant against gender-based violence and child marriage via a mobile application called 'Digital Application for Adolescents', with 132,846 adolescents (70 per cent girls), 27,962 parents and 63,517 other community members subsequently reached. Additionally, over 13,500 parents and caregivers, adolescents, child rights facilitators and social workers received, through 966 community-based child protection committees, information on violence against children, and support with referrals to services for responding to violence. Approximately 227,000 adolescents received online safety training across the country. In a similar activity, in partnership with the Bangladesh Scouts (a network of 2 million young people), 40 adult leaders (19 female) were trained as trainers for life skills-based education to support youth groups. Some 2,000 young adolescents,



368 scout officials and 270 Rover Scouts were also oriented on the U-Report mobile platform through a community-based camp. A storybook written and illustrated by adolescent girls was printed by the Department of Women Affairs for distribution to adolescent girls from adolescent clubs to keep them engaged during the COVID-19 lockdown.

**“Adolescents are excellent in providing support for child protection through awareness-building activities on violence against children, gender-based violence, child marriage, mental health and psychosocial support, livelihoods, etc. I am really very happy to see the adolescent empowerment through adolescent clubs. I wish them success in the future.”**

– Child rights facilitator

While life-skills training provided a critical conduit for reaching vulnerable girls in the context of COVID-19, they also provide strong pathways for building adolescent girls’ agency. Through the engagement of boys, parents and families, life-skills training provides a platform to revisit unequal gender norms. For instance, the life-skills sessions in the adolescent clubs (both offline and virtual) show a change in the mindset among boys towards girls and women in society, with the boys becoming friendlier and more respectful towards the girls in the clubs and in their communities. It has been reported that in many cases the boys are more protective and were found to work ‘together’ in all the club activities with the girls. Both girls and boys together have protested to stop child marriages through the child helplines and by communicating with the local administration.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The main challenge in 2020 was the closure of all schools due to COVID-19, with UNFPA having planned to implement all empowerment activities through the school system – which meant that these were interrupted until adaptations to the plans and strategies could be made. Eventually, online mechanisms were developed to reach adolescent girls virtually through mobile phones and social media; gatherings continued in open spaces in smaller groups, and printed communication materials were developed to support self-paced distance learning. However, having many of the activities conducted through online modalities created new challenges for the programme in terms of reaching the target audiences – such as having to consider continued internet connectivity in remote locations. Many of the adolescents did not have their

own phones; therefore, they are connected via their family or a neighbour’s mobile phone, which meant it took longer to conduct programmes. Sharing phones with family members was encouraged, while in other cases financial support was provided to the girls to buy a phone for their household.

An early rapid assessment of the situation regarding child marriage during the pandemic supported a lot of the decision-making in terms of revisions of design of interventions and their timelines. One important aspect emerging during the year, in terms of education, was that risk-informed design of interventions and research is critical to ensure smooth implementation, achieve expected outcomes and benefit from the investment, whatever the context. Flexibility in design facilitates quick analysis that supports adaptation in any situation or emergency as early as possible. The rapid assessment showed an increase in the risk of child marriage, and that around 50 per cent of the targeted adolescent girls were out of reach from the planned online interventions, hence at higher risk of child marriage and violence. This targeted group belongs to the most marginalized group in the country, as the national rate of possession of a mobile phone is over 95 per cent of households.

Despite the challenge with access to phones for some of the girls, where this challenge could be overcome, the use of digital and mobile platforms to engage adolescents turned out to be a cheaper and more effective approach as adolescents showed keen interest in these activities. Life-skills education through single-sex and mixed adolescent clubs – maintained even during the pandemic (including virtual safe spaces) – is an approach that aims to be gender-transformative as it works on changing the mindsets of boys and engaging them as allies for girls. Hiring social workers, strengthening child helpline facilities and linking with adolescents through the child rights facilitators also contributed to strengthening services and adolescents’ access to these services. This approach shows a lot of potential for scaling up. However, engaging with adolescents living with disabilities required new, innovative ways during the pandemic.

Keeping girls and their family members motivated to continue education after the schools reopen will be a big challenge, as multiple factors – such as learning loss, economic stability of the families, prevalence of marriage – will push for discontinuation.

In 2021, the programme aims to roll out the ‘Standardized Adolescent Empowerment Package’ across the country, following a cascading model for a multiplier impact. Integration of the package into the national curriculum will ensure that it reaches 10.5 million adolescents, 1,000 adolescent practitioners and actors at a grass-roots level.

The programme will also support the dissemination of the National Adolescent Strategy to all divisions and districts in the country.

In terms of life-skills education, the programme will enhance the scope of the 'Digital Application for Adolescents', incorporating more innovative features in the adolescent clubs (e.g., providing tablets, having IT support, buying talk time for internet connection), ensuring the integration of two-way communication and increasing the usefulness of the application for all users. Developing e-booklets on life-skills, violence against children, child marriage, child rights, etc., would be an added advantage for reaching more adolescents in remote locations, and opportunities will be sought to engage non-governmental partner organizations with diversified implementing plans to accomplish this. The programme will also support empowerment of adolescents with market-driven occupational and transferable skills and job placements.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Global evidence has shown the negative consequences of COVID-19 on gender equality – increasing vulnerabilities and risks that drive child marriage. However, the Global Programme in Bangladesh has continued to work to ensure an enabling environment through social and behaviour change communication and advocacy strategies. The community engagement initiatives in the targeted districts did slow down at the beginning of the year due to COVID-19. However, alternative modalities were quickly adapted. Behavioural, social and gender norms issues were largely covered by the national multimedia campaign and community engagement initiatives. Given the need for in-depth, participatory and iterative dialogue required to influence positive gender norms, including preventing child marriage during COVID-19, longer and extended work is expected over the years.

Among the key accomplishments in 2020 for the country programme are:

- 38 million adolescents and young people were reached through social media with key messaging on issues related to gender, and over 5.5 million of them engaged in online conversations on their rights;
- 660 child journalists from across the country and from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds were trained on reporting on child marriage, girls' empowerment, gender inequality and other gender issues during the year;
- The programme produced video documentary series, collected photo assets and organized round tables, featuring child marriage in light of COVID-19, and good practices such as the benefits of sports for girls' empowerment.

The national '#Raisethebeat4ECM'/'Dhol' campaign continued broadcasting existing public service announcements (PSAs) to foster public resistance against child marriage, reaching over 136 million people and engaging over 94 million through mass and social media in 2020. The second season of the adolescent-focused television drama 'Icchedana' ('On the Wings of Wishes'), complementing the communication campaign, has been broadcast on four television channels and social media platforms that reach more than 67 million people, and has engaged about 17 million people to date. An end-line study of the first season of the series measured its effectiveness and showed a significant increase in knowledge and positive attitudes around the issues covered. The community engagement initiatives using alternative platforms, such as interactive radio programmes, local media activities and adolescent radio listeners groups, reached over 260,000 people.

Another initiative to support an enabling environment reached 15,702 fathers and male family members linked to adolescent clubs in all zones. The fathers were sensitized on their daughters' schooling and on the importance of delaying marriage. With these interventions (including community-based child protection committee meetings and bimonthly parents meetings), they become more aware of issues related to violence against children and children's rights. The fathers also demonstrated a change in mindset related to the mobility of girls outside of their homes, to attend adolescent clubs and life skills-based education – for example, using bicycles. Some 510 gatekeepers and stakeholders in the communities were also provided training on the prevention of sexual harassment and child marriage, resulting in the active participation of male community members in dialogues on preventing sexual harassment against adolescent girls, engaging adolescent boys.

The Department of Women Affairs developed a guideline on community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was used to engage 954 community stakeholders in community meetings to address child marriage in two target districts (Bogura and Jamalpur).

Partnerships with the Bangladesh Cricket Board and the Bangladesh Football Federation were scaled up during the year, in terms of their 'sports for development' activities for adolescent girls to ensure girls' empowerment and participation in outdoor sports. While this year's programme activities were initiated in January, training and country-wide tournaments were on hold until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, multimedia documentation on the impact of the intervention on girls and their communities has been initiated, with several photography and video assignments conducted to gather evidence.

The Global Programme in Bangladesh has continued to work to ensure an enabling environment for girls through social and behaviour change communication and advocacy strategies.





### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

COVID-19 impacted community engagement initiatives for addressing behavioural and gender norms. The interpersonal communication and community dialogues were initially postponed, before being reinstated on a limited scale with safety measures in place tailored to the local context. Alternative modalities have been adopted, such as engaging people through community radio and adolescent radio listeners groups.

The use of U-Report for quick assessment polls on violence against children issues and social norms was widely taken up to adjust to digital communication and social mobilization activities, while social media was an effective communication channel in the pandemic context. A private sector partnership was a great support to address some specific issues, including online safety and prevention of violence against children and women.

In terms of social norms work, social and behaviour change interventions will continue to integrate issues and messages related to the emerging risk of violence against children and women, with efforts to strengthen the outreach to marginalized adolescent girls, including those living with disabilities, on social norms and children's rights issues. Communication and advocacy priorities for 2021 will further explore virtual modalities of generating conversations and disseminating content around child marriage, as COVID-19 restrictions may continue. In addition, the programme hopes to explore with its sports for development partners how training programmes with girls may be safely facilitated, or how the girls can be kept engaged, so that they are not negatively impacted by the long break in these vital activities that empower them and have a huge impact in the lives of particularly the most vulnerable and at risk.

### Strengthening systems

During the year, the Global Programme maintained continuity in systems-strengthening interventions across the sectors of education, child protection and health.

The Global Programme provided support to the Government's efforts to continue education during the pandemic through remote learning platforms for more than 12 million secondary school students. Reaching the most marginalized, including girls, with regular, remote learning was a big challenge but addressed through low- or no-tech options. A key focus of the programme was efforts to keep girls in school (beyond COVID-19-induced closures) and ensuring that they would return and not be subjected to harmful practices such as child marriage. Thus, the programme focused on creating access to and an enabling environment for girls' education as a fundamental foundation for any transformative gender

norm change. Alternative learning programmes for the most marginalized out-of-school adolescents, especially girls, through informal apprenticeships have been developed, positioned as a key strategy to reach the national targets set for the 'Generation Unlimited' initiative. Adaptations to the alternative learning programmes are being considered to address the changed context and impact of COVID-19 on skills and employment.

In the light of COVID-19, a key strategy that was used for supporting adolescent girls' access to education and retention in school was preventing sexual harassment in and around school premises. Anti-sexual harassment committees were established in 122 secondary schools in target districts during the year. To strengthen referral linkages between services, the capacity-building of 432 community stakeholders (including locally elected district-level government officials and religious leaders) was supported in 17 subdistricts in target areas.

The Global Programme supported the Ministry of Education to coordinate with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to establish a system to reach adolescent girls and provide a package of nutrition services in a sustainable manner through secondary schools, colleges and madrasas.

The Global Programme also supported the development of the Ministry of Education's school reopening guidelines, which covered safe operation with water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), as well as menstrual hygiene management, facilities and safe learning by addressing child protection concerns. As part of a gender-responsive approach to education, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education was supported with implementation guidelines for WASH interventions in secondary schools.

In the health sector, the Global Programme supported 65,683 adolescent girls and 33,242 boys to receive adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services. A module on psychosocial issues has been finalized to enable health service providers to detect and counsel adolescents to support their mental health. Accreditation guidelines were further endorsed in 2020 to ensure the quality of care of adolescent-friendly health services.

In Bhola District, a partnership with a local non-governmental organization was initiated to support the government health system to restore services and meet the needs of adolescents. A round-table discussion was also organized with Prothom Alo to bring the discussion on mental health to the national agenda for essential services within the primary health-care system. To further provide more comprehensive

counselling and referral services to adolescents, the adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights helpline was expanded and capacitated throughout 2020. A total of 16,305 adolescents and youth were counselled and referred to services in 2020 (data to November). In addition, live counselling sessions were conducted on Facebook twice a week from June 2020 to increase the awareness among adolescents and youth around mental health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, child marriage, gender-based violence and COVID-19. So far, a total of 35 live sessions have been conducted, with more than 421,000 views and engagement of more than 43,000 people.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of child protection, an additional 127 social workers were recruited and trained to reach a further 306,000 vulnerable girls and boys. The Global Programme supported the Department of Social Services in strengthening the toll-free child helpline, resulting in a 40 per cent increase in calls. In a related intervention, child protection case management reached 212,627 children (75,013 girls) in 2020. During

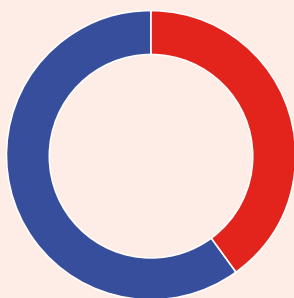
the year, the Government together with the child protection and education humanitarian clusters also supported the response to monsoon flooding that affected almost 445,000 children and 3,960 schools, with provision of non-food items and community-based messaging to prevent harmful practices.

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Schools have been closed since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, none of the planned school-based activities could be implemented. Given such a long time of closure there is a possibility that existing WASH facilities in schools may require substantial repair and maintenance, which will require adequate funding.

Inclusive WASH facilities that address gender and disability issues will be built at scale by the Government with advocacy and technical support from the Global Programme. Guidelines for a 'three-star' approach, including a gender-responsive approach, have been developed, with implementing partners

The Global Programme supported the Department of Social Services in strengthening the toll-free child helpline, resulting in a **40 per cent** increase in calls. In a related intervention, child protection case management reached **212,627 children (75,013 girls)** in 2020.



40%  
increase in calls.



being oriented on the approach. Work with the Government will push for the three-star approach to be adopted in all schools on a phase-by-phase basis. Documentation of lessons learned will be prioritized for 2021 through convening at national level.

As part of the regular education programme, the Global Programme will continue to work with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board to develop gender-transformative skills-based curriculum, materials, pedagogy and assessment mechanisms to start national roll-out from January 2022. Through this effort, transferable skills and well-being (health, mental health, nutrition, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, menstrual hygiene management, and safety and security both on- and offline) of adolescents will be mainstreamed through the formal education system. Initiatives for creating and institutionalizing the alternative learning programme for the most marginalized out-of-school adolescents, especially girls, will also continue.

Demand generation for adolescent-friendly health services is still weak and needs further collaboration between schools and adolescent clubs. Implementation research on adolescent-friendly health services showed a link between promoting and creating awareness about these services at the community level and the effectiveness of the health services: key interventions for improving service utilization among adolescents included dissemination of adolescent-targeted messages during a school assembly, a special day at a health-care facility for adolescents, and courtyard sessions with parents to promote positive parenting. The interventions have minimized the gap between girls and boys in terms of utilizing health services and have now been scaled up to all targeted districts.

The quality of adolescent-friendly health services is, however, still a challenge, and an accreditation system has therefore been initiated for the Government to ensure adequate quality of the services. Another challenge is that mental health is still a relatively low prioritized area – further investments are required to identify and integrate services for psychosocial support, albeit technical assistance provided to develop and finalize the psychosocial training module for the Government. Inclusion of gender-based violence services within interventions is still a challenge and needs further attention.

A key lesson in terms of menstrual hygiene management in schools – coming from the support provided to implementing partners to install menstrual hygiene management facilities in eight secondary schools, including low-cost sanitary incinerators and

sanitary pits – is that this intervention can be replicated at scale. For sustainability, the intervention should be implemented directly through government partners.

In the health sector, technical assistance will be provided to the Government for the scale-up of adolescent-friendly health services in all 64 districts. Support will also be provided to integrate mental health services, such as psychosocial counselling services, within the adolescent-friendly health services. The COVID-19 context has raised a concern about using digital platforms for alternative services such as telemedicine, and support will be given to the development of a website and apps for connecting adolescents to digital services. Advocacy will continue nationally for prioritizing adolescent health – especially for vulnerable adolescents, sexual and reproductive health services, and gender-based violence services – through round-table discussions, social media, and by strengthening coordination between the ministries of health and education.

### Addressing poverty

Two training centres of the Department of Women Affairs in target areas have been capacitated to provide computer training to adolescent girls. The trainers at the centres were trained to provide market-oriented updated computer training to adolescent girls to enable them to seek paid work without mobility restrictions.

The trained officials from the Department of Women Affairs will be able to enhance the computer training capacity of the training centres and include marginalized adolescent girls in training programmes. It is expected that adolescent girls with basic computer knowledge will be able to access more information and enhance their education and employment opportunities.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

There has been a lot of interest from adolescent girls and encouragement from families of adolescent girls to attend the computer training centres. Training officials at the centres were also keen to learn and impart new skills. A key lesson learned is that it is important to provide these practical life-enhancing skills along with comprehensive sexuality education to keep adolescent girls engaged and the community supportive of girls participating in empowerment programmes.

The programme will continue to support the Department of Women Affairs in providing high-quality economic empowerment programmes for vulnerable adolescent girls and their families, and continue to engage communities in innovative ways, within the



current COVID-19 situation, to create an enabling environment for the empowerment of adolescent girls. Further, the programme will initiate the design and piloting of a comprehensive skills package linked with jobs/employment for the most marginalized out-of-school adolescents, including widowed, married and divorced girls under the child marriage programme.

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policy by the World Policy Analysis Center found that the rate of child marriage reduced by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts for their enactment, foster improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.<sup>8</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis that gender egalitarian laws positively impact norms regarding women's equality and empowerment at national and subnational levels.<sup>9</sup> However, governance also entails increased accountability of national systems to deliver sustained preventive and mitigation efforts. In Bangladesh, the Global Programme continued to strengthen robust systems and law enforcement, with a focus on the Marriage Restraint Act and the Children's Act.

The programme saw the development of a number of policy and strategy framework documents in 2020, including the National Adolescent Strategy – where ending child marriage is a key priority area – and the costed National Plan of Action for Adolescent Health Strategy (2020–2030), under the leadership of the Maternal and Child Health Services Unit of

the Directorate General of Family Planning. The programme also supported the Local Government Division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives in developing a national menstrual hygiene management strategy, including an implementation plan in line with existing policy documents – mainly the national hygiene promotion strategy – through consultations with key stakeholders within the Government, civil society and the private sector. The strategy was shared with the national working committee and a final draft will be submitted to the National Forum for Water Supply and Sanitation for approval. A key highlight of the Global Programme's efforts to strengthen national and subnational action plans and systems was the costing and the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was awarded the contract to assist UNFPA and UNICEF in developing the monitoring and evaluation framework for the national action plan, conducting its costing, and arranging workshops for the Government and relevant stakeholders on the monitoring of the plan.

Through the 'Strengthening Parliament's Capacity in Population and Development Issues' (SPCPD) project, parliamentarians have been engaged in national- and subnational-level interventions to end child marriage. As part of the SPCPD project, an advocacy plan has been developed that includes eliminating child marriage and gender-based violence. The Eliminating Child Marriage and Preventing Gender-Based Violence Sub-committee, formed under the SPCPD project, put forward some recommendations to the Parliamentary Standing



Committee on the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to promote education as a means of preventing child marriage and empowering girls. One outcome was that the Parliamentary Standing Committee adopted the decision that the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs will work with the Ministry of Education to introduce compulsory education for poor female students in class 12 as a part of women's development and empowerment and to prevent child marriage. Moreover, thanks to interventions of the parliamentarians, local-level administrations included an agenda to end child marriage and promote maternal health in district- and upazila-level monthly coordination meetings. This ensures discussion, continuous follow-up and regular monitoring of the work. Parliamentarians also took the initiative to support community-based child protection committees in their local constituencies and support and encourage efforts by subdistrict-level committees to prevent child marriage and raise community awareness on girls' rights.

In the context of COVID-19, UNFPA and UNICEF ensured strong positioning of child marriage and gender-based violence in all internal United Nations plans, as well as the COVID-19 preparedness and response plans of the Government (namely the socioeconomic response framework, the Bangladesh Preparedness Plan and the COVID-19 education recovery plan). The national risk communication and community engagement strategy also addressed the heightened risk of child marriage and gender-based violence for adolescent girls during the pandemic, as well as the unique sexual and reproductive health needs of women and girls, including the need for gender-based violence services. This advocacy also made sure that the COVID-19 work was in line with the Government's various sectoral development frameworks within the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework, in which child marriage is positioned as an outcome area under strategic priority 5 on gender equality and gender-based violence.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Weak coordination among relevant ministries and a lack of understanding of child protection issues are basic challenges for the implementation of the Global Programme in Bangladesh. This is partly due to a lack of reliable data and evidence on adolescents for proper planning and programme design. Moving forward, efforts will focus on building a basic understanding of child protection among all actors working with and for adolescents, while simultaneously increasing collaboration among them. Strengthening the evidence base on the situation of adolescents is also very important.

A key lesson from the year is that the work with parliamentarians has shown that they have strong influence in their local constituencies and can therefore work with the administration and local people to bring about change. Capacitating parliamentarians to support the elimination of child marriage in their areas and to advocate for policy implementation can bring about positive change faster with enhanced political and administrative accountability.

The main priorities of the Global Programme in terms of creating an enabling environment for girls' empowerment will be to:

- Further work on the monitoring and evaluation framework together with a monitoring dashboard for the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage;
- Build capacity of the Government and relevant stakeholders to implement guiding strategies, plans and frameworks;
- Implement a comprehensive capacity development programme in partnership with relevant ministries for the relevant stakeholders on the Child Marriage Restraint Act and the Rules 2018 (including training module development, training of trainers and a roll-out plan for the district level supported by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs);
- Roll-out of the menstrual hygiene management strategy with its complementary costing plan.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

Progress was made under this outcome around supporting evidence generation to support policy and strategy decisions. Capacity-building and technical support are provided to the Government and civil society organizations to generate and use quality data and evidence on what works to end child marriage and support married girls. A key accomplishment during the year was the launch of the report 'Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Bangladesh' on the Day of the Girl by the State Minister of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs that will support an evidence-based approach to reaching marginalized adolescent girls. Following the dissemination of the findings from the report, the ministry used this new evidence to revise the national targets for ending child marriage for Bangladesh's 8th Five Year Plan. During the year, the regional study 'Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia', in which Bangladesh is a case study, was supported with technical assistance and the results were disseminated through a national webinar.

The Global Programme also undertook a number of other pieces of research during the year. For instance, implementation research on 'Keeping girls in school

to reduce child marriage in rural Bangladesh' was conducted to test a few standardized interventions through the education system to keep girls in school/learning and to try to measure education's impact on reducing child marriage. The research was adapted to COVID-19 and hence also generated evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on adolescent girls and their schooling. The findings from this implementation research will support the education system to introduce evidence-based interventions to keep adolescent girls in school/learning, which is expected to have a positive impact on reducing child marriage.

An end-line survey was undertaken to measure changes and outcomes that result from phase II of the education–entertainment campaign on selected adolescent-related knowledge, attitudes and practice areas, with a focus on child marriage. Overall, 1,163 households from Tangail, Nilphamari and Kushtia districts were targeted. The survey reflected a significant increase in knowledge and positive attitudes. For example, knowledge around the legal age of marriage increased by 8.8 per cent, there was a 10 per cent increase in knowledge on emotional changes in adolescent girls and boys, and a 5 per cent increase in knowledge on punishments for sexual harassment.

For better menstrual hygiene management programming for disadvantaged adolescent girls, a study was launched to examine the local market for menstrual hygiene management products, in terms of pricing and availability to match with the affordability, accessibility, suitability and desirability among adolescent girls in disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh. Data collection is completed and a draft report is expected to be available in 2021.

Based on a revised workplan to address the challenges and new context due to COVID-19, a rapid survey was undertaken on the impact of COVID-19 on targeted adolescent girls, with three phases of data collection being done so far. The assessment generated detailed information on the impact of COVID-19 on girls and thus supported revisions of research and data collection plans along with customization of interventions for alternative delivery during the pandemic.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The COVID-19 lockdown and other restrictions delayed necessary consultations with government entities and halted non-essential evidence generation for months. However, with remote modalities and safety precautions/procedures put in place, the work was able to move ahead at a slower pace with accepted limitations. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions and initially slow adaptation of government officials to virtual working modalities, it was difficult to reach subdistrict-level government offices and to monitor progress of implementation during the pandemic.

With a three-month extension of the partnership with the Population Council, concluding the implementation research on keeping girls in school is the priority for 2021. Also in 2021, the focus is to revitalize work to gather case studies on interventions that work to end child marriage, featuring the girls and communities involved, and develop communication products on these interventions, including leaflets and infographics, which can be disseminated to amplify the findings of the evidence generation across communication channels.

The programme also plans to:

- Undertake quantitative research on regional trends in child marriage in Bangladesh, including risk and protective factors, and relevant structural changes, using available data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys;
- Do a qualitative study on the context of child marriage, including social and gender norms and other contextual factors influencing the practice;
- Develop guidelines for consideration in the designing of new survey tools, data collection and data analysis based on an analytical review of the existence of gender biases in existing surveys used in the country (e.g., the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the national survey on coverage of basic social services, and other surveys and evaluations conducted by UNICEF in Bangladesh);
- Build a common understanding of social norms, gender norms and child marriage among stakeholders, including the Government, through workshops, and continue to support evidence generation to inform existing data gaps and advocacy asks.



## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. UNFPA and UNICEF in Bangladesh worked with 35 partners during the year. Of these, 9 are government bodies (across the sectors of, for example, health, education, gender, social protection and justice), 17 civil society organizations and 6 media institutions. The Bangladesh Football Federation, the Bangladesh Scouts and the Bangladesh Cricket Board are youth-led organizations engaged by the programme. A lesson from the year was the importance of diversifying the pool of partners to ensure flexibility and sustainability of programme implementation, also during challenging times.

The close partnership between UNFPA and UNICEF in the country continued during the year, with enhanced results as a result – for example, the joint development of learning and training tools and their planned roll-out has helped to produce high-quality products that are embedded in the systems of the Government through joint advocacy and technical support. One example is the standardized adolescent empowerment package, which is a common package to be used by all adolescent clubs supported by UNFPA and UNICEF, with master trainers coming from clubs supported by both agencies as well as the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs project directors. In 2020, some 55 potential master trainers were engaged by the programme, led by the Child Protection team in UNICEF Bangladesh. The two agencies also worked closely on the completion of the National Adolescent Strategy, which was developed in a thorough process that included consultations with diverse partners and networks of UNFPA and UNICEF, resulting in a product of solid quality.

In terms of evidence generation, a memorandum of understanding has been signed between the two agencies for a joint institutional contract with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on data, evidence and research, to ensure enhanced technical support to the institution for all the planned deliverables and their wide dissemination and use. UNFPA and UNICEF are also jointly working with the Girls Not Brides secretariat and the national non-governmental organization Manusher Jonno Foundation to do a rapid analysis of the child marriage situation during COVID-19, which will help in jointly assessing the work of the two agencies and adapting it to the new context. The findings will further support joint advocacy for an evidence-based 8th fiscal year plan and the new United Nations development framework for Bangladesh. Joint advocacy was also conducted around the launch of the new data on child marriage in Bangladesh in 2020, led by the State Minister of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

The plan for 2020 was to jointly develop a common approach and implementation plan for each of the outcome areas of the Global Programme but due to the focus on COVID-19 this was not possible. In 2021, both organizations will prioritize this within the newly emerging context of the country.

Due to the nature of 2020 and the focus on the COVID-19 public health response, there was little focus and time for strengthening the capacities of the partners and internal staff to further enhance the implementation of interventions to end child marriage. In 2021 this will be another important area of focus.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

The Global Programme aims to ensure the participation of children, adolescents and youth in the development of programme strategies, in advocacy and communication, and in research initiatives – to make sure that their voices are heard and taken into account. In terms of communication, the Day of the Girl and linked advocacy events specifically provided various ways and platforms to lift girls' voices in 2020. For example, UNICEF Youth Ambassador Raba Khan published a letter to her teenage self on Instagram.<sup>10</sup> Two live events during the year focused on understanding adolescent girls' perspectives as key actors in shaping the agenda to

eliminate child marriage, including key investments and support required to set girls on a path towards empowerment. A round-table event with child journalists also took place focused on the rise in child marriage due to the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

Another example of lifting girls' voices was the participation of Nusrat Islam Trisha, a child journalist, in the UNICEF-produced video series 'Coping with COVID-19', a global production that ran over five weeks of the summer in 2020, showing the lives and experiences of adolescent girls during the pandemic.

A local follow-up documentary series, also featuring Trisha, is currently airing in the country. Trisha is among the child journalists supported by the Global Programme. During the year, news reports on the state of child marriage in the country and on the impact of school closures on child marriage were published on the child journalist platform of bdnews24.com.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of social media, the programme continued to ensure year-round communication on child marriage across the platforms and accounts of UNFPA and UNICEF, with messaging in line with communication for development interventions. Specific messages on gender and child marriage in the context of COVID-19 were also produced and shared.<sup>13</sup> The programme further published a press release linked to the release of the new data on child marriage from Bangladesh during the

year,<sup>14</sup> and published a story on the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage from the lens of the child helpline.<sup>15</sup> For the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (25 November–10 December), UNFPA conducted an art competition with the partner organization Mukthi, where girls from Cox's Bazar were asked to draw their bright futures as they see them.<sup>16</sup>

To document good practices and the impact of the sports-for-development interventions to end child marriage, a series of photo and video documentation activities were initiated in 2020, including capturing photos, videos and case studies on girls from vulnerable and at-risk communities who have been integrated into the national-level training and tournament programmes for football. These are currently pending review and further processing before publishing.

### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	209,086	88,770
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	260,029	44,529
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	594,037	11,301,743
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	8,000,000	38,497,147
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	26,722	13,510
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	0	5
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	50	0
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	572	182
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	1	8
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	3	0
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage generated	7	4
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



# BURKINA FASO

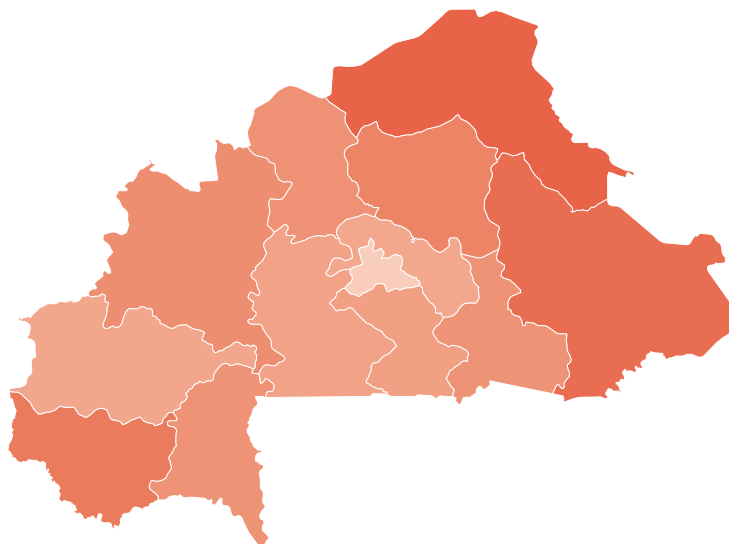
COUNTRY PROFILE





# BURKINA FASO

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Burkina Faso Demographic and Health Survey 2010. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Burkina Faso is home to 3 million child brides. Of these, 500,000 married before age 15. The country has not shown evidence of progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage in the last 25 years, with the prevalence being stagnant at 52 per cent of all girls being married in childhood. Hence, without any observed rate of change, the projected prevalence of the harmful practice will remain the same as today’s levels until signs of progress are evident.<sup>17</sup>



Girls in Burkina Faso are not only at risk of child marriage, but also the harmful practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). An analysis of the relation between the two practices in the country showed that of all women (aged 18–49 years), 42.3 per cent had been subjected to both child marriage and FGM, whereas 9.5 per cent had been married in childhood but had not undergone FGM. This means that about 4 out of 5 child brides in the country are also survivors of FGM. While the practice of child marriage has not declined, FGM has declined slightly in the country in the past decade.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike in Burkina Faso, globally the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent over the past decade, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls being married before they turn 18 years old. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade,

UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million additional girls globally will be at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic.<sup>19</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic’s economic impact.<sup>20</sup> This poses a big risk for girls in Burkina Faso, as women in the country without any education are 3.7 times more likely to experience child marriage than women with a secondary education or higher. The economic impact of the pandemic constitutes a further risk, as women in the poorest wealth quintile are twice as likely to be married in childhood than women in the richest wealth quintile.<sup>21</sup>

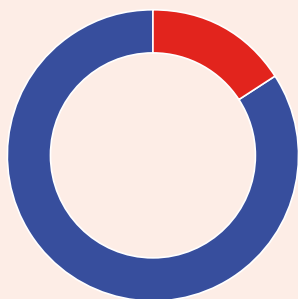
In addition, while the world grappled with the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, Burkina Faso was also grappling with an ongoing security situation. As described in the February

2021 Situation Report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over the past two years, there has been a sharp deterioration in the security situation across Burkina Faso's northern and eastern regions due to the presence of non-state armed groups. Violence has resulted in the emergence of an unprecedented humanitarian emergency in a country more traditionally subject to chronic food and nutritional insecurity than to armed conflict. Violence led to the displacement of more than 1 million people in just two years and has left 3.5 million people in need of assistance – a 60 per cent increase between January 2020 and January 2021. Food insecurity and malnutrition remain at alarming levels, especially in areas affected by insecurity. As of January 2021, more than 10,000 cases of COVID-19 were confirmed, along with 118 deaths. Humanitarian needs are at their highest since 2018. In response to the pandemic, more than 2,000 schools were closed, affecting over 300,000 students and 11,000 teachers.<sup>22</sup>

The Sahelian region of Burkina Faso (the northern parts of the country) has a higher prevalence of child marriage than the national average. UNICEF analysis shows that in five of the nine countries spanning the Sahel, levels of child marriage are higher in states or provinces inside the region compared to those outside the Sahel, as is the case for Burkina Faso. While the national prevalence of child marriage is 52 per cent, it is 48 per cent in non-Sahelian regions and 65 per cent in Sahelian regions.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these challenges and setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

Burkina Faso is home to **3 million child brides**. Of these, **500,000 married before age 15**. Is the data from the first page of the Burkina profile, so the proportion would be  $\frac{1}{6}$  married by 15.



$\frac{1}{6}$   
married by 15.

Source: UNICEF analysis based of the Burkina Faso Demographic and Health Survey 2010.



## Key highlights



**120,629**  
adolescent girls and



**48,183**  
boys aged 10-19 years engaged in life-skills training and comprehensive sexuality education in



**3,279**  
adolescent clubs and safe spaces, including



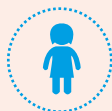
**151**  
girls living with disabilities, and



**1,211**  
girls at risk of child marriage supported in developing income-generating activities.



The adolescent clubs' facilitation guide was revised to incorporate COVID-19 and gender-sensitive parenting modules in addition to modules on sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, girls' rights and the consequences of child marriage.



**32,956** adolescent girls were supported by the programme to enrol and remain in primary and secondary school despite the disruptions in schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 'Thanks to Us' initiative, with a focus on positive masculinity and strengthening intersectoral coordination for adolescents, was launched, reaching 176,775 men and boys in 630 new villages and 34 husbands schools supported by the programme.

Close to

**10,000**

community leaders were capacitated through training and sensitization platforms to lead change in the transformation of social norms and to create an environment for the protection of adolescent girls from harmful practices.

**237,555**

individuals were newly enrolled and engaged in community dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.





## 2020 Achievements



# 1,110

**girls** from the safe spaces programme adopted contraceptive methods through counselling and support.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Through the Global Programme, 120,629 adolescent girls have strengthened their life-skills and their knowledge about child marriage. This was achieved through their participation in activities and training at 3,279 clubs and safe spaces in 7 of the 13 regions of the country. The adolescent club facilitation guide has been revised to take into account COVID-19 and gender-sensitive parenting, in addition to modules on sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, girls' rights, and the consequences of child marriage. The skills these adolescent girls acquired empowered and enabled them to better take control of their sexuality and guided them in making responsible and informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

# 120,629

**adolescent girls** have strengthened their life-skills and their knowledge about child marriage.

In view of the COVID-19 epidemic and the preventive measures put in place at the national level, the programme's implementation partners have been supported to ensure continuity of services through the provision of protective equipment, including masks, hand-washing equipment such as alcohol-based hand gels, and in accordance with social distancing rules. The programme reinforced the focus of maintaining 32,956 girls in school. These girls were systematically identified by the programme as the most at risk and families were encouraged to support their stay in school.

The programme reinforced the focus of maintaining

# 32,956

**girls in school.**

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Community-targeted approaches remain critical in Burkina Faso, given its history, social and political organization, and culture. The capacity of nearly 10,000 community leaders was reinforced through training and sensitization sessions designed to encourage them to

The skills adolescent girls acquire empower and enable them to better take control of their sexuality and guide them in making responsible and informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

become agents of change in the transformation of social norms, and the creation of a favourable environment for the protection of adolescents against traditional harmful practices such as child marriage. These leaders – including customary and religious leaders, women’s leaders, members of village development committees and municipal councillors – have been encouraged to respect girls’ fundamental rights to education, sexual and reproductive health information, and to make choices about when and with who to seal marriage ties without coercion. The training of religious leaders in intervention villages has enabled the start of marriage registration in 1,069 villages out of 1,350 (78 per cent of the intervention villages) in 2020.

To build social consensus for the abandonment of child marriage, nearly 240,000 men, women, girls and boys were involved in community dialogues, which continued through focus groups and educational talks. Such community dialogues aimed to bring about favourable change for the rights of women and girls, particularly through strengthening parenting skills, family planning, COVID-19 risk communication, information on the consequences of child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and the benefits of keeping them in school. In 2020, some 630 new villages publicly declared the abandonment of the practice of child marriage. With the aim of supporting the social dynamic against child marriage, monitoring units have been set up in the villages. These villages and their leaders have committed to ensuring compliance with the commitments made by the communities and continuing the dialogue on social issues. To ensure the effectiveness of their post-reporting actions, 400 monitoring cells from 400 villages that had already made declarations in the eastern and north-central regions benefited from capacity-building sessions.

Strategic alliances have been forged with local media, amplifying messages against the practice of child marriage to promote its abandonment. Fifty journalists from television, radio, print, online and institutional press were trained on the issue of child marriage, and a network of journalists was set up following the training to promote the abandonment of child marriage. The UNICEF ‘Don’t Call Me Madam’ campaign<sup>24</sup> to combat child marriage launched in 2019 continued with all stakeholders. The local population, especially teenagers and young people, have taken active part in the caravans organized by SMARTY, a famous Burkinabe musician, champion for the promotion of the abandonment of child marriage, and UNICEF’s National Goodwill Ambassador to Burkina Faso. SMARTY has also contributed to the public’s awareness of this issue, including its consequences and alternatives to child marriage, especially with his flagship song ‘[Shadow of the Night](#)’.

A study conducted by UNICEF confirms the key role of communication interventions for social and behavioural change. For example, 69.2 per cent of people in five regions of the country surveyed (Boucle du Mouhoun, North Central, East, North and Central Plateau) are aware of the legal age of marriage for girls compared with 45.6 per cent for the legal age for boys. The proportions are higher among those who know the harmful consequences of child marriage (85 per cent) and those who refuse to marry their child before the age of 18 (81 per cent).

Given that social relations in Burkina Faso between women and men are marked by the subordination of women and girls to men who have the authority, power and management of household assets, it is appropriate to support the strengthening of boys’ capacities to understand gender equality, to respect and protect their sisters and later their wives and children for a more equitable and human rights-based society. The programme had a gender-synchronous approach focused on building the self-protection capacity of adolescent girls involved in clubs and involving boys to support behavioural change in communities. Positive masculinity is an important factor in changing standards to ensure the dignity of girls and women. Boys and men enrolled in 34 husbands schools as part of the ‘Thanks to Us’ initiative have received training on issues of positive masculinity and their role in harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and FGM, and committed to protecting at least one girl from child marriage. An additional 48,183 boys were supported through modular sessions on life-skills, gender, human rights, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and other topics.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The effectiveness in implementing the programme’s activities at the community level was limited by COVID-19 containment measures, including travel restrictions, physical distancing, restrictions on mass groupings, mandatory wearing of masks, and hand-washing measures. In addition, insecurity in some communities, marked by killings and abductions of civilian populations, has compromised the ability to carry out community activities requiring groupings such as meetings of large groups. One of the next steps is to strengthen support to families in displaced and host communities to better protect children from child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation.

### Strengthening systems

The implementation of the advanced strategy for the identification of at-risk children at the community level and supporting them through life-skills training,



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The gender-sensitive parenting module served as the basis for training all community support technicians and **1,150** community actors (**550** men and **600** women) involved in outreach.

economic empowerment, and improved relationships with parents has decreased the child marriage risk for 110,471 girls and boys.

The involvement of state technical services at the municipal and provincial levels, including child protection networks at all levels of the national child protection system, has enabled the delivery of cross-sector services to 1,078 girls who were victims of child marriage, and to protect 490 girls who were promised in marriage. The provincial directorates in charge of women, national solidarity, family and humanitarian action, and community social services in all 45 provinces were supported to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into their activities. The gender-sensitive parenting module served as the basis for training all community support technicians and 1,150 community actors (550 men and 600 women) involved in outreach. Fifty-five service delivery points in programme areas providing

adolescent-friendly and minimum-standard health services at all levels of the health system have been strengthened. Some 220 health-care providers have been trained in the minimum initial service package for sexual and reproductive health in crisis, and in adolescent sexual and reproductive health, family planning and HIV protocols to ensure high-quality services to adolescents as needed. As a result, 1,110 girls from the safe spaces programme adopted contraceptive methods through counselling and support.

#### Addressing poverty

Social protection programmes to support vulnerable children at risk or victims of child marriage have been implemented with three types of partners. The Family and Child Branch is part of a pilot programme to prevent and protect children from child marriage in areas of high security challenges. This pilot programme



served as a framework for understanding the new vulnerabilities of children affected by the crisis to child marriage, raising awareness among internally displaced populations and host communities about the abandonment of child marriage, child protection and the adoption of child rights-friendly social practices. It was also used to implement cash transfers for 200 adolescent girls doubly affected by insecurity and at risk of child marriage to strengthen their autonomy and resilience. The one-time unconditional transfer of 35,000 CFA (about US\$60) per girl was combined with psychosocial care and family mediation, where parents also had their skills strengthened for better supervision of children while respecting their rights. Seven public and community centres were supported to provide trade training for 821 girls, married and unmarried. And finally, non-governmental organizations developed income-generating activities for 190 adolescent girls (as part of a wider programme), who received equipment, raw materials, cash and savings accounts.

In response to a consistent demand from adolescent girls coming to safe spaces, and in alignment with the theory of change, the programme invested in providing opportunities for girls to learn a trade. Some 1,211 adolescent girls at risk of child marriage were supported in developing income-generating activities through several strategies: technical training and internships, equipment, endowment of raw materials, and cash transfers. Soap-making, weaving, sheep-fattening, poultry farming and household arts are some of the trades that were taught.

### Challenges and lessons learned

Adolescents are demanding empowerment programmes for their emancipation and in response to the economic pressures driving parents to marry off their children. However, the conditions for their implementation are limited because the supply is insufficient and undiversified. This weakness in supply increases the cost of training, development and equipment, which does not allow this activity to be easily scaled up. There is also a lack of integration with other youth and employment support programmes, which limits the possibilities of a wider enlistment of beneficiaries. An upcoming impact evaluation will provide additional understanding and a path forward to improving these components.

The security crisis resulted in massive displacement and reduced the capacity of households to meet the basic needs of children, potentially an aggravating factor in marriages in the most affected communities.

Efforts to combat child marriage, particularly through educational talks, community dialogues and safe clubs/spaces, make important secondary contributions to

child protection activities, in terms of both referencing violence against children and birth registration. As a result of child marriage programme interventions, 578 abused children, including 383 girls, were identified, referred and cared for according to their needs in social services in the various communities.

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

The multisectoral platform to end child marriage, coordinated by the Government, served as an accountability framework. This active platform allowed monitoring of progress during the year and the proposal of solutions to address various challenges, including adaptation to COVID-19.

The programme supported the annual session of the piloting and coordination platform for the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage. The session resulted in establishing the budget for the implementation of the operational action plan of the strategy, and the presentation and adoption of the draft 2021 plan. Additionally, the action plans of the Ministry for Social Action and National Solidarity in all 45 provinces and 13 regions now include specific lines of intervention to end child marriage in their various localities.

During 2020, advocacy for the adoption of the revised Code of Persons and Women was continued at the national level. A national workshop helped build consensus on the major changes expected, particularly in terms of harmonization and raising the minimum age of marriage. At the community level, there is a growing level of civil society involvement, as well as that of customary and religious leaders, and local government actors in support to adolescents and the reporting of child marriages, particularly when they involve students who are taken out of school for marriage.

In addition, with the support of other programmes, the country has adopted the National Child Protection Strategy 2019–2023 and its Operational Action Plan and the National Action Plan to Combat Child Violence. These programmatic tools will help promote the abandonment of child marriage, clearly identified as a vulnerability of children at the country level.

### Lessons learned and next steps

More effort is needed to encourage actors at all levels to adopt gender-transformative approaches for the real involvement and accountability of men and women in promoting the rights of girls and women. The programme will be supporting the development and advocating the adoption of a three-year Operational Action Plan 2021–2024 to end child marriage.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

An impact study of interventions to support adolescent girls aged 15–19 in the development of income-generating activities and increase their economic empowerment was carried out during 2020. It aims to analyse the economic and social benefits of this component of interventions on beneficiaries (direct and indirect), as well as on the status of adolescent girls; and analyse the potential effects and impacts of the intervention on accelerating the abandonment of child marriages. The report of this study is being finalized.

A comparative analysis between the results of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) 2010 and the Continuous Multisectoral Survey 2015 was carried out with the technical support of the Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie. In 2015, more than

half of young women (51.3 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds) had entered their first union before the age of 18, a situation almost identical to 2010 (51.6 per cent). Prevalence of marriage before age 15 was 8.9 per cent in 2015, slightly down from 10.2 per cent in 2010. For men aged 20–24, the prevalence of marriage before 18 was 1.6 per cent, down by more than 2 percentage points from 2010 (4 per cent) and was virtually nil for marriage under the age of 15. Women living in rural areas (63 per cent), the Sahel region (76.6 per cent), or the poorest households (70.5 per cent) were most affected. For marriage before age 15, prevalence has increased in the North-Central and South-Central regions, and decreased in the Sahel region.

An impact evaluation of community interventions for the elimination of child marriage, FGM and violence against children has been initiated and will be completed in 2021.

## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Burkina Faso, 14 partners were engaged by the programme. Of these, 11 are civil society organizations and 3 are government bodies. Among the civil society organizations, Association Trait d'Union des Jeunes Burkinabe is youth-led, ensuring that young people's voices are heard and taken into account in programming and policymaking. The government bodies have a focus on gender, women and children.

The complementary interventions of UNFPA and UNICEF have been deepened through four joint initiatives

in 2020: coordinating sessions of the multisectoral platform on child marriage; revising the facilitator's guide to incorporate key COVID-19 prevention messages; supporting advocacy for the adoption of the revised Family and Persons Code; and supporting the action and lobbying group GALOP, an association mainly composed of the wives of senior officials and chaired by the First Lady. In view of the transition to a larger-scale programme, the two organizations regularly analyse the areas of interventions for optimal geographical convergence and joint delivery, to take advantage of each organization's comparative advantages to achieve results and deliver a consolidated package of services.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

In 2020, musician SMARTY became a UNICEF National Goodwill Ambassador in Burkina Faso.<sup>25</sup> SMARTY has been part of the campaign 'Don't Call Me Madam' (Ne m'appelez pas madame), which aims to raise awareness around child marriage in the country and change norms around the practice to enable its elimination.<sup>26</sup> In 2019, for example, SMARTY travelled across Burkina Faso to help raise public awareness

around child marriage, notably through his flagship song 'Ombre de la Nuit'.

To further increase public awareness around child marriage, the programme supported a workshop with journalists and media stakeholders during the year, where the participants pledged to promote the elimination of the practice in the country through media.<sup>27</sup>

**Summary of output indicator performance (2020)**

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	156,529	120,629
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	7,752	32,956
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	35,000	176,775
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	156,151	237,555
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women, and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	1,527,014	3,000,000
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	300	9,978
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized by the Global Programme in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality	2	4
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	43	0
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	120	0
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	3	4
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	3	1
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	2	1
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	2	2
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.





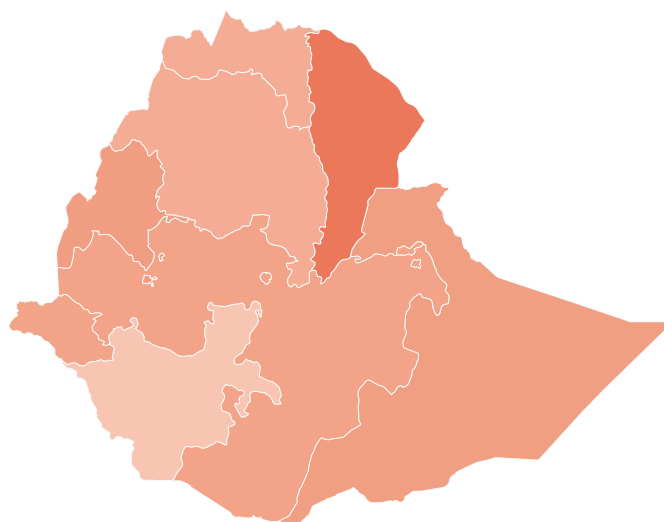
# ETHIOPIA

COUNTRY PROFILE



# ETHIOPIA

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Ethiopia is home to 15 million child brides. Of these, 6 million married before age 15. The country has shown that even in countries with high prevalence levels of child marriage to start with, progress is possible. Since 1980, the prevalence of the practice has declined from 75 per cent to 40 per cent of young women being married before their 18th birthday. However, progress needs to be accelerated to meet the ambitious target of eliminating the practice by 2030 as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If progress observed over the last 10 years is doubled, the prevalence level will be down to 2 per cent first in 2050. And if the observed rate of progress continues at the current pace, the prevalence will be 9 per cent in 2050.<sup>28</sup>



In addition to being subjected to child marriage, girls are also at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation (FGM) in Ethiopia. Of all women aged 18–49 in the country, 13.8 per cent have ‘only’ gone through child marriage, while 37.8 per cent have been subjected to both harmful practices (child marriage and FGM). Younger women are less likely than older women to have experienced both practices, since both child marriage and FGM have become less common in Ethiopia.<sup>29</sup>

Like in Ethiopia, the global community has also seen a decrease in child marriage prevalence. Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as

a result of COVID-19, making the total number of girls at risk of child marriage by 2030 some 110 million girls worldwide.<sup>30</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) further estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic’s economic impact.<sup>31</sup> This poses a big risk for girls in Ethiopia, as women in the country without any education are 3.4 times more likely to have experienced child marriage than women with a secondary education or higher.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these challenges, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

## Key highlights



### The Global Programme reached



**152,782**  
adolescent girls and



**17,420**  
boys with prevention and protection services, including legal, psychosocial and case management services across the target regions.



Over  
**152,000**

adolescent girls were reached through life-skills training, including comprehensive sexuality education, with information and skills on sexual and reproductive health, and legal and psychosocial services.



Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme was able to reach adolescent girls with essential information and skills, as well as support girls' school attendance and community-based positive gender norms interventions, thus ensuring continuity of much needed gender-responsive services.



**MORE THAN 5,000 GIRLS WERE PROVIDED WITH SANITARY AND DIGNITY MATERIALS DURING THE YEAR.**

Under the recently launched **National Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C**, over

**10 MILLION**

individuals were reached via national and subnational media broadcasts throughout the country



The Global Programme reached over

**480,000**

community members, including boys, men and community gatekeepers such as faith-based organizations, with educational interventions and community dialogues, despite COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings.

## 2020 Achievements



Through complementary funding from the Government of Canada,

# 51,062

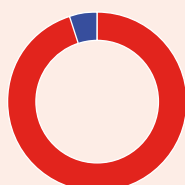
**copies of guidelines** for the school clubs were printed in eight languages and are expected to reach over

# 42,000

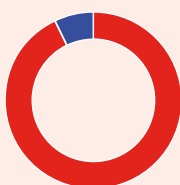
**primary and secondary schools.**



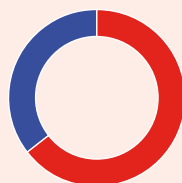
Data collected from **Amhara, Oromia** and **Somali regions**, where the programme has been implemented, indicated that **95 per cent, 93 per cent and 71 per cent**, respectively, of all girls went back to school.



**95% Amhara**



**93% Oromia**



**71% Somali**

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme works across the socioecological framework in Ethiopia by working with adolescent girls at risk of child marriage; influencers (e.g., family members, including women, men and boys; and community leaders such as religious and clan leaders); law enforcement bodies; the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth structures at different levels; health-care facilities; schools; and community structures such as Women Development Groups and Community Surveillance Committees and parent-teacher associations. The approach notes the importance of the interaction between these groups and structures, complemented by interventions to bring meaningful change.

Comprehensive capacity-building of girls, including life-skills, legal literacy and facilitation skills training, was carried out in six target regions in 2020, reaching 152,782 adolescent girls. Adolescent girls are targeted through these activities to increase their life-skills and individual agency, their ability to access information and services (including sexual and reproductive health, legal and psychosocial services, and support mechanisms), and build their confidence to protect themselves and their peers from child marriage. Continued support has been given to platforms such as girls' clubs both within and outside schools and safe spaces. These clubs give girls collective power for joint action when members of the clubs face the risk of child marriage. Dialogues in the clubs facilitate the exchange of experiences and information on the consequences of child marriage, strategies to negotiate with family members and to access prevention and response services, the benefit of education and how to support one another. Most of the girls were engaged in life-skills sessions and other training in the first quarter of 2020, before the pandemic hit the country. To ensure continued outreach during the pandemic, the programme adjusted its delivery of interventions by reducing the number of girls attending sessions, carrying out follow-up activities by telephone and engaging community volunteers for house-to-house visits.

Through complementary funding from the Government of Canada, 51,062 copies of guidelines for the school clubs were printed in eight languages and are expected to reach over 42,000 primary and secondary schools.



The guidelines inform school leaders on how to establish and run the clubs and how to engage boys, as well as provide specific examples on how to implement life-skills training.

In 2020, some 3,749 child marriage arrangements were identified, 2,051 (55 per cent) of which were cancelled by law enforcement bodies and/or community structures. Compared with the previous year, 2020 saw a decrease in child marriage reports: over the same period in 2019, some 4,991 cases of child marriage were reported, with 1,885 (37 per cent) of these being cancelled. Despite the lack of access to schools from 16 March until schools reopened in November 2020, cancellations of marriages were made possible through support mechanisms used by adolescent girls, such as going through members of the girls' clubs, community groups and anonymous suggestion boxes in the communities. That reporting of child marriage cases continued despite the COVID-19 outbreak indicates the success of girls' empowerment initiatives such as life-skills training and legal literacy sessions that have built the confidence of girls to seek support from community structures. Pre-COVID-19, schools enabled more than 80 per cent of child marriage arrangements to be reported. However, the increased functionality of community structures (e.g., women's development groups and surveillance mechanisms) to track child marriage cases, support girls and disseminate educational messages helped fill the support gap while schools were closed. The effectiveness of community

structures has been made possible by the support given by the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth and regional attorney generals to the structures to conduct more outreach activities through house-to-house visits. To ensure that these outreach activities could be conducted in a safe manner, project staff and representatives of community structures were provided with personal protective equipment (PPE).

During field monitoring visits to Afar, Amhara, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' (SNNP) regions, it was observed that girls have the confidence to initiate discussions and influence decisions at the household level about when and whom they would marry, negotiate time for studying and participate in girls' club activities. Though not presented as something they encouraged, parents reported that girls do not accept their request for marriage as per the previous norm and they, as parents, no longer have the power to force their daughters as a parental right.

In partnership with VIAMO (a technology company and long-term agreement partner of UNICEF), the programme initiated a pilot project to reach leaders of the girls' clubs within the SNNP region with refresher training on facilitating discussions and activities through interactive voice response (IVR) technology, using their mobile phones. Based on the results from this pilot initiative, the IVR messaging with girls' club leaders will be scaled up to other regions.

## STORIES OF GIRLS

Girls leading the girls' clubs in SNNP region are witnessing how their leadership and communication capacities have improved. Alemnesh Ayele, the facilitator of the girls' club in Alemkorosa kebele, Dara woreda, describes how her confidence and pride have increased thanks to the role she is playing in engaging adolescent girls in discussions and encouraging them to continue their education. Alemnesh also supports the cancellation of child marriage arrangements in collaboration with the Woreda for Women, Children and Youth. Alemnesh notes that she sees a clear change in attitude among community members towards girls' education. Despite the

distance they had to travel, Alemnesh and her co-facilitators disseminated information and continued to engage adolescent girls through house-to-house visits during school closures because of COVID-19. Similarly, Asnakech Kebede, the girls' club facilitator in Delewache kebele, Dara woreda, notes how, by engaging out-of-school girls, the programme has increased their knowledge and enhanced their confidence to openly discuss issues around menstrual health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, when and whom to marry, and their life goals. Members of the clubs are eager to participate in the discussions and do not miss any sessions.



Even though ad hoc reports showed that school closures created a challenging situation for girls due to increased risks of child marriage, the proportion of girls who went back to school after eight months of closures showed promising results. Data collected from Amhara, Oromia and Somali regions, where the programme has been implemented, indicated that 95 per cent, 93 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively, of all girls went back to school. In most instances, the proportion of girls back in school is greater than that of boys. Although no specific assessment has been conducted on why the rate of girls returning in Somali Region is lower than for the other regions, factors related to the socioeconomic and cultural profile of the region might contribute to the situation, such as general level of literacy, infrastructure, penetration of media and value placed on girls' education.

Also during the year, the programme supported the national life-skills manual to be adapted, contextualized and translated into local languages and with specific training for Oromia, SNNP and Somali regions. The plan is to adapt the manual for delivery through radio and/or television in 2021. A desk review to inform the development of a manual for out-of-school girls' engagement with an implementation guide and monitoring framework has also been initiated, after agreement with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth and the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth that the manual is to be implemented under their leadership in targeted regions.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions on gatherings, movement in some areas, and school closures affected project implementation in 2020. The restrictions caused a temporary suspension of life-skills training at the onset of the pandemic. Factors related to COVID-19 also delayed initiatives, such as the development of the out-of-school girls engagement manual and implementation guidelines, which require evidence gathering and consultation at field level.

A lesson has been drawn regarding the adaptation of interventions to contexts such as COVID-19 and during restrictions on mobility and gatherings. The programme will increasingly translate interventions – including educational messaging around the rights of girls, reproductive health and self-managed psychosocial practices (e.g., breathing and relaxation techniques) – into media and digital formats, such as radio and telephone, as appropriate. To respond to girls' needs in times of humanitarian situations, it is useful to proactively think of ensuring integration of specific content on techniques of psychosocial support into existing manuals, including in the out-of-school girls engagement manual which is currently being developed.

Another lesson has been drawn about the value of out-of-school girls' engagement and community-level interventions such as strengthening of surveillance mechanisms. This was evident in the efforts made by those structures to maintain the continuity of community-level discussions through village-to-village and house-to-house visits despite the pandemic. The structures' availability was also vital for girls to be able to report and receive immediate support when they were at risk of child marriage.

Targeting out-of-school girls with meaningful empowerment interventions is challenging as, without schools, there is no strong platform that brings girls together. To respond to this challenge, as mentioned, the programme is supporting the development of an evidence-based implementation manual and monitoring framework – led by the non-governmental organization CARE – to ensure a stronger involvement of out-of-school girls in the programme.

In 2021, in line with COVID-19 protocols and to ensure that activities reach the furthest rural areas, there is a plan to deliver life-skills training via radio, supplemented by additional offline activities, to ensure the interactive part of skills-building.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Community structures such as women development groups, anti-harmful traditional practices committees and other surveillance mechanisms play a critical role in disseminating information, tracking child marriage arrangements and facilitating cancellation of such cases. Yaleme Dires, aged 42 and leader of a committee in Qanat kebele, Farta woreda, Amhara region, expressed that the committee members were concerned about the vulnerability of adolescent girls to child marriage due to the school closures – and that this motivated her and other members to conduct house-to-house visits in the village to raise awareness on the harms of child marriage. Yaleme explained that their messaging was focused on helping girls and families to raise their hopes, by explaining that the pandemic is a temporary challenge. Through these visits, Yaleme and the other committee members provided reassurance that children will be back in school, and explained the consequences of negative coping strategies such as child marriage and uninformed and illegal migration. As a result, Yaleme said that no child marriages were carried out in her kebele during the lockdowns, and she is currently working with the kebele and school administrations to ensure that girls are going back to school.

To intensify collective community action to delay marriage and support girls' education or alternative life options (e.g., entrepreneurship training to support out-of-school girls to initiate their own small businesses), the Global Programme supports interventions targeting families and communities. Such interventions create a protective and empowering environment that enables girls to develop their potential and thrive. Community dialogues are a critical component in promoting a supportive and equal environment. The dialogues bring together men, women and community leaders



bi-weekly or monthly to engage in critical reflection around child marriage. The dialogues help individuals to reflect on the consequences of child marriage, the importance of enrolling girls in school and how to support girls' education. Since the end of May 2020, the number of people who attend the dialogues has been reduced from an average of 50 to between 7 and 12 individuals due to COVID-19 restrictions. Partners were

supported to cover the costs of PPE for community-level interventions. As witnessed by facilitators, the limited number of attendees has increased the quality of the reflections among participants. During the year, the programme was able to reach 484,696 community members with educational interventions and community dialogues, despite COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings.

● **Ateref Asaye, aged 30** and a community conversation facilitator, said that community engagement had been using different opportunities to disseminate information and to maintain the momentum, such as social gatherings at religious ceremonies and masses in church. The community dialogue members have been assigned the role of 'eyes and ears' of the communities, to cautiously watch how the community behaves in relation to child marriage. These members are also active in undertaking visits to villages and selected households to ensure that marriages are not being arranged behind the scenes. Ateref said that her husband, a priest, also played a key role in disseminating the educational message on child marriage to his congregation during church services. She further explained how his support is helping her to continue her role as an active facilitator and community change agent.

The testimonies from community members gathered during field monitoring and community dialogue sessions show increasing changes in attitudes towards child marriage, the readiness of parents to delay marriage for their daughters and expression of support for girls' education. Some parents in Amhara and SNNP regions said that they do not want their girls to repeat the same lifestyle and experience the deprivation they are facing due to their own limited schooling opportunities and forced marriage during childhood. In addition, the number of girls facing punishment from parents after reporting child marriage arrangements has decreased (reported by girls themselves).

The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth says that more than 2,000 communities (representing a population of 6 million people) across the target regions

are claiming that they are free from child marriage. However, these data still require validation through evidence generation.

● **Abala Obala, aged 30**, and Ato Okach Cham, aged 25, community facilitators in Jore woreda, Gambella region, said that they, together with seven members of an anti-harmful traditional practices committee, continued dialogues and to disseminate messages to the community dialogues members by going house to house during the pandemic. Ato Odol Omod, information and planning expert at Jore Woreda Bureau of Women, Children and Youth, said that the office is currently assessing the situation in consultation with community facilitators and health workers to come up with a plan to resume the regular community dialogues.

In addition to community dialogues with all community members, the programme also reached 178,501 men and boys with specific dialogues on the roles of men and boys in supporting adolescent girls to continue their education and reject child marriage. This intervention has helped support girls whose marriages have been

cancelled to maintain relationships with their families. Some boys consulted during field-level programme monitoring visits in SNNP and Amhara regions also expressed changes in attitudes and pledged to play an active role against child marriage in their communities.



The programme engaged 147,108 religious and other community leaders across the six programme target regions, leading to a renewed commitment to ending the practice of child marriage by these leaders. Religious leaders have committed to requesting age verification before blessing marriage arrangements, which contributed to the cancellation of child marriage cases and further strengthened the collaboration and referral linkages between the leaders, health-care facilities and law enforcement bodies.

To further disseminate messaging on child marriage, the programme used media and digital platforms to reach 2,063,000 individuals with educational information around the harms of child marriage, the benefits of girls' education, information about the national road map to end child marriage and the roles of different actors in the roll-out of the road map. Text messages gathered by broadcasting agencies revealed that the programme is helping to trigger discussions and debates on the issue of child marriage among friends and families.

UNFPA in collaboration with the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation also prepared radio sessions on different sexual and reproductive health issues that were aired for an hour two days a week. The sessions covered healthy sexual options for young people, issues of sexual and reproductive rights, unintended pregnancies, options for youth to prevent pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, barriers to utilizing sexual and reproductive health services, and life-skills for coping with challenges faced by youth. The radio programme was found to be crucial for disseminating information to a large number of young people, especially as they were out of school.

The Global Programme also supported the national alliance against harmful practices to develop packages of messages on child marriage, FGM and gender-based violence, the increased risks for these practices during COVID-19, and where to seek support and services during lockdown. The aim is to integrate and align messaging among partners and contribute to ensuring consistency and coordination among different stakeholders.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

A challenge encountered during the year was the limited number of institutional bidders for the redesign of the community dialogues interventions, leading to delays in the planned activity. This may be because it was advertised during the early onset of COVID-19 and there may have been a reluctance to bid given the global and country-level uncertainty on research and travel. In 2021, redesign of the community dialogues will be done through the application of human-centred approaches to engage women, girls, men and boys in the planning of

interventions and to provide regular feedback to inform programme adjustments as needed. For example, the content of the community conversation manual will be designed with the involvement of community members in a way suited to each region. Similarly, the training and message dissemination in collaboration with VIAMO is also designed through a consultative process and will be tested with the target groups prior to implementation.

Another challenge during the year was the conflict in several parts of the country which impacted the pace of programme implementation. However, efforts were made to keep the implementation of interventions at the community level going, with support from local structures and with limited technical support from the regional Bureau of Women, Children and Youth. In particular, in some woredas of Afar and Oromia regions, where there were restrictions on mobility, provision of technical support by the regional bureau was difficult but took place in some instances over telephone.

Some of the main priorities for the programme going forward are to use media and digital platforms, such as IVR, to provide community dialogue facilitator training in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. These modalities will be used as a way to reach more community members and supplement regular interventions that involve face-to-face interactions. Further, the programme will engage faith-based institutions through Programme Cooperation Agreements to strengthen their engagement in ending child marriage. It will continue to ensure boys' and men's engagement using a social analysis and action approach in partnership with CARE, which is expected to strengthen the gender-transformative dimension of the programme.

### Strengthening systems

Capacity-building was carried out at 288 child protection service delivery points during the year, including technical training, review and exchange sessions, and the sharing of materials that can serve as additional references. This enhanced the capacity of prevention and protection services delivered by structures of the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth, the regional Attorneys General, police and courts at subnational and woreda levels, which enhanced the accessibility of the services. Adolescent girls who were at risk of child marriage received a basic level of psychosocial support by staff from the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth in the targeted regions. The staff who provided the psychosocial support have received capacity-building training from various agencies, including United Nations agencies, as part of the humanitarian response. Non-governmental organizations working in the regions were critical in creating such capacity. The trained staff also



During the year, the programme supported **5.1 million** children (**45 per cent girls**) out of **24 million** children in total in primary and secondary school to continue their education through radio and other online platforms during the national COVID-19 school closures (mid-March until October/November).



cascaded the training to staff of woreda-level women, children and youth administrations to fill a gap which had been created by turnover of trained staff. The provision of psychosocial support services in their own localities helped adolescent girls rescued from child marriages to deal with family relationships that may have been negatively affected by their decision to report and stop the child marriage arrangements. To respond to the COVID-19 context, the capacity-building interventions were adjusted to reduce the numbers of participants in training and workshops and to cover the cost of sanitizers and face coverings. Some of the meetings and follow-up activities (including coordination meetings among stakeholders) were also held virtually on Zoom, Telegram and WhatsApp.

In total, the Global Programme reached 152,782 adolescent girls and 17,420 boys with prevention and protection services, including legal, psychosocial and case management services, across the target regions in 2020. Some adolescent girls interviewed during field monitoring visits expressed their satisfaction with services provided and the way service providers treated them. They also appreciated that services were

comprehensive. For example, many of the services not only focused on illegal marriages but also used the opportunity for dialogue to convince families to accept the decision, which made girls most comfortable. On the other hand, the study 'Assessment of Barriers to Accessing Violence Against Women and Children Response Services in Refugee and Host Communities of Ethiopia', commissioned by UNICEF, reveals that girls in Gambella region prefer to address issues like child marriage arrangements through existing community mechanisms rather than taking them to law enforcement bodies. This is because of fear of causing harm to the family and the potential of disrupting harmonious relationships/social cohesion.

Although adolescent girls have information on the existence of health-care facilities in their areas, they are often not aware that adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services are available at those facilities. To give space to girls and link them to sexual and reproductive health services, safe spaces and girls' clubs have been established to provide access to information on life-skills, which helps develop their confidence and referral linkages. These spaces enable girls

to expand social networks, seek advice and information on family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and participate in wider community discussions to express and exercise their choices. The programme continued its support to adolescent girls in 2020 through the procurement and distribution of sanitary and dignity materials for in-school and out-of-school girls: more than 5,000 girls were provided with sanitary and dignity materials during the year.

Further, the programme directly supported government-run health-care facilities in Gambella region to provide age-appropriate youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services. The facilities were linked to girls for effective service provision and referrals. The programme also strengthened its partnerships with local organizations (e.g., health development armies) that have a stronger structure on the ground, to ensure continuity of sexual and reproductive health services as a preventative measure in case public health services became unavailable due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Support to community groups such as youth associations, youth volunteers and peer educators (whose members are mostly female) also ensures that implementing partners can easily monitor what is going on in communities in terms of sexual and reproductive health services, as well as occurrences of child marriage and gender-based violence.

During the year, the programme supported 5.1 million children (45 per cent girls) out of 24 million children in total in primary and secondary school to continue their education through radio and other online platforms during the national COVID-19 school closures (mid-March until October/November). Some 84 per cent of these are from Global Programme-targeted regions. The programme also supported the dissemination of messages around child marriage, gender-based violence, and mental health and psychosocial support during the school closures. As a result, more than 285,000 teachers in Amhara, Afar, Oromia and Somali regions were reached with relevant messages.

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The effort to institutionalize delivery of capacity-building for service providers will continue in collaboration with the Violence Against Children Programme, led by UNICEF. This will include the revision of the child justice training manual, roll-out of case management training, and development of the social and community workforce. Ensuring minimum requirements for services such as psychosocial services will be achieved by providing working manuals, procedures and good practices, and facilitating training opportunities for staff of implementing partners. Further, the social analysis and action approach to be implemented as part of the FGM

programme will be considered across all initiatives within the Global Programme to strengthen gender equality considerations throughout.

#### Addressing poverty

The Government's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) continued to reach vulnerable families in the target regions with direct support, cash for work, and participation in community mobilization interventions. The programme is supported by UNICEF and implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2020, some 910,000 adolescent girls benefited from the PSNP programme. The 'Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme: Analysis of protective pathways in Amhara Region' study carried out in 2019 by UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti and BDS Centre for Development Research was completed in early 2020, and revealed that there are several pathways of change the programme can contribute to delaying marriage, including supporting girls to remain in school. A change in attitudes towards child marriage and girls' education was observed among the families participating in the community mobilization interventions. Based on the findings of the study and the potential contribution of the programme in reducing the vulnerability of girls to child marriage through supporting girls' education, both UNICEF and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth will use the evidence to influence the design of the fifth phase of the PSNP.

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The fourth phase of the PSNP was in its last year of implementation in 2020. As a result, it was not possible to influence implementation and integrate the issue of child marriage into the programme. However, UNICEF is seeking to influence the design phase of the next phase of the PSNP, which began rolling out in January 2021. In collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF is working to ensure the inclusion of gender-based violence and child marriage indicators.

The national social protection scheme has several priorities that include improved nutrition and health outcomes, and facilitating linkages with other social services such as education and gender-based violence prevention. UNICEF is using the recent evidence that relates to the benefits of ending child marriage to be included in the next iteration of the PSNP, noting that it may be linked via health, nutrition and other social services. Considering that the goal of the PSNP is to contribute to reducing extreme poverty and enhancing resilience of extremely poor and vulnerable rural households, it also reduces vulnerability of adolescent girls to child marriage.

## Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policy, published in 2020 by the World Policy Analysis Center, found that the rate of child marriage was reduced by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts surrounding their enactment, fosters improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.<sup>33</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis that gender egalitarian laws positively impact norms regarding women's equality and empowerment at national and subnational levels.<sup>34</sup>

In Ethiopia, support is provided to the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth; the Federal Attorney General; the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth; and regional Attorneys General at different levels across the targeted regions. The increased support was channelled towards the familiarization and promotion of the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C (2020–2024),<sup>35</sup> advocacy for increased budget allocation, and strengthening of accountability and coordination mechanisms to prevent harmful practices at all levels.

The familiarization and roll-out of the National Costed Roadmap started in 2020 both at national and subnational levels. The aim of this effort is to familiarize the general public with the roadmap, the roles of different actors and the efforts of key stakeholders to end child marriage and FGM. This was done by organizing workshops with stakeholders, including national and regional-level officials, cabinet, parliament and council members, and non-governmental actors. Subsequently, a four-month media campaign was implemented in collaboration with Fana Broadcasting Corporate Share Company and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth. Broadcasts of interviews and panel discussions with government and the National Alliance representatives about their organizations' efforts, mandate and commitment in implementing the National Costed Roadmap were aired nationally and in six programme target regions. Between the end of July and the end of November 2020, some 4,063,000 individuals were reached in the targeted regions and 13.7 million people across the country through the media broadcasts. Anecdotal evidence from listeners indicates positive feedback and favourable views towards ending child marriage and FGM.

With regard to the National Costed Roadmap, advocacy with key stakeholders in education, justice and health sectors has – through developing and disseminating advocacy briefs and organizing sensitization sessions, resulted in a 20 per cent increase in budget allocation for the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth in Somali

region for the fiscal year. Moreover, the region has assigned a specific budget line for the implementation of the road map. The allocated budget is planned to be used for scaling up the programmes to end harmful practice to woredas not covered by UNICEF or other non-governmental actors. In addition, ending child marriage and FGM is included in the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth's 10-year plan, in line with the core strategies, interventions and performance indicators. This puts child marriage and FGM on the national agenda to be tracked at a high level, including by the national and regional parliaments and cabinets.

The aim of the National Costed Roadmap is to promote and protect the rights of adolescent girls, including from child marriage, and to facilitate their access to services such as for their sexual and reproductive health. UNFPA and UNICEF continued advocacy efforts for increased budget allocations to roll out the National Costed Roadmap and provided support to finalize its resource mobilization strategy and advocacy plan. The increased budget allocation for the implementation of prevention and response interventions – including skills development for out-of-school adolescent girls, both in pastoralist and other communities – will further enhance girls' capacity to influence decisions that affect their lives. Similarly, it will contribute to ensuring adolescent girls continue their education through influencing families to support girls' education, as well as enhancing the capacity of schools to create a gender-friendly and safe environment where girls can thrive. Additionally, the National Costed Roadmap will contribute to ensuring that existing legal frameworks for criminalizing the practice of child marriage will be implemented and, hence, play a key role in protecting girls' rights. The focus of the road map on capacitating and advocating with stakeholders as duty-bearers to respond to the needs of girls makes it a key instrument in promoting and fulfilling the human rights of women and girls in Ethiopia.

During the year, the National Alliance to End FGM and Child Marriage continued its coordination role, synergizing the efforts of different stakeholders, facilitating the exchange of evidence generated by members and good practices through convening regular meetings, using virtual platforms between April to June 2020 and through resuming face-to-face meetings since July 2020. The level of participation of key ministries increased with the follow-up from the secretariat, notably from April to November 2020 and new members (e.g., GIZ) joined the secretariat of the National Alliance to support the initiative.

Efforts were made to influence the Afar and Somali regions to endorse the family law, which will strengthen the legal framework in these regions where children



and women are more vulnerable due to sociocultural factors and lack of basic services. The request for endorsement of the law was submitted to the regional government five years ago, but no action has yet been taken. However, two woredas (Chifra and Mille) in Afar region increased the punishment (to five livestock) for failure to comply with the community by-laws, one of which forbids making child marriage arrangements. The by-law is planned to be shared and contextualized across all communities in the regions. The elderly and traditional leaders such as the Abba Geda tribe in Oromia region are currently also reviewing 2017 by-laws, which may result in revision and increased effectiveness in stopping child marriages.

#### Next steps

In 2021, planned tracking of public finances and expenditures, with support from the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, will inform and strengthen the evidence base for advocacy for an increased allocation and accountability framework.

#### Generating and applying data and evidence

Evidence-generation activities were delayed due to COVID-19; these included the social and behavioural change baseline-midline-end-line survey, the desk review, and data gathering planned as part of the community conversation manual redesign and the development of the out-of-school girls engagement manual and the men and boys engagement package. However, the statistical brochure on 'Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Ethiopia', developed with support from UNICEF's Data and Analytics Team, was published and contributed to informing the 10-year plan of the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, which is being finalized.

UNFPA and UNICEF also contributed technically to the study conducted by Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE), led by Overseas Development International (ODI), on the experience of adolescents in relation to COVID-19 and issues that concern child

The aim of the National Costed Roadmap is to promote and protect the rights of adolescent girls, including from child marriage, and to facilitate their access to services such as for their sexual and reproductive health.



marriage, FGM and gender-based violence. This support helps to address data and evidence gaps through leveraging their resources and expertise, noting they have strong organizational capacity and established systems, and are engaged in ongoing research initiatives related to adolescents, young people and gender. In addition, a study commissioned by UNICEF, 'Assessment of Barriers to Accessing Violence Against Women and Children Response Services in Refugee and Host Communities in Ethiopia', which started in 2019, was completed in 2020. It also covered child marriage in two target regions of the Global Programme (Gambella and Somali).

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Evidence generation that was planned to be conducted as part of the out-of-school girls manual and the men and boys engagement manual development was delayed due to restrictions related to COVID-19. CARE was expected to gather evidence such as specific capacity development needs of girls, boys and men, as well as mechanisms to monitor these types of initiatives to inform the development of the manuals. This was planned to be done through convening consultations with different

stakeholders at national and regional levels, and others with community members including girls, boys, men and women. As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, the initiative was postponed to the last quarter of 2020 and is expected to be completed in 2021.

One of the lessons learned has been using available long-term agreements for efficient and timely implementation of interventions that require outsourcing of technical expertise, such as surveys. This is anticipated to reduce the long process of procurement and repeated bids when very few institutions submit proposals.

Priorities for 2021 are to strengthen the gender-transformative approach of the programme, increase capacity for programme monitoring and generation of evidence (e.g., streamlining data collection tools and developing monitoring and evaluation guidelines, providing briefing and mentorships on its implementation to partners at different levels), and use findings of the public financing expenditure tracking as an advocacy tool for increased allocation of budget for the roll-out of the national costed roadmap.

## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Ethiopia, the programme worked with 12 partners in 2020: one civil society organization, six government bodies, one media entity and four national partnerships. The government bodies focus on education, gender and protection, and two of the national partnerships are youth-led, aiming to ensure adolescent participation in programming and policymaking. Within the agencies themselves, cross-sectoral collaboration is ensured. The child marriage programme is a flagship programme within UNICEF Ethiopia, which allows the programme to benefit from integration of different sectors (health; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; social policy; evaluation and research), including human and financial resources. Within UNFPA Ethiopia, the programme is aligned with the organization's humanitarian as well as adolescent and youth interventions.

UNFPA and UNICEF in Ethiopia are coordinating efforts for efficient and effective programme delivery as well as increased value for money. This coordination includes the joint managing of the social and behaviour change study, covering a baseline, a midline and an end-line.

Managing three surveys as one, rather than separate survey initiatives, has resulted in a minimum saving of US\$75,000. Staff time in managing the procurement process is also considered a substantial saving, though not accounted for in monetary terms. Similarly, the engagement of both organizations with the Population Media Centre as a partner has resulted in a saving of US\$50,000. This has allowed budget to be used for other new initiatives such as the engagement with VIAMO.

On a national level, the manuals for men and boys and out-of-school girls' engagement that are being developed in partnership with CARE are led by and will be used by both UNFPA and UNICEF. During 2020, UNFPA also enhanced its geographical focus of the programme to include the Amhara region, which ensured increased joint coverage of the two organizations in terms of implementation.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

The Global Programme ensured coverage on social media of the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on girls and the potential increase of child marriage during the year, including calls for action on International Women's Day, on the Day of the Girl, and linked to the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and Girls.

As a part of the 16 Days campaign, UNFPA organized a high-level panel discussion with faith actors, faith-based organizations and policymakers on the role of faith-based organizations in preventing gender-based violence and harmful practices in Ethiopia. The panel discussion shared experiences and knowledge around best practices and challenges around the elimination of harmful practices in local communities, and ways to consider going forward. A short documentary film was

also produced for the event to create awareness about the role of faith-based organizations in the fight against gender-based violence and harmful practices.

On the commemoration of World Population Day and the UNFPA launch of the State of World Population (SWOP) report subtitled 'Against My Will' (focusing on three harmful practices: FGM, child marriage and son preference), a panel discussion was organized. The panellists were from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, and representatives from civil society organizations. During the panel, the link between increased cases of child marriage and FGM and COVID-19 was the major topic of discussion. To reach a wider audience, the event was broadcast through the state-owned television channels.

### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	93,373	152,782
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	38,121	0
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	26,199	178,501
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	504,922	484,696
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	1,165,266	2,063,000
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	1,276	147,108
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	8	1
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	66	0
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	543	358
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	4	0
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	4	0
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	3	3

N/A, not applicable.





# GHANA

COUNTRY PROFILE





# GHANA



## The country context

Ghana is home to 2 million child brides. Of these, 600,000 married before age 15. The prevalence of child marriage in Ghana – 19 per cent of all young women married before their 18th birthday – is among the lowest in West and Central Africa (regional average 39 per cent). Child marriage in Ghana has declined over the last three decades, from 34 per cent in 1993. However, this is not enough to meet the ambitious goal of ending the practice by 2030, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If progress is accelerated, the prevalence of child marriage could drop to 12 per cent by 2030 and to 5 per cent by 2050.<sup>36</sup>

However, even with accelerated progress, the COVID-19 pandemic put girls in Ghana and around the world at increased risk of child marriage. Recent data show that over the next decade, 100 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides, according to pre-COVID-19 projections. Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19.<sup>37</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic's economic impact.<sup>38</sup> Being out of school, or having only primary education, is a major risk factor for child marriage in Ghana. Among girls with no education or only primary education, the prevalence of the practice is 43 per cent, while it drops to 13 per cent among girls with secondary or higher education. The economic impact of the pandemic is also likely to have a negative effect on girls and child marriage in the country. Before the pandemic, the poorest girls in Ghana were about 6 times as likely to become child brides compared with girls in the richest quintile (33 per cent versus 5 per cent).<sup>39</sup> During the pandemic, girls have also become more likely to engage in forms of work that put them at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse in Ghana. For many, this results in pregnancy. They are then more likely to cohabit with their abuser to secure basic support, or their families may marry them off to avoid the stigma associated with premarital sex and adolescent pregnancy.<sup>40</sup>

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country saw an increase in the overall amount of violence against children and adolescent girls, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and adolescent pregnancies during 2020. A U-Report poll in May 2020 with adolescents and young people indicated a 32 per cent increase in the prevalence of abusive and violent behaviour experienced since March 2020. The pandemic also exacerbated the existing high levels of sexual violence, as indicated by the two national household surveys on the impact of COVID-19 conducted by Ghana Statistical Service with support from UNICEF, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). According to the first survey conducted in June,<sup>41</sup> 12.9 per cent of households agreed that their community had seen an increase in violence between members of the same household and 4.7 per cent of households indicated that at least one member of their household had experienced some type of violence with another household member since 16 March.<sup>42</sup> As per the second survey conducted by Ghana Statistical Service,<sup>43</sup> the country saw an increase in the incidence of domestic violence by 3.7 per cent nationally and 7.0 per cent in lockdown districts in Accra and Kumasi.<sup>44</sup> The situation has been further confounded by the fact that the victims and survivors have not been able to access medical, social welfare and justice services as freely as they could before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

## Key highlights



The partnership support to the Ghana health services scaled up the SafetyNet initiative to 232 health-care facilities, reaching 2,123 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers with gender- and age-appropriate care and prevention services.



Thanks to sustained budget advocacy by the programme and partners using budget analysis and policy briefs, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection continued to allocate **3 per cent of its recurrent budget to national coordination functions for ending child marriage**. In addition, the Government increased its child protection (including child marriage prevention and response services) budget allocations to metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies from

**73 MILLION**

cedis in 2019 to

**144 MILLION**

cedis in 2020.

The programme supported the completion and dissemination of the **National Operational and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (2020–2021)** to end child marriage. This is part of the **National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage in Ghana (2017–2026)** and provides an overarching framework for mobilizing cross-sectoral partners around critical strategies for implementing interventions to end child marriage.

Despite the disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme continued partnership with the Ghana education services to provide bursaries and school supplies to

**1,029**

**vulnerable junior high school girls**, including sanitary pads and supplementary readers.



Over

**27,000**

**adolescent girls** actively participated in life-skills training and comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas. Almost

**164,000**

**girls benefited** from life-skills training and sexuality education through complementary funding. In addition to **36 girls living with disabilities** whom were provided life-skills training and sexuality education by the programme, **8,200 'Kayayei' (female porter or bearer) girls** at risk of marriage and abuse during COVID-19 lockdowns were provided dignity kits and transportation to return to their village homes.

## 2020 Achievements



In total,

# 32

**districts in 10 regions** were targeted to support girls to make informed decisions, improve their economic status, and reduce their vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence and its consequences, including child marriage, cohabitation and transactional sex.



In 2020, through community-based safe spaces, about

# 27,274

**adolescent girls** at risk of or affected by child marriage were engaged through a minimum package consisting of **31 hours of information and training** in the areas of skills for life, skills for employability, mentorship, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene management, legal literacy and peer-to-peer learning, to prevent and respond to child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence in eight districts of the Northern and Central regions.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities have been the most successful channel for delaying their marriage among programmes evaluated to date.<sup>45</sup> Despite the unprecedented times in 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF continued to use rights-based services packages to reach adolescent girls in Ghana. The packages included integrated information, skills and services through physical and virtual safe spaces to build their agency. They improved girls' access to services in line with support for implementing national policies and frameworks supporting adolescent health and well-being. Partners delivered the packages, including information and services on sexual and gender-based violence, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, livelihood skills, peer education, mentoring, COVID-19 protocols and reporting channels. This was done through innovative strategies such as the use of COMPASS (Creating Opportunities through Mentorship, Parental Involvement, and Safe Spaces), radio, phone messages, jingles, small-group meetings, house-to-house visits, paralegal sessions, walkathons, and distribution of dignity kits and radios. In total, 32 districts in 10 regions were targeted to support girls to make informed decisions, improve their economic status, and reduce their vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence and its consequences, including child marriage, cohabitation and transactional sex.

The continuous engagement of girls in the safe spaces, especially during the period of COVID-19 restrictions in Ghana, was critical in providing the needed adolescent sexual and reproductive health support and services to prevent unintended pregnancies – as testified by interviews with some girls for a child marriage documentary. Additionally, the distribution of dignity kits and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as radio sets to the girls, helped to prevent transactional sex and its effects, while sexual and gender-based violence prevention information and reporting channels provided the critical support systems needed by the girls who were experiencing various forms of abuse due to the restrictions/lockdown effects.

Since 2018, UNFPA and UNICEF have agreed on a joint approach to delivering structured and sustained information and services to a common cohort of adolescent girls in geographical convergence areas. The Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS) programme is implemented by two non-governmental partners (International Needs Ghana [INGH] and Norsaac) in collaboration with decentralized agencies such as the Department of Gender, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit, the Department of Social Welfare and Ghana Education Service. Focus is on the provision of integrated services for the most marginalized adolescent girls, particularly those living in rural areas, pregnant girls, married girls, girls who are mothers, and those who are out of school. In 2020, through community-based safe spaces, about 27,274 adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage were engaged through a minimum package consisting of 31 hours of information and training in the areas of skills for life, skills for employability, mentorship, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene management, legal literacy and peer-to-peer learning, to prevent and respond to child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence in eight districts of the Northern and Central regions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the PASS programme used strategic approaches to reach out to the girls in the safe spaces and beyond, including the use of virtual safe meetings using radio (by paying for airtime), community information systems and COMPASS, as well as the production and use of tippy taps (simple and economical hand-washing stations) by the girls to enhance safety protocols. Jingles on child marriage and harmful practices produced by the Department of Gender with relevant gender-transformative messaging for both the girls and community support structures were also played in the communities as part of the sessions.

The Global Programme is also supporting the development of a feature documentary on the PASS programme to capture change and transformation at the individual and community levels. While the PASS programme is implemented in selected geographic locations, it is designed to be a demonstration intervention, supporting the implementation of key systems-strengthening initiatives across related sectors – for example, the case management and integrated sexual and gender-based violence essential services; support to girls' education and school re-entry for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers; uptake of age- and gender-responsive adolescent sexual and reproductive health; mother, newborn and child health and nutrition/iron supplementation services. At the safe space meetings, girls receive reproductive health information and services that help to prevent adolescent pregnancy, a key driver of child marriage in Ghana. They

are empowered to make choices regarding pursuing education, as well as pursuing alternative skills training and other economic empowerment opportunities. Their capacities to recognize, identify and report child marriage and other abuse/exploitation cases is enhanced through linkages and referrals to social welfare and justice service providers. Through the safe spaces, the girls participate in mentoring, leadership and coaching programmes, and are co-creating platforms to express their needs, desires and the support they require from families and community members. They are inspired and motivated to believe in their potential and future aspirations. The programme is accompanied by a solid measurement and documentation agenda, through structured before-and-after knowledge, attitudes and practices surveys conducted on a yearly basis with participation of the girls' cohorts as well as caregivers, community members and key stakeholders in programme areas.

Programme evidence through the PASS end-line survey from 2019 indicates that the safe space programme is effectively supporting adolescent mothers to return to school after delivery; supporting girls to report cases of child marriage and gender-based violence and child abuse to relevant authorities; enhancing knowledge of menstrual hygiene; standing up to menstrual myths and taboos; increasing attendance at adolescent sexual and reproductive health services; developing alternative skills for safe employability; and generally helping girls gain confidence in their future and becoming advocates against practices such as child marriage.

In addition, the adolescent parenting sessions – which are components of the PASS programme aimed at creating an enabling environment for the girls to thrive at home – has facilitated increasing interaction and open discussions on some of the most difficult and culturally sensitive topics in the implementing communities. The sessions have provided a platform for adolescent girls, parents and caregivers to engage on ending child marriage and other harmful practices and negative attitudes that affect and disempower adolescent girls in the communities. Consequently, discussions are focusing more on promoting gender-equitable norms and improved relationships between parents, caregivers, community members and their wards to support a healthy environment for adolescent girls' development.

To empower adolescent girls to be advocates of their own course, UNFPA, under the Shaping Futures programme, also partnered with Purim African Youth Development Platform Ghana to train a cohort of 85 adolescent paralegals in two districts in two regions (Greater Accra and Central) to educate and sensitize their community members on issues of sexual and



gender-based violence and harmful practices, especially child marriage and co-habitation, and identify such cases for redress. The trained paralegals went through the structured paralegal training comprising: problem-tree analysis, understanding human rights, origin and classification of human rights, rights of the Ghanaian child, gender and sex, child marriage and effects on reproductive health, legal issues and ethics of a paralegal, and action planning. As part of their action plans, the paralegals undertook various community sensitization activities during the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and Girls in 2020, with some also serving as panellists and studio audience to articulate issues on the Global Programme-supported 'Girlz Girlz Power' talk show television programme.

In the continuous efforts to leave no one behind, UNFPA collaborated with Purim African Youth Development Platform and other state agencies such as the National Board for Small Scale Industries, the Food and Drugs Authority, the Cooperative Society of Ghana, the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to continue to implement a programme entitled 'Integrated Legal Literacy, Livelihood Skills Training and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Services for Female Head Porters (*Kayaye*) in Selected Urban Markets in Five Regions in Ghana'. The intervention has contributed to empowering the vulnerable adolescent *Kayaye* to make informed decisions, improve their economic status and reduce their vulnerabilities to gender-based violence



and its consequences, including forced marriages and co-habitation. Through the programme, about 600 *Kayaye* champions against gender-based violence and Reproductive Health Education and Services for Youth (RHESY) facilitators reached out to their peers, especially those in hard-to-reach communities, to empower them with information on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention, mostly during the COVID-19 restrictions period. In collaboration with the district health services, the work of the champions focused on averting unintended pregnancies among the *Kayaye* and other marginalized populations. UNICEF also supported programmes providing 8,200 dignity kits to at-risk adolescent girls and *Kayaye* girls returning to the northern regions due to the lockdown in Accra and Kumasi.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

From an education sector perspective, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the total closure of schools since March 2020 has presented challenges in the implementation of a comprehensive package of interventions to support girls in schools. The interim report on a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on education revealed that school closures have disrupted learning and contributed to pregnancy and childbirth among schoolgirls.

Inevitably, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the capacity of implementing partners to engage girls in community-based settings following traditional 'safe space' modalities. This caused implementation delays, but also provided an opportunity to re-assess the girls' needs and circumstances, identify new risk factors and adjust programmatic interventions accordingly. For example, mass media, radio and community public address systems were preferred due to the changed circumstances and safety/social distancing concerns. Small-group activities and house-to-house visits replaced large gatherings and school-based activities, while strictly observing COVID-19 protocols. PPE was purchased and distributed to all partners and front-line workers to ensure strict adherence to safety protocols. Smaller groups were formed and more frequent activities were carried out with the girls; radio and phone were explored as alternative modes of communication; and girls were provided with sanitary pad supplies to reduce the risks they often face of sexual exploitation to cover their basic needs.

For UNFPA, provision of dignity kits to support the hygiene and safety needs of girls and radio sets to ensure participation in virtual programmes attracted and sustained the interest of the girls in the safe spaces even when in-person meetings were not possible. However, some targets by the partners – such as the number of girls who accessed adolescent sexual and reproductive

health services – could still not be met since some of the adjusted initiatives could not meet the criterion of 31 minimum contact hours.

Virtual programmes, such as e-workshops, attracted several adolescents, including a cohort that is usually not a target audience, but that faces various abuses all the same as other girls. For its ability to reach more girls with structured messaging, e-platforms such as e-workshops and podcast messages will be further adopted as approaches for Global Programme implementation.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Significant progress continued to be made in 2020 with the scale-up of community engagement and advocacy sessions with structured toolkits and facilitation manuals targeting various community and identifiable groups to facilitate change in attitudes and to address violence, abuse and exploitation of children and youth, especially adolescent girls. The sessions were rolled out via the use of interpersonal communication approaches, mass media and digital platforms, reaching 10 regions of Ghana through both direct support from the Global Programme, as well as complementary funding support.

The purpose of the community engagements and reflections, which are implemented in partnerships with the Government and non-governmental organizations, is to share information and knowledge on the negative consequences of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, increase awareness on legal provisions against child marriage and other sexual and gender-based violence issues, and stimulate intergenerational dialogue around child protection, equitable gender norms, investments in adolescent girls, and the importance of delaying marriage and supporting girls' education. The strategies and tools developed for community engagements provide an opportunity for participants to reflect and discuss in a non-judgemental, non-prescriptive manner some of the deeply rooted social and gender norms, practices and stereotypes prevalent in their contexts.

In 2020, through direct Global Programme support, at least 41,719 people in five regions (Bono East, Bono, Upper West, Western North and Western) and 13 districts were reached through community engagements and dialogues specifically on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender equality. UNFPA, in collaboration with the Department of Gender, updated the Child Marriage Advocacy Toolkit based on lessons learned and feedback from engagement sessions in Phase I. The updated toolkit with new components (e.g., traditional proverbs, adages and songs that communities can identify with)



also has more illustrations to aid facilitation and sustain the interest of community members. The updated toolkit was used, together with the UNFPA framework for engaging men and boys, mainly in the second half of the year, after COVID-19 restrictions were eased, to engage about 7,800 groups in structured sessions that included follow-up meetings to track the results of the action plans of the groups.

Emerging changes documented via programme reports indicate that increased awareness of the causes and effects of child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, is triggering communities to challenge harmful practices and initiate by-laws and actions to prevent their occurrence. Community members in programme areas are increasingly becoming advocates for the protection of the rights of children and adolescent girls. In many instances, they have formed community child protection committees, parenting networks, and men and boys mentorship circles to oversee the implementation of community-level plans drawn to prevent, address and report violence, abuse

and exploitation of children and adolescents in the community, including child marriage. In addition, an innovative approach known as 'Breaking the Silence Forum' has been introduced to create a platform for the discussion of sensitive and taboo topics such as menstruation, rape and coercion, to demystify such issues and highlight how the drivers can be addressed. More and more families in programme areas are sharing testimonies of significant changes – for example, in terms of more equitable gender roles within the household, acceptability of girls marrying later and caregivers supporting girls' education and re-entry of adolescent mothers, and silence being broken around issues of sexual and gender-based violence.

Out of 24 boys' mentorship circles across the 10 regions, about 3,080 boys have been engaged to challenge toxic masculinities and behaviours that perpetuate imbalances of power between boys and girls in their homes, communities and various sectors of the national economy. With quotes such as "girls are not less intelligent as I thought previously, helping them to become a better version of themselves is the way to go",



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Out of **24 boys'** mentorship circles across the **10 regions**, about **3,080 boys** have been engaged to challenge toxic masculinities and behaviours that perpetuate imbalances of power between boys and girls in their homes, communities and various sectors of the national economy.



by a *Keke* (tricycle) rider in the Upper West Region who is a mentee of a circle, the boys are following through and reporting on activities from their action plans to representatives of the Department of Gender for technical guidance during their monthly circle meetings. In addition, UNFPA supported an annual Male Advocates Conference that brought together 58 male champions, representatives from men's clubs and male advocates from UNFPA implementation areas, for a knowledge and experience sharing session that facilitated the review of their plans and actions, and highlighted best practices. An imam from the Northern Region stated that "I did not officiate a marriage after finding out that the bride was below age 18, and that resulted in a lot of problems for me as an imam, but I persisted." The conference recommended the production of various information, education and communication materials, especially posters and leaflets, in the local dialects to aid their advocacy work. Two major sessions were also held with He-for-She Advocates in the Upper West and Western Regions to mobilize the support of mainly middle-level professional men to advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of girls, and to re-activate the He-for-She campaign in Ghana since it was launched by the President in 2018.

Recognizing the critical role of traditional leaders in shaping and affecting social norms, in 2020, UNICEF supported the engagement of 38 religious and traditional leaders (chiefs, queen mothers, pastors, imams) on the Ghanaians Against Child Abuse (GACA) social drive platform at national and regional levels, with a focus on promotion of the safety and well-being of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The traditional and religious leaders recorded child protection and COVID-19 prevention messages via videos and voice recordings in English and various local languages that are being shown and played on television and radio stations, reaching about 5.5 million viewers and 10.5 million listeners each day.<sup>46</sup> The traditional and religious leaders have also taken pledges to be GACA champions and are expected to advance this influence among their colleagues.

Furthermore, in 2020, about 25 advocacy sessions were held with around 1,200 traditional and religious leaders and members of parents' networks that facilitated their role as community change leaders on issues of child marriage and other harmful practices, and connected them to relevant institutions that they need to refer issues to, such as the police and the social welfare sector.

In addition, UNICEF supported the Ghana Community Radio Network in 10 regions to run messages related to COVID-19 and to the prevention of violence against women and children under the banner of GACA, with young people playing an active role in the programmes.

The programmes covered all 16 regions and reached a target audience of more than 10 million listeners. At the peak of the pandemic in Ghana, UNFPA supported the Department of Gender to embark on a two-pronged social media campaign that engaged and reached approximately 5,800 girls with advocacy messages, fliers and audio clips under the campaign slogan 'Your Voice, My Voice, Together Against Child Marriage'. Throughout the year, the GACA campaign maintained a very active social media presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Since the launch of the campaign in November 2017, over 15 million impressions have been recorded, with content related to several issues, including child marriage and gender equality.

Funding from the Global Programme was complemented by other funding streams to support a wider scale-up of community engagements. Informed by the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and its potential to erode the gains made over the years, UNICEF provided guidance to the Government and non-governmental partners to enable them to deliver child protection and sexual and gender-based violence prevention and referral services, including awareness-raising on COVID-19.<sup>47</sup> These activities were delivered via community-based engagements using both mass media channels and interpersonal communication approaches while observing the COVID-19 prevention protocols. Under the Canada-funded joint United Nations Adolescent Girls' Programme, UNFPA screened 16 episodes of the adolescent girl-focused television show called 'Because I want to be'.<sup>48</sup> The show featured various celebrities and other influencers who discussed topics linked to adolescent development, including physical and emotional changes during adolescence, manners and etiquette, menstrual hygiene, adolescent health, gender roles, equality and vocation. With real-life examples, the discussions provided in-depth information for girls on how to circumvent some of the challenges of adolescence in order for them to be who they want to be, especially during the closures of schools when such life-skills topics could not be discussed in school.

Also through complementary funding, an estimated 1,096,719 individuals (204,510 girls, 187,044 boys, 367,942 women and 337,223 men) were reached face to face in 1,457 communities within 81 districts across Ghana. Of these, at least 37,729 adolescent girls and 27,993 boys were reached in community-based settings specifically with information around adolescent sexual and reproductive health, adolescent pregnancy, child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, services and referrals in six regions through non-governmental partners. The engagements equipped the audiences with relevant information on how to prevent violence against children and adolescents, plus available hotlines to



report and seek support for suspected COVID-19 cases, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and adolescent pregnancies, and online safety concerns.

### Challenges and lessons learned

Although there were delays in the implementation of some community-based activities targeting adolescent girls and boys due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it also created an opportunity for adjustment of approaches in order to reach the most vulnerable beneficiaries. Most of the partners adopted a combination of mass media channels (television, radio) and house-to-house or door-to-door approaches to reach out to the targeted audience.

### Strengthening systems

Within the context of key government policies that create an enabling environment for girls' health, protection and education, in 2020 the Global Programme continued to support the implementation of key national guidelines and standard operating procedures for the provision of age- and gender-responsive health, protection and education services to vulnerable adolescent girls and their families in programme areas.

The Global Programme continued to invest in strengthening linkages across various social services. It focused on promoting integrated programming to reach adolescent girls at the subnational level. The aim was to ensure that programming was effectively and holistically responding to the multiple, concurrent and interconnected needs that girls face. This was done through both coordinated support to systems-strengthening work across sectors, as well as specific implementation of the integrated initiatives. Stronger emphasis was placed on facilitating partnerships and exchange between government and civil society partners, and on ensuring that more synergies are built, for coherence and sustainable implementation on the ground.

During the year, the programme leveraged ongoing sector-wide initiatives to reach adolescent girls at scale with critical health, child protection, social welfare, social protection and reproductive health services. Through the 'Integrated Social Service' model, social welfare workers' capacity in eight districts improved in integrated social services and case management related to violence against children. This improvement benefited an estimated 3,767 girls and boys aged 10-17 years. The initiative is part of a much larger sector-wide support targeting 60 districts supported through complementary funding. An estimated 180 social service providers were trained, and 24,484 girls and boys were reached through the complementary funding in 52 districts. Strategic



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Within the context of key government policies that create an enabling environment for girls' health, protection and education, in 2020 the Global Programme continued to support the implementation of key national guidelines and standard operating procedures for the provision of age- and gender-responsive health, protection and education services to vulnerable adolescent girls and their families in programme areas.

engagements in planning and budgetary dialogues at decentralized levels is ongoing to support an increase in resource allocations for service provision to child marriage and other child protection cases; the scope of service delivery is expected to expand to reach more adolescents. Furthermore, the Ghana Health Service SafetyNet initiative was scaled up to 232 health-care facilities and reached 2,123 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers with gender- and age-responsive prevention and care services, including maternal and newborn health care and sexual and gender-based violence services. This intervention is part of the wider sector initiative covering an additional 748 facilities in six regions, reaching 106,316 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in 2020 through complementary funding.

In view of the associated challenges that confront adolescent schoolgirls while they continue to stay at home, UNICEF collaborated with the Ghana Education Service to promote the 'Guidelines to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy and to Facilitate the Re-entry of Teenage Mothers into the Ghanaian Education System' and the prevention of gender-based violence in a safe schools initiative through the back-to-school campaign in December 2020. This activity was implemented to promote the safe return to school of children, especially girls, including pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers, when schools reopen in January 2021. In addition, national institutions that provide vocational and technical education were engaged to include reproductive health education in their curricula with tailored versions for marginalized out-of-school girls.

UNFPA supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection through its national Department of Gender and the Domestic Violence Secretariat to review, update and disseminate a number of critical national policies and frameworks aimed at providing guidelines for the work on eradicating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, and ensuring gender equality. These included review of the implementation of the National Domestic Violence Policy and Plan of Action (2009–2019). This review remained a key milestone achieved in 2020. Reflections from the review process generated consensus among stakeholders across various sectors on key focus areas for developing the new domestic violence policy, which will articulate an overarching vision for eradicating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, and ensuring gender equality. In all, 85 partners across various sectors discussed (in detail) and agreed that the new policy should reflect critical trends such as setting up systems to facilitate linkages for data collection and reporting, merging documentation/data of survivors for easy accessibility to underpin prosecution of perpetrators, establishment of a resource directory

and systems to coordinate research, and development of a curriculum and incorporation of the Domestic Violence Act in training of law enforcement agencies.

In 2020, some 3,320 law enforcement officials were trained on the standard operating procedures for handling child victims, witnesses and offenders, and the gender-based violence training manual for judges and court staff. Service providers within the law enforcement sector – such as all staff of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit in 112 locations and all staff of the judicial service working in the 10 child-friendly gender-based violence courts – were supported with face masks, gloves and other PPE to enable them to continue to provide services during the pandemic. This support was informed by the increase in the number of cases reported to the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit during the pandemic, amidst the limited availability of services during the lockdown months. An estimated 1,627 children (1,578 girls and 49 boys) benefited from law enforcement services in 2020, with the majority being survivors of sexual violence. Nine ascertained cases of child marriage were officially reported and investigated by the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service during the year. These children were supported through the child-friendly policing initiative by the police, including the cybercrime unit, and gender-based violence specialized courts.<sup>49</sup>

In partnership with the Ghana Health Service and civil society organizations at both national and subnational levels, the Global Programme continued to promote access to inclusive adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including to adolescents with disabilities. Some 143,519 adolescents (110,540 girls and 32,979 boys) were reached with age-appropriate adolescent sexual and reproductive health information and services, including in youth-friendly formats at 1,250 adolescent- and youth-friendly health-care facilities and corners. The provision of the services was congruent with national operational guidelines and standards that have been updated through Global Programme support, such as the Training Manual on Adolescent Health and Development and the National Guidelines and Standards for Peer Support Services.

Several demand-creating activities were implemented during the year through social media platforms, which created awareness of the need to access services and information at the adolescent- and youth-friendly health-care facilities. For instance, adolescent sexual and reproductive health information and counselling sessions were given through various social media platforms, including weekly livestreaming sessions on Facebook with adolescents. Thus, with the closure of schools and

adolescents at home, as a result of awareness created, many adolescents took the opportunity to visit the health-care facilities. In addition, since adolescents were at home due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Ghana Health Service at subnational level used community information channels to give out health information and encourage adolescents to visit the facilities while observing all safety protocols, which contributed to the increased number of visits.

The National Operational Guidelines and Standards, the Training Manual on Adolescents Health and Development, and the National Guidelines and Standards for Peer Support Services were reviewed, updated and service providers trained on their roll-out in 2020. The Adolescent Health and Development Manual is to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health service provision for adolescents and youth in Ghana, while the Guidelines and Standards for Peer Support Services will ensure that peer support services provided nationwide by young people are standardized and support adolescent participation in planning, implementation and evaluation of health services. In the wake of COVID-19, an e-learning course and web-based platforms were created to provide up-to-date information and referral services to adolescents and to track those accessing services. Meanwhile, health information communication for adolescents was also strengthened with packages such as the You Must Know information package, comprising 'chit chats' on social media and newsletters. In addition, an adolescent health information package was produced and widely disseminated. Overall, 115 health service providers from six UNFPA implementation regions have been engaged or trained on the guidelines.

Finally, through Global Programme funding, 268 health workers in 232 health-care facilities were trained to provide a basic package of services under the Safety Net Programme, which includes sexual and gender-based violence counselling. To improve demand for adolescent health services, a total of 3,409 adolescent girls, 2,422 adolescent boys, 5,000 women and 3,017 men were reached with information and education on adolescent reproductive health and nutrition.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

When the pandemic reached Ghana, the Government – like many others – did not have a coordinated national child protection emergency and response plan. This severely impacted its ability to provide services during the pandemic that are critical to preventing child marriage, such as adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights information and resources. Hence, UNFPA and UNICEF stepped in to support the Government to produce key child protection and sexual

and gender-based violence messages, and special guidance for social workers on child protection case management during COVID-19.<sup>50</sup> The timely provision of guidance to implementing partners on alternative approaches for engaging target audiences in response to the restrictions imposed by measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19 was instrumental to ensure continuation of activities.<sup>51</sup> The prevention services, as well as essential information on where to report and seek support for child protection,<sup>52</sup> sexual and gender-based violence, online safety and COVID-19-related issues, were made accessible to various target audiences for a stronger and improved response.

Delays were experienced in the implementation of community-level activities due to COVID-19 circumstances. For example, health workers experienced difficulties in reaching hard-to-reach communities to follow up on service uptake by girls, boys and women. Innovative strategies were developed to reach hard-to-reach communities and were included in the implementation plan. Security threats (armed robbery) in some communities in Bole district also affected the scheduled home visits to those communities, and the security force was therefore engaged in the implementation of activities.

However, the initial delays in implementation due to COVID-19 restrictions was made up for after the ease of restrictions. Most of the implementing regions were not at the epicentre of the pandemic and health workers were able to provide essential services through the adoption of COVID-19 safety protocols. Furthermore, the monitoring and supportive supervision visit to selected health-care facilities and districts with challenges contributed to this performance.

The disruption in education, with school closures from March 2020, affected the implementation of all school-level activities, including training of teachers and peer leaders, distribution of supplies to schools and direct interventions benefiting most vulnerable girls. This challenge necessitated the adoption of innovative ways to ensure continuous teaching and that learning reached all children. During the closure of schools, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to ensure continuity of services through the initiation of distance learning programmes and delivery of lessons in the four core subject areas (social studies, science, mathematics and English) for learners at the basic school level through radio broadcasting.

Lack of coordinated sexual and gender-based violence services, such as shelters, free medical care and adequate legal aid, and weak law enforcement

continue to hamper holistic protection services for victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage. Consequently, there have been reports of backlash in some supported communities which have complained that even though they have been sensitized to access services and report cases, the lack of such services rather increases the vulnerability of survivors and emboldens perpetrators. There are times that such attitudes affect attendance at both sensitization and capacity-building programmes.

Adolescent health and protection issues are highly cross-sectoral and there is a need to further strengthen the collaboration among health, education, child protection, gender-based violence and social protection sectors to ensure that the challenges faced by adolescent girls are addressed holistically and in an integrated manner, to respond to girls' multiple, concurrent and interconnected needs. Since health services are often the entry-point for many adolescents, it is essential for the health sector to strengthen the linkages with and referrals to other sectors. Consequently, support for enhancing service provision should not be done in isolation but be informed by other developments in the sectors to maximize the capacity of service providers to render holistic and well-integrated services.

### Addressing poverty

The Global Programme in Ghana continued to explore and invest in strategic initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls and their families to access economic empowerment and social protection services during 2020. Under the overall Shaping Futures Programme, about 8,000 marginalized adolescent girls, including migrant head porters (*Kayayei*) and adolescent mothers, were engaged using human rights-based approaches to enhance their alternative livelihood options, thereby reducing their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, co-habitation and transactional sex. Various concurrent strategies were used – including innovative ones such as community 'walkathons' and online marketing – to heighten the interest of the girls in activities aimed at equipping them with integrated reproductive health, empowerment and leadership skills in five regions.

Through the continuous agenda of systems-strengthening, UNFPA and partners over the year engaged national vocational institutes and heads of associations for seamstresses, tailors and hairdressers, who oversee the training of many out-of-school youth to integrate reproductive health information and sexual and gender-based violence prevention content in their

curriculum/meeting agendas. The objective is to ensure that the critical mass of youth, especially adolescent girls who go to these vocational schools or are in apprenticeship training, will have the right adolescent sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence information to prevent abuse and exploitation, including child and forced marriages. The advocacy sessions with the national heads of the associations have initiated discussions on curriculum review, especially within the ongoing technical and vocational education training reforms in Ghana. In addition, the regional Department of Gender offices partnered with the associations for dressmakers and hairdressers in eight regions to leverage their monthly meeting platforms to educate about 850 female and 220 male apprentices on various sexual and gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health topics, including the distribution of information, education and communication materials to the associations. The national-level advocacy with these institutes will continue in 2021 for curriculum review and content integration.

Through the implementation of the Integrated Social Service model, the child protection and social protection programme teams of UNICEF jointly provided technical and financial support to various sectors (social welfare, social protection, health, etc.) to strengthen their collaboration for holistic and enhanced service delivery for vulnerable families in 60 districts, with funding from the Global Programme directly supporting eight districts. The model involves testing specific linkages, largely centred around the delivery of social protection programmes and social welfare services.

A major activity carried out during the year was the annual *Kayayei* Business and Leadership Fair. The fair brought together about 730 participants, including approximately 565 *Kayayei* to exhibit the various products from the *Kayayei* Enterprise Development Centers to enhance visibility and marketing of *Kayayei* products. Under the theme 'Leaving no girl behind, through policy, action and amplified voices of marginalized girls', over three days the girls had the opportunity to engage in dialogue, meet mentors, share experiences, exhibit and market their products, and participate in fun activities and a musical concert. The collaboration with relevant state agencies for the organization of the fair has resulted in the registration and standardization of the *Kayayei* products, enhancing their market accessibility, including online marketing. During the pre-fair, the girls also prepared a communiqué that was shared with stakeholders, which highlighted their challenges, success stories and support needs at policy, regional and local levels, to minimize their vulnerability to harmful practices. Considerable sales were made by the girls from the products exhibited, such as cosmetics, leather works, tie-dye fabrics, detergents and



bead works. As a means of showcasing the effectiveness of their products, some of the COVID-19 PPE that were used for the safety protocols at the fairgrounds were produced by the girls themselves. With the open endorsement and registration stamp of the Ghana Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), the national body in charge of standards for products, including confectionery, some major business deals were established with some fuel station shops. Moreover, the artist for the musical concert, Sherifa Gunu, a renowned musician and influencer, also allowed her social media handles, where she has a large following, to be used to advertise the products of the *Kayayej* online to enhance market access.

**A major success story shared by Hawa, a girl participating in the Enterprise Development Center, was that during the COVID-19 lockdown, she was approached by the Member of Parliament from her area to produce soap/detergents in large quantities for distribution – which saw her engage additional workers, thus expanding her enterprise and now gainfully earning a living on her own after moving out from co-habitation.**

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Within the Safety Net Programme, the area of referrals to other services (e.g., the Ghana Education Service, the police, Department of Social Welfare and National Health Insurance Scheme) by the health sector has proven to be the weakest link, and yet essential. For this reason, an assessment of key challenges, gaps, best practices and opportunities to strengthen this area is currently ongoing; key findings are expected to be released during the first quarter of 2021 and will inform Phase II learning and strengthened programming.

A lesson is also that strengthening the implementation of the Safety Net Programme through demand creation will result in better outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an opportunity to strengthen the community outreach component of the programme – for example, through increased number of home visits, which has been instrumental in increasing girls' confidence and gaining family support, particularly for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers. Community engagement meetings have made it possible for all key stakeholders to contribute their quota to recognizing the importance of and improving adolescent health, nutrition, protection

and education. Hence, involvement of key community stakeholders in programme implementation guarantees ownership and sustainability.

#### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policies published in 2020 by the World Policy Analysis Center found that the rate of child marriage decreased by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts surrounding their enactment, foster improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.<sup>53</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis that gender egalitarian laws positively impact norms regarding women's equality and empowerment at national and subnational levels.<sup>54</sup> In line with the continuous support for the implementation of national policies and frameworks supporting adolescent development and protection in Ghana (e.g., the Ghana National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage 2017–2026 and the National Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy 2018–2022), the Global Programme in 2020 focused on supporting the implementation of national priorities and re-alignment of strategies and approaches in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the global pandemic that delayed programme implementation, the Global Programme made significant strides to advance the piloted initiatives from Phase I, mainly focusing on strengthening the national systems for overall government ownership and sustainability. Major highlights for the year include successful advocacy resulting in the continued allocation of resources to end child marriage by the Government; the review and update of major gender-responsive policy documents and frameworks that facilitated the required enabling environment for women and girls to thrive (including the national policy and plan of action on domestic violence, and the national operational and monitoring and evaluation plan of the child marriage strategy); and strengthened national coordination for effective processes to end child marriage. During the year, more vital partnerships and collaborations with government structures in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic were shown to be crucial – during the lockdown the Ghana Health Service and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection were on the ground through already established structures, which facilitated continuation of programming.

The sustained budget advocacy for allocation of financial resources for the overall child protection sector and particularly for the implementation of the National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage continued to yield some results in 2020. The Ministry

of Gender, Children and Social Protection continued to allocate 3 per cent of its recurrent budget (goods and services) to national coordination functions for ending child marriage. Similarly, the 2020 child protection budget analysis revealed that the overall child protection-related budget allocations for districts (including prevention and response services to address child marriage) increased from 73 million cedis in 2019 to 144 million cedis in 2020. Budget advocacy will continue to be prioritized in 2021 for timely release of budget allocations to facilitate the implementation of programmes and service delivery.<sup>55</sup>

The national operational and monitoring and evaluation plan to end child marriage (for 2020–2021) was finalized, printed and disseminated to at least 457 cross-sectoral

stakeholders during the year. This plan is part of the National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage in Ghana (2017–2026). The operational plan provides an overarching framework for mobilizing cross-sectoral partners around critical strategies for implementing interventions to end child marriage. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection organized regional review meetings with stakeholders to track the implementation of the operational plan. This culminated in the annual national stakeholders' review on ending child marriage in Ghana, to track progress made during the year. The annual gathering also looked at the new strategies that need to be adopted to address child marriage during COVID-19. The stakeholders' meeting created a platform for national reflections on progress made towards targets in the operational plan, as well



The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented an opportunity to strengthen the community outreach component of the Safety Net programme – for example, through increased number of home visits, which has been instrumental in increasing girls' confidence and gaining family support, particularly for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers.

as mobilizing key actors around a common vision towards elimination of child marriage by 2030. Further, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection mobilized major government and civil society partners to review the National Policy and Plan of Action, the operational document that facilitates the effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (Act 732) for Ghana. The review highlighted the achievements of the goals and outcomes of the 10-year document and outlined the emerging trends of domestic violence. These included online abuse and forced relationships that needed to be targeted in the updated policy for the protection of women and girls.

The Domestic Violence Secretariat under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was supported by both Global Programme and complementary funds to engage about 160 stakeholders drawn from the judiciary, health, security and gender sectors on their role in the effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2007 as outlined in its Legislative Instrument (L.I. 2016). The Secretariat further disseminated the Domestic Violence Act and the Legal Instrument to the wider public at the regional and national levels with the primary intent of raising awareness on legal requirements related to sexual violence against children and child marriage. This is to ensure that stakeholders at all levels are well informed on their roles to provide the required services to survivors of violence, including child brides.

To support the coordination efforts of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to end child marriage and other harmful practices and sexual and gender-based violence, a one-stop-shop database and information portal on child marriage in Ghana has been established with support from UNFPA. The system readily shares information on child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence and related issues in an open-source application accessible with the press of a button. The database and information portal will improve access to accurate and reliable data to inform planning, implementation and advocacy for sustained resource allocation for child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence issues. During the validation with a cross-section of national stakeholders, it was emphasized that a strong editorial board comprising academics, researchers, government and civil society organizations should be constituted to vet information and documents that are uploaded by the Ministry in order to ensure authenticity. The availability of these resources and tools will go a long way to improving coordination and implementation of child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence interventions in Ghana.

In partnership with the National Development Planning Commission, the annual progress reports of 216 out of the 260 municipal, metropolitan and district assemblies (MMDAs) were reviewed to ascertain the progress against integration of child protection and gender-based violence issues. The review found that the majority of MMDAs reported on child protection/gender-based violence commitments. Through the review process, all MMDAs received recommendations and guidance for strengthening child protection systems in their jurisdictions. To further mainstream the inclusion of child protection and gender-based violence interventions into the annual action plans of the MMDAs and their financial allocations, UNICEF successfully advocated for the inclusion of child protection and gender-based violence indicators in the District Assemblies' Performance Assessment Tool (DPAT) and the performance contracts of the MMDAs for 2020, since this constitutes an important entry-point and mechanism used to allocate funding to MMDAs from the District Assemblies Common Fund.<sup>56</sup>

With support from UNFPA, the National Department of Gender, in its continuous efforts to track the implementation of the five-year Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy through its institutional framework, organized three national cross-sectoral meetings in 2020 to assess implementation by various partners. Discussions highlighted challenges with an increase in adolescent pregnancies in some areas, especially during the COVID-19 period. Partners also shared innovative ways through which they were rolling out interventions in spite of the restrictions. Consequently, the Ghana Education Service sensitized 1,377 (786 female and 591 male) Muslim stakeholders as part of the implementation of the national guidelines for management of adolescent pregnancy and school re-entry of adolescent mothers and pregnant schoolgirls through complementary funding from UNICEF. These interventions collectively reflect the commitment of cross-sectoral actors in playing their respective roles in the implementation of the Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy.

Through UNICEF complementary funding support, the Cybersecurity Act 2020<sup>57</sup> (with provisions related to online child sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, cyberstalking and sharing of intimate non-consensual images) has been approved by the Parliament and is awaiting presidential assent. The act provides adequate protection to children from sextortion, cyberbullying and cybergrooming, including a mechanism for the identification and removal of child sexual abuse materials. Proposed amendments to the Children's Act, the Juvenile Justice Act and the Criminal and Other Offences Act are still being considered by the Office of Attorney General.

### Challenges and lessons learned

Experience often shows that many plans and strategies are not effectively implemented to achieve the stated objectives. Consequently, to ensure that the interventions are effectively implemented and coordinated, strategic and evidence-based advocacy for allocation of resources at both national and decentralized levels remains critical.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

The Global Programme in Ghana contributed to evidence generation through investments in the analysis of child marriage data, project baseline and end-lines, and evaluations of broader initiatives linked to child marriage. These activities are intended to support programme implementation, including the review of programme strategies, and inform the design of new projects. This further facilitates evidence-based advocacy and documentation and dissemination of best practices.

In collaboration with the Data and Analysis Team of UNICEF Headquarters, the programme launched a report on 'Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Ghana', based on a trend analysis of child marriage data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys and other sources. The analysis presents insights into ways that the Government and other stakeholders can act to strengthen their approach to ending child marriage in the country. One striking result revealed by the report is that progress in reducing child marriage has been uneven across the country, and accelerated efforts are required in regions with more child brides and in those that have made slower progress. The visual presentation of this finding during stakeholder dissemination sessions, particularly at the regional level, triggered a lot of discussions and reflections on what needs to be done, resulting in renewed commitment from stakeholders to intensify efforts and to accelerate progress to eliminate child marriage. In addition, informed by these new data, the Child Protection Programme within UNICEF has been guided in the design of a new country programme, including prioritizing regions with higher concentration of child brides and teenage pregnancies as well as those with slower progress, for investments related to ending child marriage and adolescent programming in general. The data will also inform advocacy for budgetary allocation for districts in the affected regions. Furthermore, the risk of Ghana slipping in the progress documented due to the secondary impacts of COVID-19 was also brought to the fore during the year and generated additional momentum among stakeholders within the space to intensify actions that address the needs of adolescent girls. Two additional updated profiles on the situation

of adolescent girls and child protection in Ghana are currently being finalized and will be launched in the first quarter of 2021.

UNICEF supported two evaluations during the year: one of community-based approaches to ending child marriage as part of a broader evaluation led by the Regional Office for West and Central Africa; and one formative and summative evaluation of the child protection programme covering the period of 2012-2019. These evaluations experienced considerable delays related to COVID-19, and the results are expected to be shared with stakeholders in the first quarter of 2021; the results will inform the Global Programme interventions and the next UNICEF country programme document cycle.

As part of joint technical support to non-governmental implementing partners, UNFPA and UNICEF engaged in technical support to Norsaac and International Needs Ghana in the design of a methodology and tools for conducting baselines and end-lines of the structured and sustained package of information and services benefiting adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage. The tools are expected to support monitoring and, over time, documentation of outcome-level results of both girls-focused and community-based interventions supported through the Global Programme, in line with the programme's indicator guidance. The 2019 end-line report for Phase I by Norsaac showed very encouraging results, with both girls and community-level change. The 2020 baseline for Phase II has been completed and the end-line is currently being conducted; reports will be available in March 2021.

To strengthen administrative data collection related to child protection and gender-based violence at the decentralized level, UNICEF has supported the adoption of Primero as the Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS). SWIMS is currently being piloted in six districts. This is a complete child protection and sexual and gender-based violence case management system that will support case tracking, incident monitoring, services tracking and family reunification. The official launch and scale-up to 100 districts across the country are planned for 2021. SWIMS is based on the intersectoral standard operating procedures for child protection and family welfare that cover child sexual abuse, neglect, sexual and gender-based violence, including child marriage and social protection.<sup>58</sup>

UNFPA, as part of experience and knowledge sharing among partners, organized the 2020 Partners Learning Forum (PALEF). The objective was to foster shared learning and horizontal collaboration between UNFPA implementing partners and relevant stakeholders, and



provide a platform for networking among partners and other stakeholders involved in policy and programme implementation on maternal health, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and sexual and gender-based violence prevention. On the fringes of the PALEF, an Adolescent Girls Learning Forum (ADOLEF) was held, which brought together 50 girls from UNFPA-supported safe spaces, SISTAs clubs, Kayayei Networks and the PASS programme to share experience and knowledge on the most effective strategies and interventions in their safe space meetings. The interactive session enabled the girls to share best practices through case studies, beneficiary stories, poetry recitals and a 'Cube Convos' session on menstrual hygiene, with the UNFPA child marriage customized sanitary pads serving as an entry-point for discussions on the prevention and management of sexual and gender-based violence and other harmful practices. The first session of ADOLEF attracted the National Director of Gender, who commended the initiative and asked for its scale-up in collaboration with the department to provide an opportunity for adolescent girls to learn from their peers in ways and language they can identify with. ADOLEF will thus be an annual platform to facilitate exchange learning among adolescents. Based on the testimonies of the girls, the different safe spaces were paired for follow-up on the

replication of the new strategies they were going to use to enhance their confidence, assertiveness and agency.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The commissioning of the joint PASS documentary was delayed due the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further consultation with the non-governmental partners resulted in the rescheduling of the filming to the fourth quarter of the year, to allow implementation to pick up after the lockdown and easing of some of the COVID-19 restrictions. However, the commencement of the documentary was further delayed by the intense political activities across the country leading up to the general election of the President and Parliamentarians, which further slowed project implementation.

The initial investments made in the design of methodology and tools for the documentation of robust pre- and post-data on the cohorts of adolescent girls benefiting from the structured and sustained package of information and services have proven useful. The emerging evidence generated demonstrates the effectiveness of the approaches and strategies used and further offers very reassuring results on changes both at the individual level of the girls and at community level.

## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Ghana, the programme worked with 17 partners in 2020, comprising 11 government bodies, 5 civil society organizations and a national partnership. The multisectoral nature of the programme is shown in the partnerships with government bodies, which cut across the sectors of education, health, social protection, gender, justice and protection, and statistical services. Of the civil society organizations the programme engages with, one is youth-led, four have an explicit focus on women's rights and two of them on children's rights (one has both a women's and children's rights focus).

The use of common approaches by UNFPA and UNICEF for delivery of structured information and services to a common cohort of adolescent girls through the safe space concept in geographical convergence areas has enhanced the consistency in the minimum package of information and services delivered to the girls. Although the context, dynamics and drivers of child marriage are slightly different in some regions, the application of similar approaches helps to bring out the peculiar issues in each region.

The joint support by the two United Nations organizations to key government partners has been valuable. For example, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Domestic Violence Secretariat was supported to implement strategic initiatives such as the review and dissemination of the operational plan for the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage, including the annual stakeholders' meeting, and support for the 'Girlz' television talk show series. Consequently, coordination among the organizations and partners has improved, thereby ensuring efficient use of limited resources and avoiding duplication of efforts. In addition, partners benefit technically from the expertise of staff from the two organizations, making them even more effective in programme delivery.

The joint support and recruitment of a national consultant (videographer) to undertake the assignment for the PASS documentary proved cost-effective by harnessing the benefits of joint procurement processes to achieve this common objective. More such joint efforts will be forged to enhance learning and efficient use of resources.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

Throughout the year, the Global Programme ran different communication campaigns linked to the empowerment of adolescent girls, prevention of violence, prevention of teenage pregnancies and ending child marriage. As a means of enhancing visibility on the child marriage campaign through an innovative way that will also respond to the needs of girls, UNFPA produced branded sanitary towels to support girls participating in safe spaces. Based on information from the girls and partners on the critical importance of sanitary towels for girls as a means of reducing period poverty, the branded pads were launched at the national stakeholders' review on ending child marriage and the platform was used to advocate for

the Ministry of Finance to allocate more resources to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and other relevant partners to provide sanitary towels to adolescent girls. The advocacy demand will be continued through Cube Convos sessions.

Two news articles on the livelihood empowerment training programme were published during the year, showing the impact of the programme in girls' lives.<sup>59,60</sup> The non-governmental organization PAYDP also published on Facebook from the *Kayeyei* business fair, to spread the message and further give attention to the businesses of the girls.<sup>61</sup>

### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	32,987	27,274
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	1,017	1,029
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	3,149	4,986
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	125,686	41,719
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women, and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	758,864	65,253
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	530	1,200
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	3	2
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	5	3
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	274	256
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	3	4
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	0	1
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	6	0
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	4	0
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	0	1

N/A, not applicable.



# INDIA

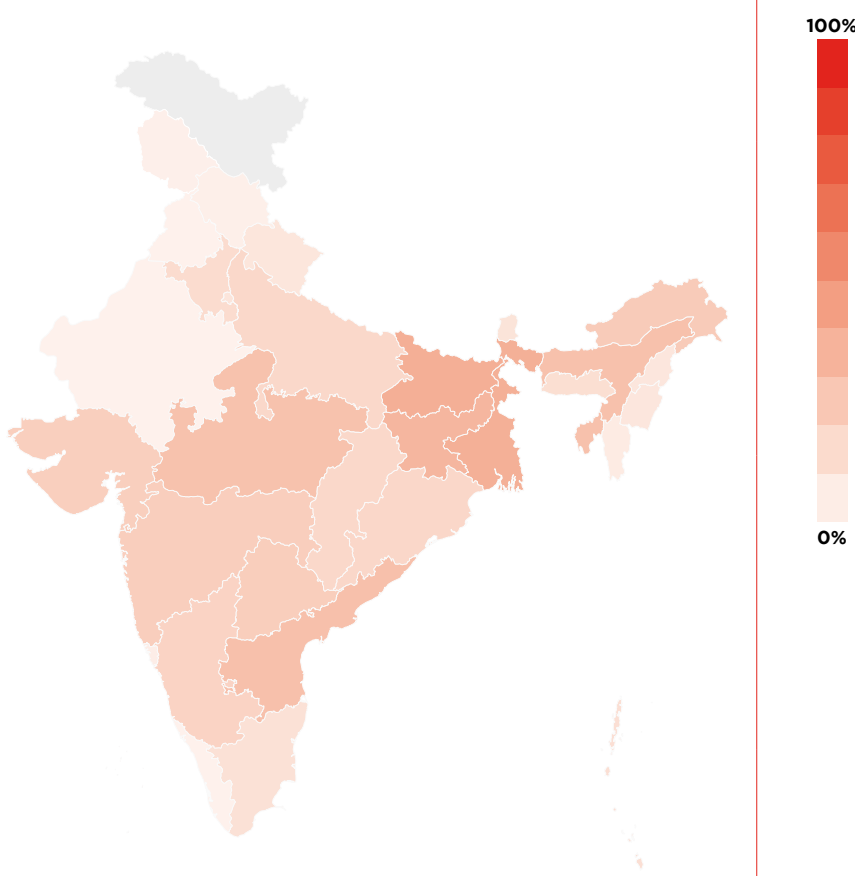
COUNTRY PROFILE





# INDIA

**Percentage of women aged 20-24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** India National Family Health Survey 2015-2016. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers. No data for grey region.

## The country context

India is home to the largest number of child brides in the world: 223 million child brides – a third of the global total. While it is illegal for girls under the age of 18 to marry in India, estimates suggest that at least 1.5 million girls under age 18 get married in India each year. Nearly 16 per cent of all adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married.<sup>62</sup> Recent evidence, though sparse, highlights the persistence of family-arranged marriages without meaningful consent.

However, the country has seen a large decline in the prevalence of the practice of child marriage in the last decade, from 47 per cent to 27 per cent of all young women being married in childhood – driving the reduction of child marriage globally. Across the world over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted.<sup>63</sup> This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as

a result of COVID-19, putting the global total number of girls at risk at 110 million girls by 2030.<sup>64</sup> Further, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic’s economic impact.<sup>65</sup>

In 2020, India – like the rest of the world – was rattled by the COVID-19 outbreak that placed the country under stringent nationwide lockdowns, which led to a complete closure of educational institutions, industries and all





forms of socioeconomic activity. To further compound problems, the Global Programme-targeted states of Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal were affected by the tropical cyclones that wrecked the region. It is feared that the economic hardship caused by the lockdown and the cyclones might prompt many poor parents to consider getting their underage daughters married to men who do not demand dowry.

A case study on child marriage during the lockdown, supported by UNICEF India in West Bengal, noted that parents seem to be caught in a dilemma between adhering to the socio-legal justifications against child marriage and common fears of their adolescent girls falling prey to trafficking, runaway child marriages, abuse and 'tarnishing family honour' on account of late marriage. A parent in South 24 Parganas noted

that "their life will be spoiled, they will not be able to manage their family and get sick." Though the case study analysis sample size was limited, it is worth noting that 46 per cent of the child marriages recorded were of supposed runaway child marriages, in which the girls (attempted to) escaped with their partners.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

The elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.



## Key highlights



A special training package on alternative education for out-of-school children was rolled out in three states (Assam, Jharkland and Rajasthan) that benefited close to **115,000 adolescent girls** from the most disadvantaged communities.



Over

# 3.6 MILLION

**adolescent girls** actively participated in life-skills training or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas during the year. The programme integrated life-skills training and social and behavioural change communication materials into online platforms during COVID-19.

Close to

# 1.5 MILLION

**adolescent girls** were provided training in life-skills during the pandemic to address child marriage.



Using advocacy and data to strengthen political accountability, **five states were supported to develop and cost action plans on ending child marriage.** Intensive dialogues and advocacy with the Government led to inclusion of adolescent girls' issues in the 'Handbook for Members of Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee',<sup>79</sup> and the school development monitoring committee.



About 10 million parents engaged in regular dialogue on responsive parenting through online platforms and community networks created during COVID-19 to prevent and respond to child marriage and **gender-based violence (GBV).** In addition, close to 3,000 religious leaders were mobilized and sensitized on preventing and responding to child marriage and GBV during the pandemic.

## 2020 Achievements



UNICEF trained teachers in remote teaching and established a **Learning Management System** supporting self-learning and blended training programmes, reaching

**125,000**  
users.



With schools closed during the pandemic, learning and awareness programmes through **Direct-to-Home**, national and state Doordarshan television channels cumulatively reached an estimated

**8.2 MILLION**  
adolescent girls.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme approaches in India are grounded in human rights and based on the principle of 'leave no one behind'. This means protecting the rights of women and girls to education, including human rights education during life-skills training and catch-up training for those who dropped out of or never went to school.

UNFPA and UNICEF used multiple approaches to reach out to adolescent girls and boys with information on and training in life-skills, including: face-to-face life-skills education in schools and community settings through government programmes such as the National Adolescent Health Programme (Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram [RKSK])<sup>67</sup> and Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG). UNFPA's experience with interventions under the Action for Adolescent Girls programme in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan was leveraged to develop and support the implementation of national guidelines and curriculum for SAG68 in the two states, and UNFPA's support for integration of life-skills education in madrasas in two districts of Bihar led to scale-up of the intervention across all madrasas in the state.

With schools closed during the pandemic, learning and awareness programmes through Direct-to-Home, national and state Doordarshan television channels cumulatively reached an estimated 8.2 million adolescent girls. Across states, UNICEF trained teachers in remote teaching and established a Learning Management System supporting self-learning and blended training programmes, reaching 125,000 users. The Call a Student programme used digital platforms to promote continued education for girls and boys, especially during lockdown and school closure; and educational programmes for young people were broadcast through multimedia channels to address the digital divide.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

As a result of COVID-19, which was further compounded by other regional natural calamities, children and adolescents faced multiple challenges and an exacerbated risk of violence, including trafficking, sexual exploitation and fake marriages.

The COVID-19 pandemic has restricted face-to-face activities and dependence on technology has brought about a huge digital divide, restricting access to marginalized communities and girls. As internet

accessibility is limited in rural areas, a large number of adolescents (especially girls) are unable to participate in activities conducted via various web platforms by the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Internet accessibility is no longer just a service for the privileged but a basic service warranting the urgent attention of the Government to ensure better access and affordability for enabling the information, knowledge and skills of adolescents, community members and even service providers. For instance, in Odisha, nearly 300,000 adolescents (girls and boys) of the tribal residential schools were deprived of comprehensive sexuality education sessions. While online sessions continued, attempts were made to conduct repeated sessions to increase coverage, strategize and reach out to more and more girls from remote communities through innovative programme strategies such as short films. Multimedia digital packages in vernacular languages were developed and disseminated for wider reach among all stakeholders (parents, teachers, community leaders). However, these outreach programmes by the Government still met with challenges due to poor internet penetration and non-availability of smartphones among teachers and students in hard-to-reach and interior tribal districts.

The intersectionality with violence against women and girls, mental health and adolescent empowerment also came to the fore as a result of COVID-19, requiring more informed programme design for the coming years.

The COVID-19 pandemic also led to a shift in the Government's engagement of adolescents and youth. The critical deficit in human resources – especially front-line functionaries – at the last mile led to extensive reliance on and engagement by volunteers. In recognition of youth leadership potential and aspirations, UNICEF engaged 524,587 youth volunteers (15–24 years) and 1,522,805 volunteers from civil society organizations, women's and community structures to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19; provide peer-to-peer psychosocial counselling; establish linkages to entitlements; combat stigma, discrimination, early and forced child marriage, and violence against children; and raise awareness on the use of masks.

Going forward, the programme will complement the Government's efforts to effectively implement the SAG and RKSK in all intervention states; and the peer educator programme under RKSK will be further strengthened in four districts using a saturation mode in Rajasthan.

The programme will also continue to ensure meaningful adolescent participation and engagement. The work on adolescent engagement needs to be viewed from a meaningful participation lens and not just reach of adolescents with messages, information and uptake

of services. UNICEF defines adolescent participation as: “adolescent girls and boys (individually and/or collectively) form and express their views and influence matters that concern them directly and indirectly”. States should work in partnership with adolescent networks, youth network institutions (such as the national service scheme [NSS]; the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan [NYKS] under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports; and the National Cadet Corps – the youth wing of the Indian Armed Forces) to plan participation and civic engagement initiatives.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Across 12 states, over 9 million community members have been reached and engaged in promoting gender-equitable attitudes, alternatives to child marriage and support for girls' rights. Over 20 million individuals are estimated to have been reached by traditional and social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

In Maharashtra, for example, a set of eight films and information resources was developed to sensitize village child protection committees, resulting in activation of 44,000 village child protection committees that were trained in ending child marriage, preventing GBV, child protection and harm prevention. This led to identification of 226 girls vulnerable to child marriage and at-risk families that were linked to child protection services. Across different states, the reactivation of the village child protection committees has led to proactive community engagement in addressing child marriage and GBV issues. In Odisha, the village committees worked with district prohibition and social welfare officials to cancel over 800 child marriages during the last quarter of 2020. With the active engagement of the village committees, 900 child marriages in Bihar, 898 child marriages in Uttar Pradesh and 629 child marriage in Maharashtra were cancelled during the first two months of the lockdown. UNICEF also used the Tarunya package (a package of communication and training tools for adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage) to equip government functionaries and community members with skills and knowledge to address child marriages and violence against children.<sup>69</sup>

In Rajasthan, the education-entertainment initiative 'Naubat Baja' is currently being leveraged by several departments to disseminate information on social protection schemes and programmes related to gender and adolescent empowerment. This medium has been used extensively to engage with influencers (men, youth and community leaders) who further spread awareness messages on gender and child marriage in their networks. The state also used this channel to spread messages on COVID-19 safety protocols during the lockdowns.





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Panchayats (rural local governments) in four states are being engaged for sensitization on enhancing the value of women and girls. Fifty-seven trainers from the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), including Block Coordinators in Madhya Pradesh, were capacitated to mainstream the role of panchayats in addressing gender inequality and harmful practices as part of the SIRD training curriculum for panchayat-elected representatives. Further, with support from a local civil society organization, 333 elected representatives of panchayats from Chattarpur District of Madhya Pradesh underwent capacity-building on gender, GBV and harmful practices, to enable them to address gender-discriminatory norms, promote safe spaces for women and girls, and support improved access to government schemes and entitlements by women and girls.

In order to actively respond to the community's sexual and reproductive health and rights needs during

COVID-19 in Bihar, UNFPA organized Ratri chaupal (evening sessions in village common places using audio-visual aids) to train grass-roots cadres and share sexual and reproductive health and rights and COVID-19-related information.

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The role of gender norms in shaping adolescent realities and protecting them from child marriage, violence and other types of exploitation is of paramount importance and a lesson learned is that work around social norms is not enough. Experience shows that interventions directly addressing the pervasive issues of gender discrimination, unequal gender roles and power dynamics are of significance for meaningful change to happen and to transform rigidly held gender norms. The pandemic has delayed the introduction of planned gender-transformative programme approaches that rely on face-to-face contact. An analysis of triggers and drivers of child marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic

in West Bengal indicates that, while a multisectoral approach to address child marriage is needed, greater acknowledgement of adolescent sexuality and development of parental skills are needed to address increasing cases of elopement.

Working with suitable partners in the community and the sense of ownership of the local government in taking forward the agenda to end child marriage have been invaluable and an integral approach for success and best practices. Adopting a 'partnership' approach with both the Government and civil society (including community organizations) has helped bring the two together and created an enabling environment.

Adolescents can be excellent content creators – many of them have created content for awareness of COVID-19 and key messages on GBV and ending child marriage. At the same time, a great concern continues to be the digital divide between communities and being able to find effective solutions that can be safely implemented while addressing this divide.

Going forward, the Global Programme will implement an adolescent parenting package that will focus on three key themes: (1) improving interaction between parents and adolescents, (2) changing social norms, and (3) gender socialization practices. Additionally, effort has been made to present specific issues to be addressed during early adolescence (10–14 years) and late adolescence (15–19 years). The package will be implemented as part of the district-level support integrated in the district action plan for smooth implementation. UNICEF will plan to provide all the required support in development of capacity of the front-line workers (such as accredited social health activists and Anganwadi workers), self-help groups, community influencers, civil society partners and relevant government institutions for wide-scale implementation.

### Strengthening systems

As part of the systems-strengthening approach, UNFPA and UNICEF equipped education, health, child protection and GBV service providers with knowledge and skills to provide gender-responsive girl-friendly services. The capacity-building approach was used to successfully anchor and institutionalize toolkits and approaches to address some of the key issues related to harmful norms and social practices.

In Bihar, prior to COVID-19, UNICEF worked with the Education Directorate to ensure the roll-out of an initiative for the prevention of abuse in schools, with special focus on ensuring identification of girls

dropping out of schools to get married. A menstrual hygiene management (MHM) training module was also developed and shared with the State Government for roll-out. Complementing the module, a MHM week was celebrated, which helped hundreds of girls who were otherwise not attending the schools due to lockdown to access the services. Online and offline messaging were sustained with community members and adolescents on child marriage and violence prevention and gender. Further 'handholding' support has resulted in placing ending child marriage firmly on the agenda of the Department of Women and Child Development.

In Bihar, as part of the scale-up of the madrasa (Islamic schools) initiative, the Global Programme supported the development of a curriculum that includes a module on gender norms, GBV and harmful practices such as child marriage, with inputs from experts and religious scholars. The initiative is now being scaled up across 2,000 madrasas in the state through government resources.

UNFPA and UNICEF sustained convergent support to the national School Health and Wellness 'Ambassadors' Initiative (SHWAI) of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Education to develop guidelines and teaching aids. UNICEF supported the national launch of the programme along with 56 interactive videos on 11 thematic areas to help facilitate discussion between teachers and students on issues related to growing up healthy; emotional well-being and mental health; interpersonal relationships; values and citizenship; gender equality; nutrition, health and sanitation; prevention and management of substance misuse; promotion of healthy lifestyle; reproductive health and HIV prevention; safety and security against violence and injuries; and promotion of safe use of the internet and social media behaviour. Both organizations are supporting the State scale-up of the programme. In the last quarter of 2020, support was provided for a baseline assessment and orientation of school principals and teachers. With UNFPA and UNICEF support, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Education jointly rolled out SHWAI in 191 districts in the first phase; UNFPA and UNICEF are providing technical support, which included training of over 1,800 State resource persons. UNFPA will continue to provide technical support in four states (Bihar, Delhi, Odisha and Rajasthan) to reach 40,000 teachers across 20,000 schools in 2021. Based on popular demand and a felt need for developing self-learning tools for teachers, UNFPA is working on an e-course for school teachers.

At the national level, UNFPA partnered with the Indian Nursing Council (INC) to train 8,700 nursing faculty staff, doctors and nurses on youth-friendly health services. These sessions were part of larger trainings



In Rajasthan, 314 service delivery points were supported through staff training to provide adolescent-friendly health services. These clinics recorded 68,018 girls and 130,255 boys accessing services during and immediately after the lockdown period.

conducted online on sexual and reproductive health and included national-level participation. Leveraging lessons learned from the pilot intervention for the Action for Adolescent Girls (AAG) in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, technical assistance was provided to the Government's SAG initiative to develop implementation guidelines, curriculum, training materials and modules on life-skills outreach.

In Rajasthan, 314 service delivery points were supported through staff training to provide adolescent-friendly health services. These clinics recorded 68,018 girls and 130,255 boys accessing services during and immediately after the lockdown period. In Madhya Pradesh, the Global Programme provided strategic support to the development of the detailed implementation plan of the National Adolescent Health Programme of the Health Department/RKSK, under which 24 comic books were developed for adolescent girls to transact sessions with peers at the village level. Training of 51 district prohibition officers, 453 child marriage prohibition officers, 97,135 Anganwadi workers (community health workers) and 2,954 Anganwadi supervisors has been completed on the use of comics for conducting monthly sessions with adolescent girls.

Around 799,206 (84 per cent female) government functionaries have been equipped with knowledge and skills to use UNICEF-developed social and behaviour change communication toolkits and approaches to address some of the key priorities related to harmful norms and social practices while promoting girls' empowerment. These toolkits have been institutionalized in the district implementation through district-level resource groups (DRGs) responsible for strengthening capacity and skills of government officials, functionaries and community structures.

In Odisha across all 30 districts, UNFPA and UNICEF conducted state-level webinars and district-level online trainings covering all 2,100 (1,207 women and 893 men) district social welfare officers, child marriage prohibition officers, district child protection officers, and One Stop Crisis counsellors on the state action plan on ending child marriage and adolescent empowerment. With the support of UNFPA and UNICEF, a series of online orientation and capacity-building training activities conducted on ADVIKA - the state-wide adolescent programme - has been rolled out, covering all 75,000 (74,473 females and 527 males) Anganwadi workers, child marriage prohibition supervisors and other field functionaries.

In West Bengal, a state-level Adolescent Cell has been established under the Department of Women and Children Development and the Department of Social



Work with technical support from UNICEF. It is aimed at improving the overall situation of adolescents in West Bengal and to institutionalize response to their growth, development, protection and participation needs, as well as at creating greater synergies between different sectoral interventions and improving coordination between different stakeholders.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Integrated interventions engaging key government departments and civil society organizations are key to promoting adolescent well-being, development, their access to quality services and progressive social and gender norms. Political commitment, continuous evidence-based advocacy with systems, convergence efforts and capacity-building, quick discussion, review of progress, and online monitoring of progress under the project are key for addressing the issue of child marriage and other child protection issues.

In light of the pandemic, plans have been revised with all partners involved in the process of implementing interventions across high-burden districts. A reimagining process has been initiated with a revisit of achievements, and challenges faced as a result of lockdowns, school closures and fewer economic opportunities. The challenge posed by the pandemic also opened possibilities for effective and efficient advocacy as officials and functionaries were easily accessible for discussions over digital platforms, opening a new avenue to impart training. The linkages established with adolescents and communities through the field-level workers during COVID-19 to ensure health, protection, mental health, food and nutrition services was noteworthy, and the cost-effective benefits experienced was a significant learning experience for future consideration. Government functionaries such as accredited social health activists, Anganwadi workers and police are the backbone of implementation in the Indian system and law enforcement structure. They were also the first responders during the pandemic; consequently, their time and ability to engage in child marriage prevention were diminished. Gathering information regarding imminent child marriages has been a challenge due to the reduced physical contact and peer engagements at the Gram Panchayat and village level.

Strengthening community-level mechanisms such as child protection committees and health services for adolescents through adolescent-friendly health clinics help create an enabling environment for adolescents and ensures their protection and well-being. Mental health and psychosocial support were recognized as a new area of intervention that need to be addressed for adolescent development. Case management

and robust information management systems that can maintain linkages and transparency of scheme benefits and access remain a challenge. In Bihar state, feedback received from community cadres during the COVID-19 pandemic on addressing harmful gender roles and sexual and reproductive health and rights highlighted that the lessons learned from the online training were less effective. Health and ICDS front-line workers who are part of the programme could not make themselves available for the training due to their engagement in pandemic response. The administration was busy with COVID-19 response in the initial months and therefore the child protection issues were not a priority. Recruitment of staff members/functionaries in the Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme and the District Child Protection Unit was delayed due to COVID-19, which also limited scheme coverage. Designating the social service workforce as essential – including GBV and adolescent health service providers – is therefore key in sustaining services for adolescents during a pandemic. A key partner that continued to be able to respond to children's needs in the pandemic was CHILDLINE, the telephone helpline, which could continue to operate under the recognition of being an essential service during the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a shift in the Government's engagement of adolescents and youth. The critical deficit in human resources at adolescent youth-friendly facilities, especially front-line functionaries, led to extensive reliance on and engagement of volunteers. This is compromising the quality of services that adolescents are receiving during the pandemic.

Going forward, the programme will attempt a blended approach between the district and state approach alongside outreach to community-level structures leveraging civil society networks. The community outreach will be done with child protection committees, community-based organizations and Gram Panchayats to be able to foster community dialogue and adolescent participation and engagement. This approach will involve the following:

- Advocating with the Government for availability of the dedicated human resources at subdistrict level.
- Supporting the district and community-based protection structures to respond and prevent early marriage and violence in the communities.
- Continuing advocacy and implementation support to the madrasa initiative and enhance advocacy on sexual and reproductive health and rights and vulnerabilities among adolescent Dalit girls, a generally marginalized group, in Bihar.



In Odisha, **1,730 residential schools** will be supported to promote a student-friendly environment. Technical assistance will be extended to strengthen the life-skills programme with adolescents living with disabilities, to about **8,500 adolescents** with different kinds of disabilities in **157 schools**.



- In Odisha, 1,730 residential schools will be supported to promote a student-friendly environment. Technical assistance will be extended to strengthen the life-skills programme with adolescents living with disabilities, to about 8,500 adolescents with different kinds of disabilities in 157 schools. The trainings will focus on life-skills, but also equip them to deal with sexual and reproductive health issues, violence and sexual abuse. It is also proposed to orient the matrons, teachers and principals of the special schools to create an enabling environment. Sensitization of caregivers and parents on sexual and reproductive health needs and issues faced by adolescents with different types of disabilities will be a main focus. User-friendly learning tools and resource materials will further be developed and disseminated, and an app developed for reporting.

#### Addressing poverty

The COVID-19 pandemic posed serious threats to livelihoods, impacting the overall socioeconomic deprivation among the most marginalized across almost all states and districts. The indirect impact visible was the proneness to harm, abuse and exploitation of children irrespective of their caste, class or religion, with schools remaining closed due to lockdowns and other preventive steps adopted by the respective states. UNFPA and UNICEF strengthened collaborations and partnerships with government, states and civil society organizations to successfully leverage social protection programmes to benefit vulnerable girls and their families.

A focus and emphasis remained on ensuring stability within migrant worker communities, where children can be at particular risk of child marriage. The Government

responded to this by announcing multiple measures of social protection (free rations, one-time cash transfers, access to all key services) and the roll-out of the centrally sponsored economic empowerment scheme for migrant workers. Linkages were explored and emphasized with income-generating or livelihood-promoting platforms and programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the State Livelihood Mission, and civil society organizations promoting income-generation livelihood options, with a focus on reaching out to the most vulnerable families to reduce economic vulnerabilities. The 'Cash Plus' model, where cash transfers are coupled with access to social services, has become even more critical as a means to also deal with the after-effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

Considering the need to assist adolescent girls and their families to avoid negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage during the pandemic, UNFPA and UNICEF partnered with 26 civil society organizations to create linkages with Government-supported social protection programmes to extend services to vulnerable girls and their families. UNFPA and UNICEF provided technical support in design, implementation and monitoring of social protection schemes – such as Kanyashree (West Bengal), Mukhya Mantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (Bihar), Mukhyamantri Sukanya Yojana (Jharkhand) and Kanya Sumangla Yojana (Uttar Pradesh) – to ensure that the most marginalized girls benefit from education, skills training and career opportunities. Ten million adolescent girls are estimated to have benefited from these schemes as a result of the programme support and linkages created with partners. Technical support provided to Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme district task forces using linkages with civil society strengthened the institutionalization and sustainability of the scheme across 12 states, and increased funding utilization, especially in Rajasthan.

In Odisha, civil society organizations partnered with the programme-supported district administration in arranging transport for 70,000 migrants during the lockdown and assisted in settling them in close to 7,000 temporary medical centres set up by the Government. In addition, 150,000 migrants (72,000 females and 78,000 males), including adolescents and youth, were linked with social protection schemes such as MGNREGA and Nutri-garden, enrolling returnee migrant children in midday school meal schemes and integrated child development services.

In Uttar Pradesh, UNICEF advocated for a core social protection package to respond to the pandemic, which was accepted and implemented by the state government. This included technical support for

the formulation of guidelines, labelling the scheme, communication materials, capacity-building modules and an online monitoring system. In Jharkhand, rapid assessment and advocacy conducted by UNICEF resulted in a first tranche of allocation of 1,720 million rupees for cash transfers for girls.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Convergence for social protection continues to be a challenge with various departments, multiple schemes and inadequate focus on 'Cash Plus' components in most states. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the livelihood crisis for migrant workers and poor families and subjected them to further vulnerabilities. Important next steps include ensuring access of marginalized populations to existing social protection measures, and ensuring that adolescent empowerment processes couple life-skills training with a focus on employability (e.g., through linkages to the State Skill Mission).

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

The overall approach of the Global Programme has been towards advocating for the development and implementation of costed strategic action plans at the state and district levels across all 12 states, including policies that are critical to adolescent-friendly programmes. To support the implementation and review of these, district task forces have been put in place in all intervention districts. Technical support continues to be provided to strengthen the functioning of these task forces.

In Assam, UNICEF supported the development of a strategic action plan and integration of a multisectoral approach towards ending child marriage in the state. To ensure implementation, action plans on six dimensions (political support, policies, governance, human rights, accountability, access and participation) have been developed in 17 priority districts.

In Gujarat, the strategic action plan was launched with the State Government committing US\$700,000 towards awareness generation about the plan, community outreach and campaigns, and development of information and communication materials and training on ending child marriage.

In Madhya Pradesh, the gender-responsive, costed and integrated multisectoral strategic action plan for adolescent empowerment with focus on ending child marriages and ending violence against children was developed and approved by the state government.

In Odisha, a state-level steering committee for multisectoral convergence on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and state action plan was established and chaired by the Principal Secretary. Odisha state increased its budget for the implementation of the state action plan from US\$100,000 in 2019 to US\$50 million in 2020 and, for the first time, a budget provision was made in the plan for quarterly meetings of committees at block and Gram Panchayat levels.

In Rajasthan, UNFPA supported the drafting of the Rajasthan State Policy for Women 2021 in partnership with the Directorate of Women Empowerment after a series of consultations with various stakeholders and representatives from special groups. The policy focuses on holistic empowerment of girls and women, designing of schemes and programmes for girls with special needs, and engagement of men and boys.

In Uttar Pradesh, all 75 districts have functional district task forces that plan, implement, monitor and review the progress of the child protection and adolescent empowerment programme based on the state action plan. Among the 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh, 68 districts have an approved district action plan with financial allocation of US\$1.55 million under the BBBP programme to address the issues of masculinity, GBV and child marriage.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Coordination with districts to complete certain processes were delayed during the year because of restricted movement and different priorities set by line departments in the wake of pandemic. Delays in district action plan approvals resulted in subsequent delays in rolling out district workplans and integration of services for adolescent empowerment, and delays in developing the associated monitoring mechanisms.

The balance between adolescent sexuality, protection and their agency is not easily supported by a normative framework that has pegged the age of consent at 18 years of age, thereby criminalizing adolescent sexuality. This needs to be understood in greater depth, and research has been planned by UNFPA and UNICEF for 2021. For instance, a formative study has been initiated by UNICEF in Bihar to see how these dynamics are curtailing autonomy and decision-making for girls. UNFPA has completed research on the impact of amendment to the Child Marriage Law in Karnataka that introduced a clause of declaring all child marriages void. Research on legal and policy reform processes has revealed that exclusive reliance on legal initiatives can sometimes adversely impact the interests and well-being of girls who are vulnerable to the risk of child marriage.

Going forward, the programme will also undertake evidence-based advocacy on issues of (1) age of consent, (2) girls confined to childcare institutions when rescued from consensual elopement or marriage, (3) efficacy of working on social and behaviour change communication for the prevention of child marriage, and (4) identifying and designing drivers for change like the 'Cash Plus' programmes.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

UNICEF in partnership with MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child, Child Rights and You (CRY) and Action Aid India undertook a study in nine states (Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh) to identify the socioeconomic and demographic factors that make adolescents vulnerable to child marriage, assess their needs from a programmatic perspective and map the drivers that help accelerate adolescent empowerment and ending child marriage, and those that hinder progress and act as bottlenecks. The study findings are informing programmes to help district officials of different departments such as education, health, labour, RKSK, BBBP, District Child Protection Unit, Child Welfare Committees, the Juvenile Justice Board and the Special Juvenile Police Unit, who are implementing adolescent-specific programmes and schemes to strengthen the ongoing work and programmes associated with adolescents, to make them more targeted.

In Gujarat, the study findings are informing both the advocacy planning with the state government and programmatic planning with civil society partners in terms of prioritization and de-prioritization of identified focus areas. In Tamil Nadu, policy briefs were prepared for seven core areas to strengthen implementation: political advocacy; adolescent education; adolescent-friendly water, sanitation and hygiene; adolescent health; adolescent nutrition; child protection; and ending child marriage. These will help the department frame evidence-based adolescent-friendly policies. The policy briefs will also be the guiding principles for key stakeholder departments during implementation of adolescent- and children-related policies and schemes. UNICEF supported policy-level discussions on adolescents through research and field-level demonstration by conducting an analysis of budgetary provisions (expenditure) on children by age groups (including disaggregation for adolescents) in collaboration with the Centre for Budget Studies and Planning. The analysis of multidimensional poverty index with age-specific analysis for children and adolescents by age group disaggregation provides solid analysis for adolescent boys and girls.

UNFPA initiated support for development of a comprehensive information management system to monitor the gender and adolescent outputs of various programmes and schemes implemented by the Directorate of Women Empowerment, Department of Women and Child Development, and Rajasthan state. Support for the information management system has helped influence increased focus on data collection and analysis related to women's and girls' empowerment.

In West Bengal, UNICEF – through its partners – supported the districts in the collation and analysis of the SAG- Kanyashree Prakaalpa District Monthly Progress Report (DMPR), resulting in tracking the progress, understanding gaps and making necessary course correction. At the state level, the analysis of DMPR of all 23 districts that led to a state-level review meeting by the Department of Women and Child Development helped to determine the effectiveness of the process and make necessary adjustment. Support has been provided to the department in collating child marriage cases received from the district Kanyashree cells, followed by analysis and suggesting recommendations on the gaps identified.

Another emergent area was ending violence against children (GBV, online abuse, child labour, etc.) from a child-rights perspective. There is a need for greater engagement with district-level authorities to be able to intensify identification and reporting of violence against children and engage with communities on underlying normative issues.

UNFPA, working with a civil society organization-led national coalition advocating for adolescent concerns, launched an online platform to work as a repository for resources for a range of issues relevant for young people, including child marriage, child sexual abuse, juvenile justice, and adolescent reproductive and sexual health. This partnership with the civil society coalition with expertise in legal advocacy has helped to sharpen perspectives about the implications of legal and policy reform initiatives related to child marriage and adolescent well-being.

UNICEF supported government programmes and civil society implementation with an early assessment of adolescent vulnerabilities through the mobile platform/service U-Report to understand the challenges faced by them and whether they have access to essential services during the COVID-19 lockdown. Some 45 per cent of adolescents reported school closure as their main challenge; other challenges included separation from family and friends, inability to access online classrooms run by schools and colleges, fake news and rumours online, loss of family income and no alternative livelihood

opportunity, increased stress and anxiety, and inability to access job and training opportunities. About 48 per cent of U-Reporters were aware of special central government benefits or schemes during this crisis, and 50 per cent of those who are aware have been able to access the benefits of these schemes. Some 88 per cent of U-Reporters have access to information and messages related to COVID-19 on how to keep themselves safe. The main source of information was television (49.8 per cent) followed by newspaper (16.2 per cent), Facebook (7.2 per cent) and WhatsApp (7 per cent). About 40 per cent of the U-Reporters said that they consider videos from credible sources to inform others on COVID-19. GIFs (21 per cent) and posters (20 per cent) were other cited methods for sharing information. About 76 per cent of the U-Reporters have been able to take actions within their family or community to inform people on ways to keep themselves safe. Another U-Report poll was conducted to assess the psychosocial issues faced by young people. The questions included assessing mental health and inquiring about other activities done at home. Some of the key results are that most young people (70 per cent) were eating, sleeping well, helping with housework and enjoying spending time at home. Less than half felt connected with friends, connected through phone calls and meetings, video chats and social media. Less than half knew the numbers of CHILDLINE or psychosocial support helplines. Less than half were following ways to keep safe online, and a fifth were not doing anything.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

As a result of COVID-19, there have been delays in data collection, updating of information management systems and maintaining monitoring and evaluation systems at government level due to gaps in communication and reprioritization of efforts. This has slowed the work of comprehensive information management in various government systems, making it difficult for systems to reflect data. Technical assistance has also been offered to the state governments to support and strengthen information management efforts.

In the COVID-19 scenario, new evidence will need to be generated on the impact of the socioeconomic stress on households and family-level decision-making related to child marriage. However, these changes are likely to emerge over a period of time. Therefore, longitudinal research and data analysis will need to be planned.



## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. A large portion of these partners are through the programme in India: engaging 126 partnerships in 2020. Of these, 57 are government bodies, 45 civil society organizations, 14 academic institutions, 6 media entities and 4 national partnerships. Nine of the civil society organizations are youth-led and 34 have a focus on one or more of children's, youth or women's rights. At the same time, the engagement with government bodies expands across sectors such as health, education, social protection, child protection, justice, finance and gender. This shows the importance of a multisectoral approach to responding to child marriage.

In 2021, the programme will continue to build partnerships with existing civil society organizations at the community level and leverage resources from district administrations to strengthen the programme. Through its partnership with existing networks of young people such as NYKS and NSS, in addition to civil society organizations, the programme also works to ensure sustainable development, autonomy and youth participation.

UNFPA and UNICEF continue to work together for enhanced results in India. Joint meetings between the two organizations have been undertaken at the state level to facilitate joint implementation and achieve better synergies. Example include the joint partnership to strengthen the core group designed for rolling out the state action plans for child marriage in Odisha and

Rajasthan; joint advocacy with the Minister of Women and Child Development to emphasize the issue of child marriage and adolescent girl empowerment in Odisha; and two joint meetings with the Minister of Women and Child Development in Madhya Pradesh during the year. Further, a joint webinar was organized for all staff of UNFPA, UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), including heads of agencies, to build a common understanding and perspective on legal and policy measures related to child marriage in the country.

Other state-level examples of joint work in 2020 include the joint regular meetings between UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women in Rajasthan to take the mandate of the state-specific action plan for ending child marriage forward. In Bihar, there is scope for joint work between the two organizations for leveraging the work with adolescent groups, and for joint advocacy with the Department for Women and Child Development. Strong synergy and partnerships have been established between UNFPA and UNICEF at the state level in Odisha. Both organizations have been members of the state-level steering committee for multisectoral convergence on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and the State Action Plan since 2019. This partnership led to the development of the adolescent programme ADVIKA ("every girl is unique") and capacity-building of key government functionaries on ending child marriage and adolescent empowerment in the state.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

Materials to support communication around child marriage, such as awareness-raising materials in the form of posters, videos and fact sheets, have continued to be used throughout the year. Resorting to online methods due to COVID-19 ensured extensive reach and coverage of the Global Programme messaging. Some examples of communication activities at national level include the Tarunya Toolkit<sup>70</sup> and its adolescent and youth package.<sup>71</sup> Extensive social media coverage of the UNFPA 'State of World Population' report launch in 2020 included a strong focus on child marriage, reaching across all segments of the population, with webinars and talk shows being conducted where child marriage was discussed in great detail. Training of media fellows (e.g., journalists and photographers)

on gender, media scholarships and print products on gender-transformative approaches, on reducing girls' vulnerabilities and on enhancing the value of girls were also covered widely during the year. A web portal on life-skills was developed during the year, which works as an interface, making it easier for students to work on as it provides videos, e-handouts and e-forms on a single web page. About 75,000 students have responded favourably to the portal, making it the most preferred mode of communication.<sup>72</sup>

In Gujarat, the programme engages with Commutiny, a youth collective, and their initiative, 'Be a Jagrik',<sup>73</sup> through which young people across the country have been involved in online and face-to-face engagements.

In Maharashtra in 2019, a social behaviour change communication strategy to end child marriage was developed with the support of the programme, guiding communication activities in the state. In 2020, an advocacy resource tool in the form of a video was also created with the objective of sensitizing the Government of Maharashtra on the issue of child marriage.<sup>74</sup> In October, the ADVIKA adolescent empowerment programme was launched in Odisha.<sup>75</sup> The programme ran a social media campaign (across YouTube, Facebook and Twitter), led by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, for a week in October to spread awareness on themes covered under the programme; share quotes by adolescent champions; and highlight key moments and occasions. In Rajasthan, through the partnership with ActionAid India, three blog posts were published during the year as part of the 'Say no to marriage – yes to school' campaign.<sup>76</sup> From Bihar, a story on gender-sensitive flood response and on the distribution of dignity kits was published on the UNFPA global and India websites, and subsequently published

in United Nations News Hindi.<sup>77</sup> Another important coverage of the programme in Bihar was published on the UNFPA regional website for Asia and the Pacific, focusing on life-saving support to pregnant women and new mothers during the pandemic.<sup>78</sup> In Madhya Pradesh, as part of Umang animatics, a school-based programme supported by the Global Programme, 24 animated videos on health, nutrition and life skills were developed earlier in collaboration with the Department of Education, and are still being used by different departments for disseminating messages to adolescents. In Tamil Nadu, booklets and videos on adolescent empowerment and child marriage were produced and disseminated throughout the year. The booklets, part of the Ilanthendral communication materials, were launched by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu together with the Minister of Education. In West Bengal, a music video on gender equality was published during the year in partnership with the West Bengal Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, and its launch received attention in both the *Times of India* and *Telegraph India*.

#### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

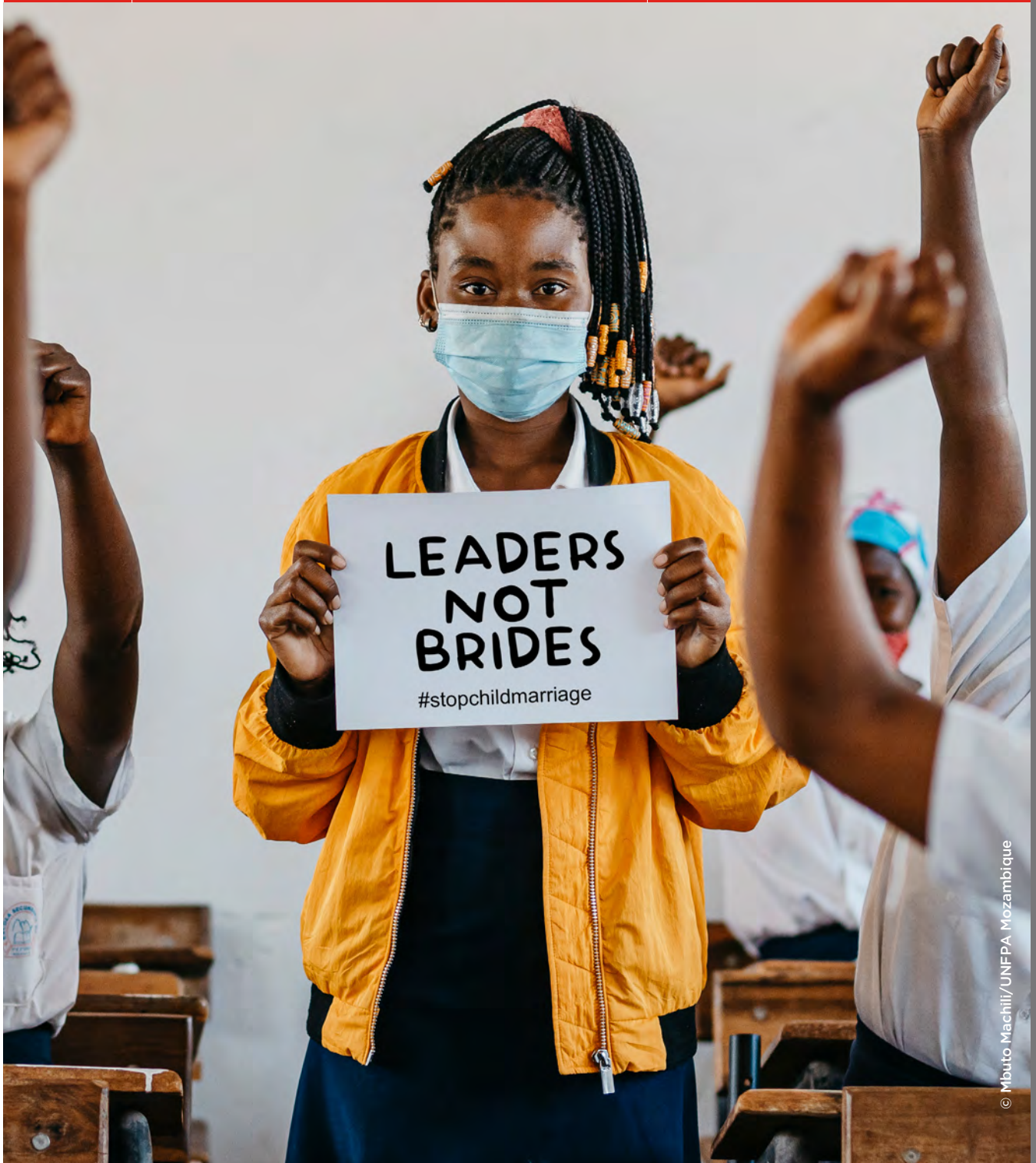
Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South-South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported		
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	3,246,395	3,610,573
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	265,731	114,740
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	3,000,000	5,900,558
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	1,293,000	8,252,151
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women, and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	4,215,271	20,015,101
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	1,350	16,745
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	135	22
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	5	26
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	0	4
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	0	0
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	0	2
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South-South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	3	0

N/A, not applicable



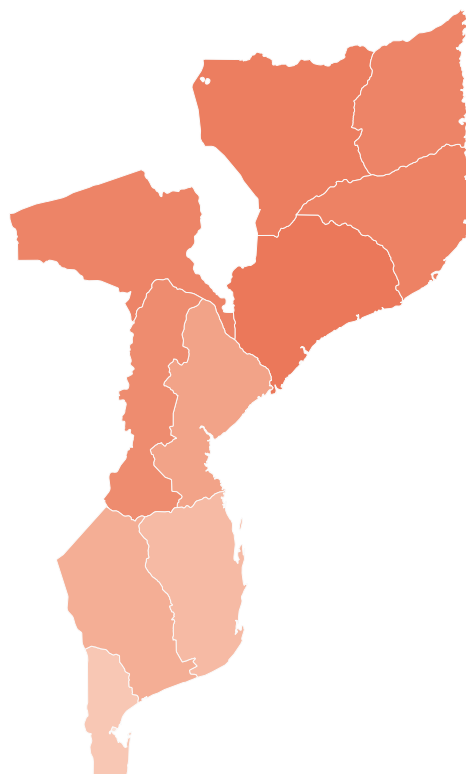
# MOZAMBIQUE

COUNTRY PROFILE



# MOZAMBIQUE

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Mozambique AIDS Indicator Survey 2015. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Mozambique is home to 4 million child brides. Of these, 1.5 million married before age 15. Across the country, 53 per cent of all young women are married in childhood. Projections for the elimination of the practice in the country are not possible for Mozambique as the country has not shown evidence of progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage over recent decades. Hence, it is not possible to build on observed rates of change: the projected prevalence will remain the same as today's levels – with more than half of all girls marrying in childhood – until signs of progress are evident.<sup>80</sup>



Unlike the situation in Mozambique, globally over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is under threat over the coming decade, making it even more difficult for Mozambique to change the course of development – up to 10 million more girls globally will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19, bringing the total number of girls at risk to 110 million.<sup>81</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) further estimates that nearly

24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic's economic impact.<sup>82</sup>

Despite these setbacks and challenges, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.



## Key highlights



Close to

# 1,300

**adolescent girls** were provided life-skills training, including counselling support to improve their psychosocial well-being and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a total of

# 1,900

**village mentors and safe spaces facilitators** were provided with content on gender-based violence (GBV), teenage pregnancy and child marriage via the phone in order to provide quality support and mentoring to girls at risk in their communities.

**Sustained support and advocacy resulted in the approval and dissemination of a multisectoral child-friendly mechanism for prevention**, reporting and referral of and response to violence against children in school, including child marriages, by the Ministry of Education.



Over **2 million adolescent girls and boys** were reached by the popular entertainment-education radio drama 'Ouro Negro' with nine episodes in a mini-series aired, targeting adolescents on content related to child marriage, teenage pregnancy and COVID-19 prevention.

The mentorship manual and implementation guide targeting boys and young men on gender equality and positive masculinities was successfully piloted as part of **Phase II programme adaptation of the Global Programme**, with close to



## 5,000

**boys and men** engaged in dialogue sessions despite the pandemic. Pre- and post-session assessments showed a



## 9.8 per cent

**increase in knowledge** among the participants on the negative consequences of child marriage, a



## 38.9 per cent

**increase in understanding of reporting mechanisms** for violence against children and child marriage, and a



## 23 per cent

**increase in boys' and young men's willingness** to change their behaviour and attitudes towards gender norms.



## 2020 Achievements



In Mozambique, the focus of the Global Programme is to accelerate action to end child marriage **by enhancing investments in and support for married and unmarried adolescent girls**, and by engaging young people (among other key actors) as agents of change in catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities are the most successful channel for delaying their marriage in programmes evaluated to date.<sup>83</sup> In Mozambique, the focus of the Global Programme is to accelerate action to end child marriage by enhancing investments in and support for married and unmarried adolescent girls, and by engaging young people (among other key actors) as agents of change in catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms. In 2020, the programme also worked to make sure to mitigate the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of adolescent girls.

In 2020, the programme also worked **to make sure to mitigate the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of adolescent girls.**

The Global Programme in Mozambique is applying a 'leave no one behind' approach in multiple layers, by direct interventions reaching marginalized girls and young women – building their knowledge, agency and skills – and by facilitating access to and strengthening of adequate youth-friendly and gender-sensitive services; by contributing to an enabling environment through community interventions and engagement with men and boys; and through policy and legislative advocacy and technical support. The most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls are among those left behind in Mozambique and consequently at the greatest risk of child marriage. Hence, the Global Programme aims to reach the ones furthest behind by targeting girls and young women aged 10–24 years old in two of the most populated provinces in the country, Nampula and Zambezia. The targeted girls are living in remote and hard-to-reach areas with scarce access to sexual and reproductive health and GBV information and services, and they are mostly out of school and illiterate, some are pregnant and/or married, and some girls live with albinism or some form of disability.



Throughout the year, **psychosocial support** was provided at an individual level to

**1,295**  
girls, including life-skills training through a total of

**3,194**  
consultations with peer community mentors.

It is well known from previous public health crises that adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by emergencies. Hence, the Global Programme enhanced its psychosocial support to girls during the year. The support takes into account the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting girls and women by exacerbating existing systemic gender inequalities at all levels, with potential implications

for the incidence of child marriage. The psychosocial support works to strengthen the resilience of girls and young women as well as positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment for their empowerment. Throughout the year, psychosocial support was provided at an individual level to 1,295 girls, including life-skills training through a total of 3,194 consultations with peer community mentors. To ensure outreach during the pandemic, the support was provided via phone. Training in psychosocial support was conducted for 29 district focal points and monitors to enable them to provide quality psychosocial support and supervision to the mentors.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

A key lesson learned through the COVID-19 pandemic is that it is feasible to use online learning and training platforms to reach and engage adolescents and young people, especially those in youth associations and groups. This is a low-cost and effective approach for capacity-building, knowledge sharing, planning and monitoring, and it will be important to continue to build the capacities of young people in using virtual communication technologies and to encourage them to transfer these skills to their peers.

With the mentorship sessions suspended and many services disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, girls and young women are facing greater risks of violence and harmful practices, including child marriage. Despite the challenges caused by the pandemic, many mentors have been proactive and resourceful agents of change in the COVID-19 response, by continuing to engage with and support their mentees throughout the year through individual mentorship sessions upon request via door-to-door visits, phone calls or individual meetings, giving information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, GBV and COVID-19 prevention. Yet, these informal mentorship sessions/encounters have been sporadic and not aligned with the regular mentorship cycles. To ensure continuation of psychosocial support provided to girls, adaptation to phone-based counselling was necessary. However, the target of girls to be reached was not achieved due to delays in inception of the new approach and the fact that not all 4,800 mentors have access to phones. To ensure that all mentors can be reached for further engagement with the mentees, either all mentors need to be provided with a phone, or alternative ways of reaching all mentors need to be devised.


With sexual and reproductive health and GBV services disrupted, and regular support and protection systems malfunctioning, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the urgency of leaving no one behind by adding additional challenges and vulnerabilities to already marginalized groups, including the adolescent girls and young women

targeted by the programme. Going forward, an even stronger focus will therefore be put on reaching girls living with disabilities, building on a plan developed with support from sectoral interventions for children with disabilities.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Multilayered social and behaviour change activities reached more than 2 million family members, adolescents and children in Mozambique in 2020 with an integrated package of messages on essential family practices, protective behaviours (including a specific focus on child marriage) and COVID-19 prevention. This was achieved through multiple channels, including the 'Ouro Negro' radio drama series, community dialogues and faith-based organizations.

Throughout the year, psychosocial support was provided at an individual level to 1,295 girls, including life-skills training through a total of 3,194 consultations with peer community mentors. To ensure outreach during the pandemic, the support was provided via phone.



Through two annual coordination meetings in the provinces of Zambezia and Nampula, with all implementing partners and government actors participating, UNICEF made significant progress in terms of building synergies and collaboration between different community engagement platforms, such as community radio, youth associations, religious and community leaders, and services led by the Government and civil society at the local level, for increased joint action to end child marriage. Through capacity-building, these actors were able to sustain collective promotion of and awareness-raising around children's rights and uptake of adolescent-friendly health services, including the SMS Biz/U-Report platform (e.g., the newly established peer-counselling hub in Nampula) and Linha Fala Crianca (the national child helpline), as well as spark a dialogue on ending child marriage in communities.

The Global Programme also worked with civil society organizations to support the challenging of harmful social norms and to promote gender equality. In 2020, UNFPA supported the foundation for community development (FDC) and the Network of Women's Associations of Zambezia (NAFEZA) in mobilizing influential actors at the community level, including community and religious leaders, midwives, parents and other decision makers. A total of 157 influential actors participated in dialogues addressing themes related to combating child marriage and to promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women. At least 16 cases of child marriage were dissolved in three targeted districts as a result of community mobilization.

Through external evaluations and programme reports of the Rapariga Biz programme, a need has been identified to strengthen the programme's gender-transformative approach by enhanced engagement of boys and young men through a boys' mentorship model to enable positive masculinities and equitable social norms – benefiting both boys and girls – to build more just and equitable communities in the targeted districts. Hence, under the leadership of UNFPA, a mentorship manual and implementation guide targeting boys and young men around issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and GBV, life-skills, gender equality and positive masculinities was developed and piloted in one district each in Zambezia and Nampula provinces. A total of 4,819 adolescents and youth aged 10–24 years were reached through 20 community dialogue cycles. The results from the dialogues have been encouraging, with pre- and post-surveys showing a 9.8 per cent increase in knowledge of the harmful consequences of child marriage among the participants, a 38.9 per cent increase in understanding reporting mechanisms for child marriage and for violence against children, and a 23 per cent

increase in people's willingness to change their attitudes and behaviours related to harmful gender norms. Another remarkable change in behaviour is in how the Matronas people in Murutho and Aube communities have changed the guidance they provide during initiation rituals, now encouraging girls to continue education and avoid sex even after the initiation.

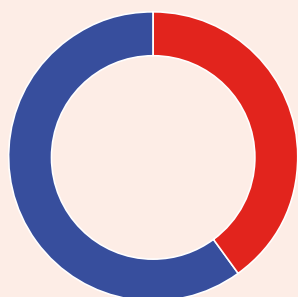
The entertainment-education radio drama series 'Ouro Negro' continued to run in 2020, with 2 million regular listeners of nine newly produced episodes, developed in partnership with the youth advisory group. The episodes focused on preventing and mitigating the secondary impacts of COVID-19, including themes such as adolescent sexual and reproductive health, HIV, violence against children and child marriage, with specific messaging towards young people living with disabilities. The episodes were broadcast twice a week through 115 radio stations in both Portuguese and several local languages (Emakwa, Cisena, Elomwe, Ndao and Tsonga). UNICEF, in collaboration with Radio Mozambique, also produced 55 radio spots on early childhood development, psychosocial support and violence against children, translated into 17 local languages and broadcast through 12 radio stations. These messages reached over 5 million children, including 100,000 children aged 3–6 years, and their families during the year.

Some 3.5 million young people were reached through a social media campaign targeting adolescents with messages on COVID-19 prevention, violence against children, and mental health in 2020 through the Global Programme. In addition, with complementary funds, social media, radio, WhatsApp and music platforms were used to continue outreach to and engagement with adolescents in the absence of planned interpersonal communication. UNFPA, UNICEF, Coalizao and the Secretary for Youth and Employment launched an adolescent-friendly social media campaign by using local creative artists and their social media followers to promote COVID-19 prevention practices. Between August and October, the campaign reached over 4.1 million individuals, recording 8.8 million impressions and close to 419,000 engagements. Further, a TikTok mask challenge video recorded 53,000 views and received 12,000 likes through the UNICEF social media account, and over 100 adolescents and young people in Maputo, Nampula and Zambezia provinces participated in the campaign offline by sharing their pictures and videos under the challenge. The campaign was also able to extend its reach by associating with PCI Media and Radio Mozambique to produce programmes with local artists talking about COVID-19; these were aired through all 12 radio stations of Radio Mozambique across the country.



Around 319,000 adolescents and young people (41 per cent female) systemically engaged with the U-Report/SMS Biz mobile platform in 2020 by asking questions related to sexual and reproductive health, HIV prevention, child marriage and GBV.<sup>84</sup> To leverage the effectiveness of the platform, the Secretary for Youth and Employment, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF repurposed two SMS Biz counselling hubs, with 52 trained counsellors to respond to COVID-19-related issues. This set-up allowed the counsellors to address more than 500,000 queries on COVID-19 between April and December 2020.

As the programme pivoted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one innovative approach the Mozambique team used was the launch of a national 'child marriage innovation challenge'.<sup>85</sup> The aim of the challenge was to source new solutions to existing challenges regarding ending child marriage from the technology, innovation and entrepreneurship communities in Mozambique. A specific focus was placed on engaging youth in developing innovative solutions within three core areas: male engagement; community awareness around the law to prevent and combat premature unions; and tracking and referral of child marriage cases. Some 98 submissions



41%  
female



Around **319,000 adolescents** and young people (**41 per cent female**) systemically engaged with the U-Report/SMS Biz mobile platform in 2020 by asking questions related to sexual and reproductive health, HIV prevention, child marriage and GBV.

were received, demonstrating the great interest and engagement from young people in social change, and a technical panel selected three top candidates, proceeding to a high-level panel composed of representatives from UNFPA, UNICEF, the Ministry of Gender, the National Coalition to End Child Marriage and IdeiaLab, which selected the final winner of the contest – a community-based initiative led by young people in Cabo Delgado. The challenge made visible the added value of focusing on digital and innovative means of reaching and engaging with young people as change agents, especially in times when movements are restricted.<sup>86</sup>

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Due to the measures put in effect to stop the spread of COVID-19, all education and community engagement activities (including training) planned by the Global Programme were suspended and/or postponed to the last quarter of 2020 and 2021. In order to comply with the Government's containment measures, the programme adjusted its strategies for community and interpersonal communication interventions by focusing on communication channels other than face-to-face where possible, such as mass media, social media and the use of phones. A community leaders' guide was finalized during the year, which will be distributed during training in 2021.

Due to the movement restrictions, the outreach to boys and young men in 2020 was limited to the piloting of the mentorship manual. Printing of the manual is currently ongoing, to take this work forward in 2021 (partially funded by the Rapariga Biz programme).

The lack of connectivity and technology at all levels, including among implementing partners, made communication and monitoring challenging in 2020. To address this gap, the programme procured technological equipment (e.g., laptops and modems) and provided training in online conferencing to several key partners, including government actors, to ensure continuity of services and monitoring of activities, even if remotely.

Going forward, the programme will include paralegals in community outreach activities such as dialogues under the Rapariga Biz programme, to specifically address girls' rights and raise awareness of the new child marriage law at the community level. The paralegals will also play a role in identifying cases of child marriage in the communities and supporting girls and families to denounce the practice. UNFPA will also ensure continuation of funding for the implementation of selected submissions from the child marriage innovation challenge, focusing on disseminating the child marriage law and tracking child marriage cases in targeted districts.

Considering the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the country, community engagement activities will have to continue to be adapted to COVID-19 prevention measures. Mass media, social media and phone-based and online tools and platforms will continue to be used to ensure a wide range of young people and community members are reached with key messages related to child marriage, violence against children, and the promotion of protection and health services. In the event that places of worship will be closed, UNICEF will use creative ways to engage faith-based organizations to ensure that messages related to child marriage continue to be disseminated.

### Strengthening systems

In 2020, the violence against children referral and reporting mechanism for schools (which also includes harmful practices) was approved and launched by the Consultative Council of the Education Ministry, with support from the United Nations and civil society organizations. The mechanism was developed in collaboration with and with full support from justice actors such as the police and the courts system. The mechanism aims to ensure the support of multisectoral actors in addressing violence in a child-friendly way. To support the roll-out, a simplified brochure has been produced and printed, with distribution ongoing. Further, to strengthen the child protection system in the country, child marriage and violence against children district plans were supported, and training and operational support provided to activate the response plans.

The programme supported the Government to conclude a mapping and capacity assessment of social services, falling within the scope of the Social Action Services Program (PROSAS), a new component of the National Strategy for Basic Social Security (ENSSB II 2016–2024) in Mozambique. The mapping exercise provided evidence-based knowledge on the capacity of social services to attend to the needs of beneficiaries across the country, improving awareness of the availability and capacity of staff for each service. UNICEF also supported the Government to strengthen the capacity to respond to cases of violence against women and children. Based on the standard operating procedure (SOP) for case management, developed with UNICEF support, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare revised and approved case management guidelines and tools to address all types of child protection cases. The SOP and guidelines aim to harmonize the response of the Government towards victims of violence and those whose rights have been violated. The guidelines were piloted in Nampula and Inhambane provinces in 2020, and training for government social workers was started





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during the year in Nampula and Cabo Delgado, reaching 60 social workers in total. Roll-out of the guidelines and training to the rest of the provinces is scheduled for 2021.

Due to COVID-19, most of the education activities in 2020 were postponed to 2021; however, the programme was able to ensure the integration of messages around prevention of violence against children into the distance learning activities going on during the pandemic. The programme was also able, with the leveraging of additional funds, to initiate the revision and integration of referral protocols for violence against children, child marriage, GBV, and mental health and psychosocial support into the existing psychosocial support training manual for teachers, and use it to train gender, school health and emergency focal points on the provision of psychological first aid and referrals of children affected by COVID-19 to specialized mental health and psychosocial support services. The manual also includes the recently approved implementation model from the violence against children in schools mechanism. In 2021, the plan is to scale up teacher training on the manual in programme focus districts.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Mozambique has the lowest ratio of social workers in the region (1 per 75,000 people), with the lowest ratios found in Nampula and Tete provinces (1 per 144,000 and 115,000 people, respectively). The number of social welfare staff based at district level is not nearly enough to respond effectively to the demands from the community level to provide care and support to vulnerable families. PROSAS aims to address these gaps, but resource allocations for the sector remain a challenge. In addition to this, social workers were important front-line professionals in the pandemic response. However, increased demand for services from the already thin workforce meant that the priorities of the services deployed to the emergency made it difficult to ensure implementation of actions aiming to construct a long-term programme. The lack of temporary shelters for victims of child marriage and at-risk girls who refuse to be married also remains a challenge.

Another challenge during the year was that, with the COVID-19 outbreak, the risk of violence and psychosocial problems increased. The Government, in partnership with the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative and with UNICEF support, developed a training package on case management services and psychosocial support for families and children – training that can be delivered face-to-face or remotely. So far, 1,289 children who are survivors of violence have received psychosocial support through the government services. The teachers' psychosocial support manual is also being adapted to incorporate modules for violence against children and GBV in times of COVID-19.

During the pandemic, schools were closed in Mozambique, making it difficult to implement activities involving students. During the year, focus was therefore given to capacity-building of education officials and school council members to prevent cases of violence and child marriage as part of the back-to-school campaign.

A lesson from the year is seen from the results achieved with the approval of the violence against children in schools mechanism. This approval shows that prevention of violence (including child marriage) is a multisectoral issue that cannot be addressed by one sector alone, but requires joint efforts from different government and non-governmental actors. Considering the stronger mandate of the multisectoral reference group to respond to cases of violence against children after the revision of the SOPs, UNICEF will continue to support the group in focus districts together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

A training-of-trainers package is under development, including modules on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and will be tested at the beginning of 2021. This will allow focus districts to monitor and provide support to cases of violence against children and child marriage. Following up on the approval of the violence against children in schools mechanism, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and civil society organizations will take the lead in providing support to the operationalization of the mechanism, including: development of a reporting and referral operational plan; training gender and school health focal points in the use of the mechanism, on menstrual hygiene management, and on the use of the new guide on life-skills activities; building the capacities of the child parliament and youth associations to understand the mechanism and share the information among their peers; and investing in capacity-building of education sector actors to ensure availability of skilled personnel and that schools provide gender-sensitive education. The implementation of the mechanism will also need to

be complemented by additional policy tools, such as a policy on the retention of pregnant girls in education.

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policies published in 2020 by the World Policy Analysis Center found that the rate of child marriage reduced by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts surrounding their enactment, foster improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.<sup>87</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis that gender egalitarian laws positively impact norms regarding women's equality and empowerment at national and subnational levels.<sup>88</sup> In Mozambique, the Global Programme was a driving force in the development of the Law to Prevent and Combat Premature Unions (adopted in July 2019) and, in 2020, the programme supported the Government in conducting an effective, transparent and inclusive evaluation of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage 2016–2019. The objectives of the evaluation were to: assess the degree of achievement of the objectives, results, goals, activities and indicators of the strategy; assess the quality and quantity of resources available for the implementation of the strategy; identify the challenges inherent to the implementation of the strategy; and assess the level of knowledge among children and adolescents about the strategy. The results from the evaluation – yet to be published – will form the basis for the new child marriage strategy for Mozambique; the Global Programme will support the development of the new strategy in 2021.

The implementation of the national strategy on child marriage is multisectoral and brings together the ministries of gender, child and social action, health, interior, justice, education and human development, and the State Secretariat of Youth and Employment. The Global Programme is facilitating the implementation of the strategy by providing support to ensure greater coherence and linkages between key sectors, accompanied with strategic actions to empower girls, mobilize gatekeepers and sensitize families and peers, and strengthen health, protection and education services in programme areas to deliver adolescent-friendly and gender-sensitive services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, support provided to the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action to strengthen multisectoral coordination at national, provincial and district levels was reprogrammed to take place virtually.

To respond in a quick and effective way to the secondary effects of COVID-19 (possible increases in cases of child marriage and violence against children), UNICEF in



coordination with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action decided to re-activate a response plan used in 2019 during the violence against children national survey. The ministry organized regional training on the response to cases of child marriage and violence against children, targeting 51 technicians who had not been trained in 2019, and – with support from UNICEF – the six priority districts in the country developed district response plans and allocated funds and key IT equipment to enable the employment of an effective and timely response to cases of child marriage and violence. Data on number of cases addressed and solved are yet to be collected, and a joint evaluation together with the ministry is planned to assess whether this pilot activity should continue through 2021.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

A persistent challenge in Mozambique has been the fragmented, weak and parallel coordination mechanisms for addressing child marriage, violence against children, GBV, sexual and reproductive health and rights and HIV/AIDS, and child protection (and other related issues), which are led by different institutions or different departments of the same institution – as this hampers effective work and duplicates effort and investment of resources. For this reason, in 2018 UNICEF started to support IOM in the child marriage focus provinces and districts in strengthening the multisectoral reference group, which consists of all justice, social action and health authorities and actors. The reference group, led by the attorney's office and co-led by the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action, initially had the sole mandate to respond to trafficking cases. In 2019, as a result of UNICEF advocacy and technical assistance, the attorney's office and the ministry approved a new SOP for the reference group, which gave a clear mandate to also respond to cases of violence against children (including child marriage).

Another challenge in the country is the continued weak leadership and limited convening power of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action at all levels (national, provincial and district). Further, the process of decentralization in the country delayed disbursements of funds, especially at the provincial level.

COVID-19 also posed a challenge during the year, leading to the postponement of several planned activities. These included the revision of the protocols and guidelines for shelters for girls at risk of marriage and girls already married, the development of an operational plan for the implementation of the new child marriage law, and the organization of government exchange visits with countries that have succeeded in reducing child marriage prevalence. Various initiatives to increase knowledge of the child marriage law have been undertaken with communities and justice partners, but a well-structured, comprehensive operational plan needs to be developed in 2021 – to

increase dissemination and to strengthen structures and multisectoral mechanisms to support survivors.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2020, UNICEF and Ipsos advocated with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action for the endorsement of the planned social norms baseline study on child marriage, and to adjust and finalize the research protocol and questionnaire submitted to the review board. Final approval by the review board will allow the cognitive testing process to take place.

The programme also adapted its research plans as the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, and planned to conduct a qualitative study on girls' vulnerabilities in light of COVID-19 through a reality-check approach, specifically looking at risk factors related to child marriage. The study was delayed during the year, but is expected to be finalized in 2021.

Partly leveraging other funds, in December 2020 UNICEF organized a social forum in Zambezia with a thematic focus on child marriage. The forum engaged administrators from programme focus districts, with the main objective of including child marriage indicators into the district plan (PESOD) from 2021.

Building on the high-level launch event for the UNFPA *State of World Population* report in 2020, UNFPA developed a concept for a regular series of technical webinars on child marriage for knowledge sharing and for advocacy purposes – to be implemented on a quarterly basis in 2021. Planned themes for the webinars include masculinities; the effect of COVID-19 on child marriage; child marriage in humanitarian contexts (specifically looking at the case of Cabo Delgado); social and gender norms; and the mental health of adolescent mothers and married girls.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Lack of mobility due to COVID-19 containment measures impacted the monitoring of activities and data collection during the year. Some activities had to be suspended altogether, but where possible, alternative modalities were applied, such as phone-based interviews. The social norms baseline study was put on hold, as it was considered that the complexity of the in-depth questionnaire and the sensitivity of the subject matter meant it would have to be conducted in the planned face-to-face modality. However, its implementation and the dissemination of the forthcoming results is a priority for 2021. Another priority for 2021, that was deprioritized in the COVID-19 context, is the elaboration of a concept related to temporary shelters for victims of child marriage and violence against children.

## Partnerships and working as one


In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Mozambique, the programme worked with eight partners, of which five are civil society organizations, one a government body (the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action) and one an academic institution. Of the five civil society organizations, four have a specific focus on youth rights, and two of these also specialize in children's and women's rights. UNFPA and UNICEF also provided technical support to the national partnership Coligação para Eliminação dos Casamentos Prematuros (CECAP), through a United Nations-to-United Nations agreement. This support included, for example, capacity-building and facilitation of advocacy efforts around mitigation of secondary effects of COVID-19 related to GBV, child marriage and adolescent sexual and reproductive health for the women's rights and youth-led organizations that are members of CECAP. The programme also strengthened the capacity of CECAP itself to coordinate provincial-level interventions by the local authorities and civil society organizations to support girls' rights, by recruiting a programme assistant to be based at Associação Moçambicana para Desenvolvimento da Família (AMODEFA), the new lead organization of CECAP.

To strengthen multi-stakeholder advocacy, coordination and resource mobilization around the child marriage agenda in Mozambique, in 2020 UNFPA and UNICEF hosted a technical lunch on child marriage with key donors, namely the high-level policy group on child, early and forced marriage, involving Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The lunch focused on four priority areas: the coordination mechanism; the Global

Programme; addressing knowledge and information gaps; and opportunities for working better together. As a follow-up to the technical lunch, the high-level policy group initiated a high-level dinner on child marriage in early 2021. This initiative is intended to remain an ongoing forum to assess the progress and needs of the child marriage agenda in Mozambique, and follow-up meetings are planned in 2021.

Throughout 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF had ongoing discussions on how to improve the programmatic synergies across the two organizations in the implementation of the Global Programme, as well as how to provide the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action with technical assistance for their overall leadership and coordination role in the implementation of the national strategy on child marriage. As a result of these discussions, there has been an agreement that bimonthly meetings will be held between the ministry, UNFPA and UNICEF in 2021.

There are several opportunities in 2021 in the drive towards improving effectiveness and efficiency in responding to and advancing the child marriage agenda in the country. These include the fact that both UNFPA and UNICEF are to develop their next country programmes; that both organizations contribute to the development of the next United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Mozambique; the development of a new national strategy and costed implementation plan on child marriage; and that UNFPA has initiated a Youth Partners Group to serve as a platform for strategic advisory and multisectoral coordination to harness the demographic dividend and maximize investments in the youth agenda.



Throughout 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF had ongoing discussions on how to improve the programmatic synergies across the two organizations in the implementation of the Global Programme, as well as how to provide the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Action with technical assistance for their overall leadership and coordination role in the implementation of the national strategy on child marriage.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

At the commencement of Phase II of the Global Programme in March 2020, several posts were published on social media in Mozambique to highlight the occasion, including through Twitter and Facebook.<sup>89</sup> To further showcase the impact of the programme, an article about girls and young women as change agents in the COVID-19 response in Mozambique, coming from the Rapariga Biz empowerment programme, was published in English and Portuguese during the year.<sup>90</sup>

As the UNFPA *State of World Population* report was published in 2020, a launch event specifically highlighting child marriage was arranged in Mozambique, with the participation of Graça Machel, the Minister of Gender, a parliamentarian, the ambassador of Sweden to Mozambique, a social activist and a Rapariga Biz mentor. The virtual event was attended by more than 100 people streaming it online.<sup>91</sup> The programme also produced a fact sheet on child marriage based on the 2017 census data, and a child marriage sectoral issue paper during the year, to keep the focus on the issue during the pandemic.

### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	55,599	4,185
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	1,756	1,226
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	3,000	1,295
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	46,216	4,819
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	1,700,000	2,000,000
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	200	157
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	0	2
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	150	160
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	15	6
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	16	2
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	2	0
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	0	0
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.





# NEPAL

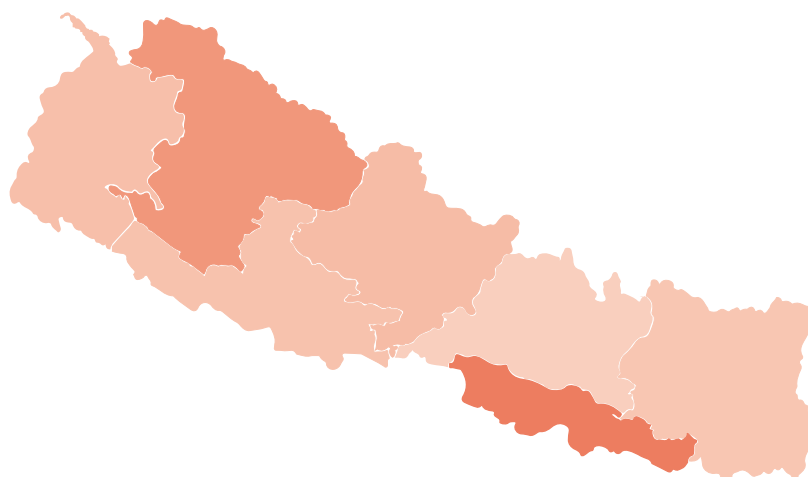
COUNTRY PROFILE





# NEPAL

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Nepal is home to 5 million child brides. Of these, 1.3 million married before age 15. The practice has become less common over the last decades, with the prevalence in the last survey in 2016 standing at 40 per cent, down from 55 per cent in 1991. However, the progress is not enough to reach the ambitious aim of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – to eliminate child marriage globally by 2030. If the progress observed over the past 25 years continues, the prevalence of child marriage will stand at 33 per cent at the end of the decade, and if the slightly accelerated progress from the last decade continues the prevalence will be 27 per cent in 2030. Even if the progress from the past decade is doubled, the child marriage prevalence will be 18 per cent in 2030, and down to 6 per cent in 2050.<sup>92</sup>



Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming a child bride. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls globally have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data show that over the next decade, 100 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides, according to pre-COVID-19 projections. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls are now at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic and measures

to stop its spread.<sup>93</sup> UNICEF Nepal reports that the economic pressure from the pandemic and containment measures are pushing adolescents to seek their own marriage and home, due to a combination of boredom, an increase in violence in the home, and their search for new opportunities because they are out of school and do not expect to go back. Further, UNICEF reports that there has been an increase in families disguising human trafficking as child marriage to earn money to survive; as the economic situation deteriorates, families can be more easily enticed to marry off their daughters for small exchanges of gifts and cash.<sup>94</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic's economic impact.<sup>95</sup> Out of school, Nepali girls lack their 'student' status, which would otherwise give them the agency to negotiate with their parents about marriage. School closures mean students lack safe spaces to socialize with the opposite sex, access to established child marriage reporting mechanisms, and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education. In addition, adolescents from poor and remote rural households in Nepal have far less access to online learning, reducing the likelihood that will return to school and increasing the likelihood of child marriage.<sup>96</sup>

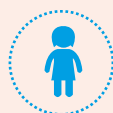
Nepal was already affected by humanitarian crises before the COVID-19 pandemic, after the earthquake that severely affected thousands of people and more than 800,000 homes in 2015. According to the Global Programme-commissioned study 'Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia', in earthquake-affected communities in Nepal (Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha districts) child marriage prevalence is moderate. In both districts, the proportion of children married before age 18 was higher for girls than boys: 3 per cent among men aged 20–24 and 9 per cent among women in Sindhupalchowk district; and 5 per cent among men aged 20–24 and 7 per cent among women in Dolakha district.

The proportion of 15- to 17-year-olds currently married was slightly lower: 2 per cent of boys and 4.8 per cent of girls in Sindhupalchowk, and 0.6 per cent of boys and 4.6 per cent of girls in Dolakha. There were very low rates of marriage before age 15 years in both communities. Qualitative data noted a slight increase in child marriage after the earthquake in 2015, but reported child marriage to be on an overall declining trend in both districts. There are variants of marriages within this trend – for example, arranged marriages before age 18 are decreasing, at the same time, love marriages and elopements are increasing. This may be one area that saw a change specifically related to the earthquake – with reports of increased elopements following. Gender-based discrimination, systemic poverty linked to caste and ethnic discrimination, agency and self-initiated marriage, and economic insecurity were among the drivers of child marriage in settings where there was a humanitarian crisis in place before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>97</sup>

Despite these setbacks and challenges, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

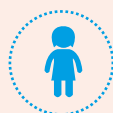


## Key highlights



3,533

**adolescent girls** actively participated in life-skills programmes or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas.



7,716

**underserved or marginalized adolescent girls** enrolled and remained in formal or non-formal education.



8,014

**individuals participated in group education** or dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

Despite the pandemic, **21 per cent** of the sampled girls in the Rupantaran financial and livelihood skills programme expressed increased sense of self-efficacy, felt confident in their ability to negotiate and delay early marriage, and felt comfortable speaking without fear.



8.5 MILLION

**individuals** were reached through mass media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.



**44 health service delivery sites** were assessed as providing quality adolescent-responsive services that meet programme minimum standards.

Six provincial governments and **92 municipalities** committed to and developed action plans to address child marriage, and **51 municipalities** allocated a total of **US\$100,000** towards scaling up implementation of the Rupantaran programme in their communities.

## 2020 Achievements



# 3,533

**girls targeted** by the Global Programme and

# 20,049

**girls targeted** by complementary interventions were engaged through the Rupantaran programme.

More than

# 3,000

**adolescent girls** were interviewed: the majority (2,336) being 11–16 years old, with slightly over half (51.5 per cent) not enrolled in school.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme in Nepal places girls' empowerment at its core, and combines both macro- and micro-level considerations that impact a girl's life and her possibility to exercise her rights – making sure that girls are given opportunities to make informed decisions and that they are in a safe environment, free from any form of violence or harmful practice. Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities are the most successful channel for delaying their marriage.<sup>98</sup> UNFPA and UNICEF in Nepal are jointly supporting the social and financial skills programme, Rupantaran, to build skills and knowledge among adolescent girls to ensure that they can exercise their choices and build support networks. In 2020, while adapting the content of the programme into a radio show to respond to the changed context during the COVID-19 pandemic, the content on gender equality was also strengthened to ensure that it is gender-transformative and that it promotes critical thinking on gender roles and unequal power dynamics that exist in the society.

During the year, 3,533 girls targeted by the Global Programme and 20,049 girls targeted by complementary interventions were engaged through the Rupantaran programme. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19-induced lockdown, thanks to the adaptation to a radio show – where sessions were aired across multiple community radio stations – it was possible to remain in contact with most of the girls enrolled in the programme. The adaptations of the Global Programme, in terms of methods of delivery and content, were informed by a rapid assessment conducted by UNFPA and UNICEF in early March 2020, which gathered information on the impact of the outbreak on adolescent girls. The assessment looked at girls' access to information and services, their mental health, key challenges experienced, and emerging needs and vulnerabilities, to determine alternative modalities to safely continue existing empowerment interventions. More than 3,000 adolescent girls were interviewed: the majority (2,336) being 11–16 years old, with slightly over half (51.5 per cent) not enrolled in school. After the assessment, the content was adapted to include



themes such as mental health and online safety, while ensuring a gender lens in all episodes of the radio show to spark discussions about gender norms and rethink and challenge prevalent power dynamics in Nepal among the listeners. Further, the radio sessions included quiz contests to ensure engagement of the listeners: recording an 85 per cent correct response rate. To ensure the appropriateness of the adaptations in terms of delivery and content, a survey using KoBo Toolbox (a free toolkit for collecting and managing data in challenging environments) is used to monitor the impact of the programme among a sample of the adolescent girl listeners.

In addition to the radio programme, UNFPA and UNICEF also ensured a strong follow-up component in the adaptations, to ensure in-person interactions through phone calls and household visits by mentors (outreach workers or peer leaders), conducted in smaller groups to ensure adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols. Despite increased risks for many of the girls due to the pandemic, only 0.45 per cent of the girls enrolled in the Rupantaran programme (14 out of 3,079) got married during the COVID-19 lockdown.

To reach the most vulnerable girls from the targeted communities, the Global Programme has initiated a system for maintaining a profile of vulnerable girls. The girls listed under the profile benefit from the social and financial skills package and are also referred to other appropriate services. In some programme areas, some of the girls enrolled in the Rupantaran programme have received in-kind support such as education materials, scholarships and uniforms on the basis of their economic situation.

As evidence suggests a strong correlation between lack of education and child marriage, the Global Programme is also supporting out-of-school girls with literacy and numeracy skills through the non-formal education programme Girls Access to Education (GATE). After completion of the non-formal classes, the girls are provided with further support for enrolment in formal education. Some girls also received cash and in-kind support for them to remain in school.

As a result of their empowerment and the strengthening of their sense of agency, the adolescent girls participating in the programme are gaining recognition at the local level. Some of the girls enrolled in Rupantaran have also been mobilized by the Government in other activities, including, for example, the distribution of supportive kits (dignity kits and adolescent kits) to pregnant women, lactating mothers, women with disabilities, and other adolescent girls and women affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, landslides and fires. Adolescent girls from one

district, Bajhang, were further recognized by the local government for their contribution to COVID-19 prevention and response activities.

To assess the impact of the Rupantaran programme, a concept mapping exercise was conducted, with technical support from the University of Pittsburgh, to develop an empowerment measurement tool. As a result, the Global Programme in partnership with local governments in Nepal developed and implemented the first ever standardized 'empowerment scale' specific to Nepali girls in 2020 ('Power in Nepali Girl' [PING]). The mapping exercise indicated significant short- and medium-term behaviour change among the participating adolescent girls. The measurement tool will be used to influence local governments to implement the Rupantaran package in programmes designed to empower girls.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The target for engagement with adolescent girls for Global Programme was partially achieved in 2020, with face-to-face engagement limited to only 3,533 girls, while about 23,000 girls were reached through the radio broadcast of the Rupantaran sessions. This was due to the national COVID-19-induced lockdown and movement restrictions, which posed a major challenge for the programme when activities could not be conducted as planned. Despite the lockdown restrictions, outreach workers kept a record of all the girls enrolled in the programme and this proved essential in keeping in contact with the girls and their parents, and ensuring that girls have access to key information related to COVID-19 prevention and transmission and other services.

The rapid assessment conducted to increase the understanding of the impacts of the pandemic on girls was essential to inform programme adjustments – adaptation of the programme delivery modality – and also provided an opportunity to integrate relevant content on psychosocial support and information on relief into radio sessions. The revised modality of delivery of the Rupantaran programme through radio allowed for more innovative approaches to be used to strengthen interaction with adolescents, including quizzes, question-and-answer sessions, phone follow-up sessions and home visits with adolescent girls, which supported learning and skills-building. This has ensured that the radio shows have good listenership and strong youth engagement.

The implementation of the Rupantaran programme as a common modality between UNFPA, UNICEF and partners, continues to serve as a platform for collaboration and a space for gender-transformative approaches across the socio-ecological framework.

Having in place a system for identifying the most marginalized girls in the programme areas allows the programme to follow up on their progress to ensure that no girl is left behind in the fight against child marriage in Nepal. In 2021, the programme will review the radio versus the face-to-face components of Rupantaran to allow for future adaptations in the programme delivery modality as required.


### Enhancing the family and community environment

The Global Programme in Nepal aims to build capacities of communities for attitudinal change to alter intergenerational transmission of behaviours that promote child marriage. To do this, the Rupantaran programme is also used as a platform to reach out to community members by engaging boys and men to create a supportive and gender-equal environment for girls and women. Realizing the importance of enhancing the knowledge and skills of parents and caregivers to

be able to provide the enabling environment for girls to exercise their voice, choice and agency, the Rupantaran parenting content has built in strong gender equality content. In the context of the pandemic, messaging on COVID-19 was integrated into the child marriage messaging delivered through the programme, and all social and behaviour change activities were implemented according to COVID-19 safety protocols as mandated by the Government. Public service announcements (PSAs) and community radio campaigns on harmful practices and COVID-19 were developed and aired in local languages. The content was informed by the findings of the rapid assessment and research on the context of child marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic, and developed in partnership with multiple organizations. Overall, 8,014 community members were reached through dialogue sessions and over 8.7 million individuals through the Rupantaran parents package adapted into radio sessions during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Overall, **8,014 community** members were reached through dialogue sessions and over **8.7 million individuals** through the Rupantaran parents package adapted into radio sessions during the COVID-19 lockdown period.





## In 2020, the Global Programme mobilized young people to conduct community dialogues on ending child marriage, gender equality and on alternatives to child marriage, facilitated through radio sessions during COVID-19.

In 2020, the Global Programme also mobilized young people, most of them men, to conduct community dialogues on ending child marriage, gender equality and on alternatives to child marriage, facilitated through radio sessions during COVID-19. These dialogues included parents and community influencers to expand critical and transformative reflections. In addition, 378 religious leaders, local leaders and influencers were engaged by the programme in dialogues and consensus-building sessions to end child marriage and lead the support to community protection and surveillance mechanisms. As a result of these social and behaviour change radio campaigns and engagements, the majority (73.5 per cent) of surveyed adult respondents that participated in the radio campaigns are now able to identify the benefits associated with ending child marriage and are increasingly aware of the harmful effects of children marrying before the age of 18. However, only a small proportion (6.9 per cent) of participants were able to identify sanctions linked to the practice.

These community campaigns have led to increased reporting of child marriage cases. In 2020, through the support to the community protection monitoring systems, 64 cases of child marriage were registered with the police, compared with 31 cases in 2019; 443 cases of potential child marriages (before the marriages took place) were reported through the child helpline, compared with 285 cases in 2019. Around 350 cases of child marriage (before and after the marriages occurred) were identified in Global Programme-targeted areas through the incident reporting mechanism. Of these reported cases, more than 40 per cent were resolved (averted/intercepted) successfully, only 10 per cent were concluded without any action, and actions are ongoing for the remaining 50 per cent of cases.

Youth participation was enhanced during the year, with 30 young people from Province 2 attending forum theatre training for conducting edutainment (educational entertainment) on ending child marriage as part of risk

communication and community engagement activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people delivered child marriage messages through radio and megaphone announcements; in addition, 16 episodes on child-marriage-related issues targeting religious and community leaders, fathers, men and boys were developed and broadcast through eight FM radio stations covering all districts of Province 2. In the same province, two child marriage testimony songs were prepared by young people in the local language and aired through radio and megaphone announcements for awareness-raising. The young people engaged also collected and documented 14 real-life stories of child marriage, which will be used to develop a storybook. Adolescents taking part in the storytelling found the process of preparing stories empowering. The published storybook will be disseminated in schools and communities for further awareness-raising.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown and restrictions on movement and travel severely disrupted programme implementation. In 2021, the programme plans to assess the Rupantaran package delivered through both face-to-face and radio to strengthen its content and implementation strategies. The flexibility built into the programme supported the timely adaptation and implementation of activities in 2020, highlighting the importance of integrating space for review, revisions and improvisation to achieve results. One of the major lessons learned during the COVID-19 response is the need for greater flexibility, both in terms of the use of funds and in implementation, to deliver timely results on the ground. This is essential for responding effectively to rapidly evolving and fluid situations.

The programme will prioritize the strengthening of strategic partnerships and coalitions of women's rights organizations and men's/boys' groups to advance the gender-transformative agenda in 2021.

## Strengthening systems

At a systems level, the Global Programme supports child protection, sexual and reproductive health and education services to ensure adolescent girl-responsive services. In 2020, the Global Programme supported the child protection sector, capacitating 301 justice and security authorities with skills and knowledge on justice for children, including data management and diversion, strengthening their capacity to provide quality services that are child and gender sensitive. Throughout the year, a total of 13,939 cases related to women and children were registered with the police, which exceeded the annual target by 47 per cent. The rise in reporting could be because of the increased awareness and trust in justice/security authorities and increased service-seeking behaviour among women and children. However, it could also indicate an increase in cases related to gender-based violence.

UNFPA in coordination with local governments organized orientation on disaster management, protection and emergency health preparedness and response in selected municipalities. The participants were selected from the respective municipal executive members, local disaster committee members and thematic section chiefs of the municipalities. This has resulted in the formation of municipal protection cluster committees, ensuring the availability of protection services and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The generation of evidence on adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and its utilization for policy and advocacy has resulted in an increase in investment from local provincial government, the Family Welfare Division and relevant stakeholders in adolescent sexual and reproductive health programming. The Government and all seven provinces have allocated a total of US\$124,500 towards adolescent sexual and reproductive health training and the certification of adolescent-friendly service sites in all 77 districts.

During the year, the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Training Package was revised and improved with an added focus on building the skills and modelling the behaviour of health service providers, with technical support from the programme to the Family Welfare Division, the National Health Training Center and the Ministry of Education. Fifty-seven health-care providers have received training on the revised training package, which strengthened their capacity to provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services to adolescents. A training package (trainer's guide, participant handbook, adolescent sexual and reproductive health reference materials, and adolescent job aid) was provided to all service providers during the

training to use during examination and service provision to adolescents. The efficacy of the training can be measured by the increase in the number of adolescents visiting the centres for services. A total of 51,669 adolescents (26,401 girls and 25,268 boys) utilized sexual and reproductive health services in five districts during the year – a 7 per cent increase in service utilization.

The Global Programme has supported the establishment of adolescent-friendly information corners in schools in programme areas. In coordination with the Health Facility Management Committee, 44 health service sites were supported to deliver adolescent-friendly services following pre-certification criteria. Materials such as information booklets, posters, comic books and a television screen were provided to these health service sites to comply with the set standards. With the objective of familiarizing adolescents with the services provided by the adolescent-friendly information corners – and to ease barriers between adolescents and service providers – site visits to the corners have taken place for over 50 per cent of girls participating in the Rupantaran programme.

In the education sector, in collaboration with the Center for Education and Human Resource Development, a partnership was established with a civil society organization to promote girls' education; end gender-based violence in schools; ensure equity in education (through the establishment of a complaint response mechanism in schools); and establish a Girls Education Network and Gender Focal Points with local government participation and collaboration. A one-day virtual orientation on safe school reopening, after the pandemic-induced closure, was conducted for political authorities and education officers of 37 local governments. The orientation session focused on the promotion of girls' education, gender equity and social inclusion, linking officers from the local governments with the Girls Education Network and the Gender Focal Points to ensure the return of vulnerable girls to school. Likewise, orientation sessions were conducted with 299 teachers from 19 districts, focusing on the safe reopening of school, girls' education, gender equity and social inclusion, the use of the complaint response mechanism and suggestion box, and the role of Gender Focal Persons in promoting girls' education.

The Complaint Response Mechanism Guidelines, developed in 2018, were amended in 2020 and approved by the Government. The amendment incorporates changes to the role and responsibility of Gender Focal Persons and the Complaint Response Committee, integrating lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the subnational level, a Girls Education Network was formed in three municipalities in Province 2 and network members were oriented on



girls' education, gender equity and social inclusion, and the purpose and functions of the Girls Education Network. Additionally, 69 schoolteachers were trained on the Complaint Response Mechanism and on providing psychosocial first aid support.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Across the world, 2020 was a challenging year to continue programmes for ending child marriage, and the situation in Nepal was no exception. The disruption of services for sexual and reproductive health and child protection, school closures, lockdown measures that prevented girls from meeting in person, increase in gender-based violence and economic burden on families due to loss in income were some of the most pressing challenges affecting the Global Programme implementation. However, the country team took measures to ensure the continuation of services reaching the most marginalized adolescent girls, boys and families in need by pivoting critical interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enhancing the capacities of government at the national and subnational levels to deliver responsive services for adolescent girls during the COVID-19 lockdown was a successful approach. The provision of technical tools and capacity-building allowed the Global Programme to leverage existing national mechanisms and networks, and partnerships between the Government and civil society organizations increased local capacities and achievement of results.

Cross-sectoral collaboration was strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of areas. This has led to opportunities to drive a more dedicated advocacy strategy and to coordinate child marriage efforts with other issues such as mental health, girls' education and menstrual hygiene management. It is important to constantly look for opportunities for strategic collaboration and avenues to reach a wider audience, which also ensures optimal use of resources.

### Addressing poverty

In 2020, the progress in addressing economic drivers of child marriage was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, by pivoting interventions, UNICEF has initiated a partnership process for strengthening the promotion of the birth registration campaign with the aim of promoting online birth registration systems that link with birthing centres, ward offices, the Beti Bachau Beti Padau ('Educate a Girl, Save a Girl') scheme, and the girls' insurance scheme of Karnali Province, in addition to capacitating local governments to strengthen online civil registration and the social protection programme implementation system in 100 wards of Province 2 and Karnali Province covering the Global Programme target areas. Under this partnership, ward offices will be capacitated to carry out online vital events and the social protection registration system; strengthen linkages between birth registration systems of birthing centres, ward offices and the Beti Bachau Beti Padau scheme; and conduct birth registration campaigns for increased demand-generation.

At a systems level, the Global Programme supports child protection, sexual and reproductive health and education services to ensure adolescent girl-responsive services.



The Global Programme has established a partnership with the National Youth Council to conduct a mapping of existing programmes on technical and vocational education and training centres, microfinance, government grants and employment programmes implemented by municipalities at the local level, to create linkages for accessing economic empowerment initiatives for girls graduating from the GATEs and Rupantaran programmes. This initiative is expected to provide information to girls on the existing economic empowerment and on ways of accessing these services.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

There were significant delays in establishing the partnership to conduct the planned activities, as some of the activities were relatively new for UNFPA and UNICEF in the country and required comprehensive discussions to identify the appropriate partner to implement activities. The COVID-19 lockdown also affected the consultation processes for defining the scope of the partnership.

In 2021, the programme will expand the engagement and partnership with other United Nations agencies that have programming experience on addressing poverty drivers, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

The Global Programme undertakes evidence-informed advocacy to strengthen governance and sustainability in order to prevent child marriage, and generates data and evidence to inform public investments in promising interventions. An important strategy used by the Global Programme in Nepal based on its new federal structure is the partnership with the provincial and municipal governments to advance the child marriage agenda. The technical support covers supporting the governments to develop subnational action plans, to implement and monitor the action plans, and to integrate the child marriage issue into other public programmes and plans.

In 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF in Nepal continued providing sustained advocacy, technical and programmatic support for the implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage, which has contributed towards a decline in child marriage prevalence in Nepal. In line with the national strategy, several local and provincial governments have advanced the agenda on ending child marriage through action plans and dedicated government schemes, which has contributed to the reduction. As a result of the joint advocacy of UNFPA and UNICEF,

two of the provinces, under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Development and with technical support from the Global Programme, have developed a provincial-level strategy on ending child marriage in alignment with the national strategy. The development of the provincial-level strategies and action plans were supported with the purpose of setting up mechanisms and approaches for ending child marriage at the provincial level and to guide provincial and local governments in addressing child marriage. The provincial-level strategy in Lumbini Province was developed in close coordination with various stakeholders such as child clubs, adolescent group networks, youth clubs, local civil society organizations, parents, teachers, religious leaders, elected leaders, members of the provincial parliament and division offices of the Social Development Ministry. Three virtual consultations were conducted with targeted groups, including youth and children, social leaders and elected representatives, religious leaders and teachers, and policymakers/higher authorities.

A comparison between the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data from 2014 and 2019 indicates a decline in the prevalence of child marriage among women aged 20–24 of 15.7 percentage points (48.5 per cent in 2014 to 32.8 per cent in 2019). A similar reduction can be seen among girls aged 15–19 who are currently married or in union (24.5 per cent in 2014 to 19.3 per cent in 2019). Although this decrease is not attributable to activities in the last couple of years alone, it is important to highlight the impact of the Global Programme since its inception in 2016.

The programme had planned to work intensively with 92 municipalities and 6 provincial governments to ensure coherent programming on ending child marriage and to establish stronger linkages with other existing programmes supported by the two organizations, and to increase local resource allocation. During Phase I (2016–2019), the programme began to advocate for local resource allocation, which resulted in local governments announcing various schemes and activities to address child marriage. In 2020, the Global Programme advocated for resources and support for action from local governments to implement activities to end child marriage. Fifty-one municipalities have now allocated funds to support the implementation of Rupantaran in their communities. On average Rs.250,000 (US\$2,500) was allocated by each municipality; a total contribution of approximately US\$100,000.

During the year, UNFPA and UNICEF advocated for the inclusion of child marriage in the national short- and long-term COVID-19 response plans. Through active participation in the harmful practices working group,

interventions that contribute to end child marriage were included in cluster plans, supported by the development of a technical brief on harmful practices and COVID-19, with specific guidance for the various clusters.

### Next steps

A key focus will be to develop a communications and visibility strategy for the Global Programme in Nepal and the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage with a focus on gender-transformative approaches.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2020, the Global Programme conducted a rapid assessment covering over 3,000 girls in the Rupantaran programme within three months of the imposition of the nationwide lockdown to reduce COVID-19 transmission. The assessment aimed to explore the impacts of the outbreak and identify alternative modalities for the delivery of the programme within the new context. While the overarching goal of the rapid assessment was to gain an understanding about the ideal modality for continuation of the Rupantaran sessions, it also gathered information from adolescent girls about how the lockdown was impacting their access to information and services, their psychosocial condition, the key challenges they were facing and how emerging needs could be addressed to avoid increased vulnerabilities. The findings from the rapid assessment were used to adapt both the modality of delivery of Rupantaran into a radio show and to include additional relevant content to address adolescent girls' emerging needs. In addition, the knowledge, attitudes and practice (KAP) matrix used pre- and post-participation has been reviewed and revised to incorporate the findings from the rapid assessment.

During the year, the Global Programme in Nepal had planned to revise the web-based reporting system in line with the Global Programme Phase II indicator reference guide. However, post-participation data collection for already enrolled participants and pre-participation data collection for newly enrolled girls could not take place due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Yet, to still be able to monitor change among participants of the programme, a survey was designed using the KoBo tool with 10 per cent of participants from all target groups randomly selected to respond to the questionnaire.

The Rupantaran social and financial skills programme is a flagship component of the Global Programme in Nepal and has been part of its activities since the programme's inception in 2016. In the context of COVID-19, the need to demonstrate results became more relevant than ever. The programme has reached

thousands of adolescents, especially girls, and a mapping study was conducted to assess and validate the evidence of positive change. The findings from the study provide valuable examples of how empowerment is a key prerequisite for social change and development, and the programme's positive impact on knowledge and skills development, which can be measured and attested to by the people closest to these change processes, providing a foundational evidence for future work.

In 2020, a final report of the study conducted on the effectiveness of adolescent sexual and reproductive health interventions was released. The study was conducted in two programme districts to determine the extent to which the programme's work on adolescent sexual and reproductive health is contributing to improving the capacity of adolescent-friendly health service programming. Recommendations are in line with activities that are being undertaken by the programme. Some of the recommendations include ensuring the presence of trained service providers to provide adolescent, girl-friendly services; strengthening coordination between provincial/local government and adolescent-friendly health-care facilities; strengthening monitoring, recording and reporting of data; generating demand for adolescent-friendly health services; and building an enabling environment for adolescents to access services. The programme will continue working on these recommended areas in 2021.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The COVID-19 lockdown and mobility restriction resulted in the suspension of regular community monitoring and mobilization that was developed during Phase I of the Global Programme. As an interim option, a survey using the KoBo tool was developed. The programme will review the use of the KoBo tool for monitoring with outreach workers and if this platform proves more efficient and effective, it will be used throughout the remaining programme period.

It is important to ensure that if programmatic adaptations are made during humanitarian contexts, plans for revising programme monitoring, which may be affected in the changed context, take place concurrently. As the monitoring mechanism was aligned at the onset of adaptations to the programme, there were relatively few challenges needed to comply with reporting requirements.

In 2021, the programme plans to conduct a study on self-initiated child marriages, work initially planned for Phase I. Given the new context of COVID-19, considerations around child marriage drivers and trends during the pandemic will be incorporated into the study.

## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Nepal, the programme worked with 17 partners in 2020: 11 civil society organizations, 4 government bodies and 2 academic institutions. Of the civil society organizations, 2 partners are youth-led, 2 have a specific focus on children’s rights and 2 have a specific focus on women’s rights. For the government bodies, these focus on youth, gender and health.

Partnerships have been enablers and represent a strategic dimension for Global Programme implementation in Nepal. The rapid assessment among girls enrolled in the Rupantaran financial and social skills package was jointly conceptualized by UNFPA and UNICEF, involving field office staff and all implementing partners. Data collection was undertaken by the respective partners with the support of field offices. Data cleaning, data analysis and report writing were completed by the UNICEF partner Nepal Fertility Care Centre (NFCC) for both UNFPA and UNICEF.

Numerous technical joint meetings with implementing partners from both organizations were also conducted to review the KAP matrix for the Rupantaran girl and parent programmes. In addition, the revised content outline developed by a UNICEF-contracted consultant was extensively reviewed in these technical joint meetings. Joint orientation sessions on rolling out the radio show were provided to implementing partners by the consultant.

Further examples of joint work in the country were the support to provincial governments to develop a provincial strategy, led by UNFPA with technical support from UNICEF in one province, and led by UNICEF with technical support from UNFPA in the other. The monitoring mechanism for the programme was also jointly conceptualized and implemented.

Going forward, the programme will explore strategic partnerships with the private sector for promoting girls’ education and gender equity.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

“When I learned that my parents wanted to marry me off, I knew I couldn’t let it happen. If I did, what kind of message would I be sending to other girls?” – **Phulm, 18**, stood up for her rights to choose her own future.

During the year, the Global Programme in Nepal communicated messages on child marriage and adolescent girls’ empowerment extensively on social media, focusing on sharing the stories and voices of girls.

“I didn’t want to ruin my future.”– Even though child marriage was nothing out of the ordinary in Rashida’s community in Mahottari, she mustered up the courage to say no.<sup>99</sup>

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the story of Chandani was filmed and shared on national and global platforms, showing how girls in their communities in

Nepal are walking door to door to convince community members and parents to change their attitudes and practices for an end to child marriage. Videos under an #ENDViolence campaign also showed Praksha in Bagmati Pradesh, Kristina in Province 1 and Priyanka in Province 2, with Praksha’s message on how we need to raise our voices against all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse against children.<sup>100</sup> Another video showed Mantoriya, the first girl in her village to go to college and a strong believer of education for girls to ensure that they can follow their dreams.<sup>101</sup>

Throughout the year, the programme has highlighted stories of girls who have been empowered to support their communities during the pandemic. Bidhya, from Kapilvastu, had stopped her own child marriage and, together with members of the adolescent girls’ group of her village, began educating villagers about how to stop the spread of coronavirus when the pandemic hit. Meanwhile, Rupa in Bajhang started to provide emotional support to women and adolescent girls who were stressed because of the pandemic and disruptions to their studies.<sup>102</sup>



The programme also published messages from, for example, Simran Shilpakar, co-founder of Astitwa Nepal, on why it is important to raise public awareness around different forms of violence and harmful practices, and the rights of children;<sup>103</sup> and from journalist Malvika Subba on why violence against children is detrimental to the development of children.<sup>104</sup> The programme also published a message from Prashansha KC, winner of the UNICEF Nepal Short Film Competition 2019 with *One Childhood Story*. Prashansha was 15 when she first began working for girls' rights. It was seeing young girls in her community in Rukum District being forced into marriage – including among her own family and friends – that spurred her into action. She initiated different campaigns to build support against

child marriage, including teaching girls self-defence and raising awareness among children and families about the harms of child marriage. Currently studying engineering, Prashansha is an enthusiastic film-maker whose documentaries aim to educate and encourage viewers to be part of the change.<sup>105</sup>

In addition, the programme produced awareness-raising materials to support norms change in favour of children's rights. A short video series showed common scenarios related to child marriage in the country to make people reconsider attitudes and practices. An animated film produced together with Save the Children further highlighted the issue of child marriage.<sup>106</sup>

### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	28,000	3,533
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	9,908	7,716
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	16,500	432
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	2500	8,014
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	200,000	8,768,799
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	180	378
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	15	5
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	31	368
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	55	124
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	2	5
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	2	2
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	2	0
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	4	0
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



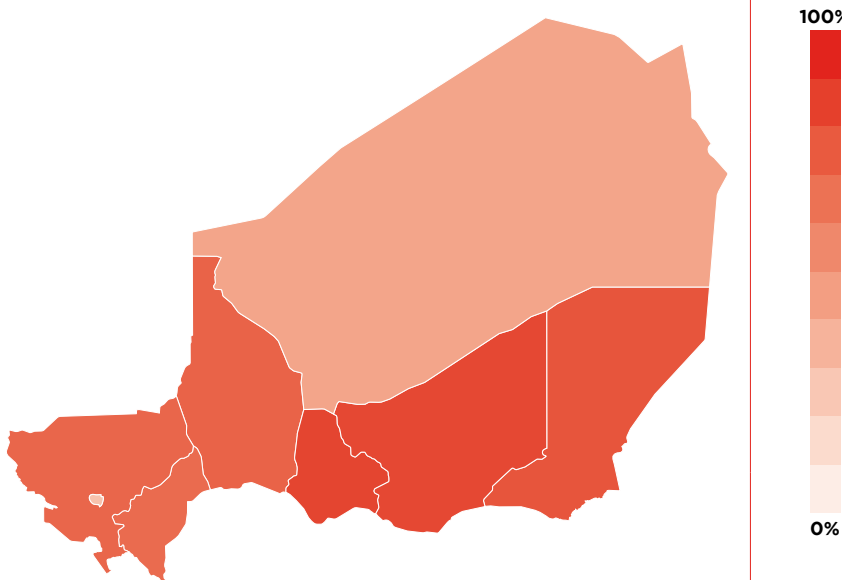
# NIGER

COUNTRY PROFILE



# NIGER

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Niger Demographic and Health Survey 2012. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

The Niger is home to 5 million child brides. Of these, 1.9 million married before age 15. The Niger is the country in the world with the highest prevalence of child marriage, with 76 per cent of all young women marrying before their 18th birthday – and there is no sign of progress in eliminating the practice.<sup>107</sup> Hence, projections for the country are not possible to assess, as it is not possible to build on observed rates of change. The projected prevalence will remain the same as today’s levels until signs of progress are evident.



Further, parts of the Niger are considered part of the Sahel region, a broad swath of land across the northern portion of sub-Saharan Africa. Compounding crises affect the well-being of children and adolescents in the Sahel, both directly and indirectly. In this climate of uncertainty, in a region firmly rooted in cultural traditions, it is common for marriage to be considered a safe haven for girls with few opportunities. Not surprisingly, the Sahel has the highest levels of child marriage in the world – this is also the case for the parts of the Niger within Sahel: here the prevalence of child marriage is in line with the national average of 77 per cent, whereas the prevalence in non-Sahelian parts of the country is 47 per cent. On average, women in the Sahel region in the Niger marry nearly two years earlier than those outside the region (at age 16 compared with at age 18).<sup>108</sup>

married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that 10 million additional girls are at risk of child marriage.<sup>109</sup> This risks making an already hard situation for girls in the Niger even worse.

Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

Unlike the situation in the Niger, globally over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were



## Key highlights



Community mechanisms for protection of girls and surveillance of child marriage were strengthened through the establishment of



**38**  
**child protection** committees and



**221**  
**village** child protection committees.

More than



**740**  
**cases of child marriage** have been postponed or cancelled, and



**27,321**  
**children** have received child protection care services.



**12,471**  
**adolescent girls** in the

**97**

**new target villages** acquired knowledge and life skills through their participation in educational discussion activities on themes relating to social mobilization, human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation, and traditional practices harmful to the health of women and girls.



**The National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls and Women's Education and Training (SNAEFF)** was developed and launched with programme support. Following the launch, over

**6,000**

**out-of-school girls** have been able to return to formal education programmes.

Skills-building of **300 adolescent girls** in clothing-making alleviated the supply shortages of protective masks for refugees and displaced persons as they were able to produce **1,500 masks per day**.





## 2020 Achievements



Some

# 22,064

**adolescent girls**, enrolled since 2019 in cycle 5 of the Illimin initiative, were able to complete the programme at the start of 2020.

# 12,471

**adolescent girls** in the 97 new target villages acquired knowledge and skills through their participation in educational discussion activities on themes relating to social mobilization, human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation, and traditional practices harmful to women and girls.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme works towards enhancing knowledge, education and life-skills, and attitudes of marginalized adolescent girls, including in humanitarian contexts, on matters such as their rights, relationships, sexual and reproductive health, and financial literacy. At the individual level, this is done through interventions to strengthen girls' skills and capacity to empower them via the implementation of the UNFPA-supported Illimin initiative and the UNICEF-supported Community Approach to Child Protection (ACPE), where adolescent girls – both married and unmarried – from the most marginalized communities are taught to better express their opinions in decisions about their future.

Some 22,064 adolescent girls, enrolled since 2019 in cycle 5 of the Illimin initiative, were able to complete the programme at the start of 2020. They acquired knowledge of life-skills, sexual and reproductive health and nutrition, literacy and financial management, and were ready to face the challenges related to their situation as girls and young women.

Additionally, 12,471 adolescent girls in the 97 new target villages acquired knowledge and skills through their participation in educational discussion activities on themes relating to social mobilization, human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation, and traditional practices harmful to women and girls. Among these, 194 girls took on new leadership roles as 'child protection correspondents', leading community initiatives and being recognized and respected by their peers, who call on them in case of need. Supervised by qualified community facilitators, they represent the girls of the village in the child protection committees, where they make sure that their interests are taken into account, as illustrated by the testimony of Safiya Ibrahim, 15, Maradi Region member of the Village Committee for the Protection of the Child (VPE) of her village:

**"I feel very useful in the community because I intervene a lot with the VPE committee for awareness. Things have really changed, since I've been a protective correspondent, I feel proud to help my friends, and all my friends respect me and everyone wants to talk with me to take advantage of the messages I convey."**

"Let's not be spectators,  
but rather actors of our  
destinies."

– Rahilatou, 15

During the peak of COVID-19, these leaders played a key role in the prevention of disease transmission and in improving the dynamics around respect for girls' rights, going door to door, even as schools were closed for more than two months without the possibility of students continuing to learn through other channels (television, internet, radio), and organizing small-group participatory community workshops in their local languages where they shared their knowledge.

The Global Programme continued to provide economic empowerment opportunities to girls, with 300 adolescent girls enlisted in the Centre for Professional Training in Styling and Modelling in Niamey graduating and able to produce protective masks against COVID-19. The girls, who produced about 1,500 masks a day, contributed to alleviating the shortage of protective masks especially to refugees and displaced persons.

#### Next steps

The programme will strengthen and expand the existing 'community of champions' to advocate for girls' rights. The programme uses a human rights-based approach and aims to establish the general status of adolescent girls as rights-holders in the Niger.

#### Enhancing the family and community environment

The strategic approach of the programme is in line with the four strategic axes of the national plan, and within the Global Programme's results framework and gender-transformative approach. The programme's intervention strategy is based on a holistic approach that takes into account risk factors, traditions and norms, and the social and economic beliefs and systems that create and support the conditions under which child marriage is maintained. This approach also takes into account the respective roles that different stakeholders play in creating an environment that protects the rights of children, especially girls. These stakeholders have responsibilities at different levels to shape and influence the course of adolescent girls' lives at individual, interpersonal and societal levels.

The Global Programme is contributing to adolescent boys, families, traditional and religious leaders, community groups and other influencers demonstrating more gender-equitable attitudes and support for girls' rights. Supporting actions at the interpersonal and community levels are integrated into the Illimin and ACPE initiatives – these are essential actions for social and behaviour change of families and loved ones aimed at supporting girls in their choices and community mobilization around the rights of children and girls.



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The Global Programme continued to provide economic empowerment opportunities to girls, with **300 adolescent girls** enlisted in the Centre for Professional Training in Styling and Modelling in Niamey graduating and able to produce protective masks against COVID-19.

In parallel with the girls' sessions of cycle 5 of the Illimin initiative, as part of a holistic approach to social change, the same communities were mobilized by community facilitators through 1,347 community dialogues on topics related to sexual and reproductive rights. Traditional leaders grouped within the Association of Traditional Chiefs of the Niger (ACTN) in the eight regions of the country (four of which are targeted under the Global Programme) have carried out actions on the ground through campaigns and community caravans, with a view to eliminating child marriage. Seventy leaders (15 funded by the Global Programme) exchanged with communities committed to eliminating child marriage. Each leader mobilized a team with two education officers, two health workers, two religious leaders, a youth representative and a women's representative.

During the year, 38 new community child protection committees and 221 village child protection committees were set up in accordance with the 2019 decree and are functioning as per the procedure manual – to manage child protection cases in their communities. These committees, with a total of 5,716 members, are elected in accordance with the defined criteria for a renewable two-year term. Committee members benefited from capacity-building on child protection issues, awareness raising techniques and case management. The committees work in partnership with the school management structures on gender-based violence (GBV) to ensure the implementation of the presidential decree on the protection of girls in school, allowing the committees to broaden their scope of action at the school level, to avoid school dropout and thus child marriage. Committee members played an important role in creating awareness of the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 and intervening in arranged child marriages. More than 740 cases of child marriage have been postponed or cancelled, and 664 girls were able to resume their education. More than 20 cases of sexual assault were referred to the appropriate services by the committees. Some 6,223 cases, 41 of which related to rape, were referred to appropriate services by the committees, and 408 child candidates returned to school.

Labour migration is a challenge for boys' and men's participation in the programme, especially after the rainy season. However, due to mobility restrictions, more boys and men ended up being engaged in the dialogues at the community level and participated in decisions to delay marriage with their own suitors. Close to 5,470 men and 824 boys from the 97 new villages in the programme participated in educational sessions on human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation, and harmful traditional practices, which

has enabled them to become agents of change among their peers.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The modular sessions scheduled for 2020 as part of the implementation of cycle 6 of the Illimin initiative could not be conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, preparatory activities, namely five regional orientation workshops, were held to raise awareness among the programme's stakeholders between June and December. Training materials and data collection tools have been reviewed and printed. The inputs needed for the programme have been pre-positioned. Recruitment of actors (e.g., mentors, literacy teachers, supervisors, community facilitators, monitoring and evaluation) was finalized for the Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder regions in late December. Training for 23,000 girls will begin as soon as the health environment allows in 2021.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, community meetings, which were an opportunity to share action plans for validation in plenary, could not be held from March to July 2020 and the participatory workshops run by the girls also had to be postponed several times. Ninety-seven of the 134 planned villages were reached (72 per cent). A virtual rescheduling meeting was held with the partners, following which emergency support was provided to the partners to ensure connectivity and to take part in future meetings. Educational talks were interrupted pending a normalization of the situation. Following the experience of the mini-series 'Coping with COVID-19', in which two teenage girls from the Niger took part, and the impact this activity had on the participants, the programme will focus on the use of smartphones and WhatsApp to strengthen the empowerment of adolescent girls, especially the child protection correspondents, in their role as leaders. The door-to-door approach used by these girls reached girls who are generally invisible, including girls with disabilities, girls who have had a child out of wedlock, and those who cannot attend community participatory workshops due to their heavy workloads.

## Strengthening systems

# STORIES OF GIRLS

In the village of Groumdji, Maradi Region, the girls know about child marriage. Most are afraid of it. Some have no choice about the matter. But girls are increasingly standing up to the practice, with the support of child protection committees. “When our friend found out that her family had accepted her marriage, she felt so sad. She was traumatized. She even stopped eating and lost weight,” say Olabizi, 17, and Aminata, 18. They decided to alert the committee in their village and, after a process of negotiation and sensitization with the parents of their friend, her father agreed to finally refuse the marriage. “Next time, it will be her who decides how, when and with whom,” continued the girls.<sup>110</sup>

The Global Programme increased the capacity of education, health, child protection and GBV systems to deliver coordinated, quality programmes and services that meet the needs of adolescent girls and their families, including in humanitarian contexts. UNICEF (through other resources) has contributed to the development and extension of the SNAEFF. Through this strategy, 13,015 out-of-school children, including 6,021 girls, have been able to return to formal education programmes, with close to a half coming from areas affected by humanitarian emergencies (Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua and Tillabéry). Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, child protection workers were able to provide appropriate services to children in need of care. A record 27,321 children in care were reached, or 167 per cent of the 2020 target. Child protection workers also provided care and response services to more than 10,000 conflict-affected children expelled from Nigeria following the closure of schools. Services were also provided to 893 migrant girls from neighbouring countries, including the cancellation or postponement of more than 200 child marriages.

## Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the education system, hampering activities on the ground, particularly social mobilization and follow-up activities. At the same time, it was an opportunity to raise the awareness of the Government, donors and implementing partners, and local communities about the need to develop intelligent solutions for data management; explore a partnership with the private sector to facilitate continuity of learning; build regional and local capacity in preparing for an emergency response; and build an effective knowledge management system.

The insufficiency of social workers as a result of the recruitment freeze in the public service since 2016 reduces their capacity to intervene. Despite the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), monitoring the number of migrant children remains a major challenge. Advocacy will continue as soon as the new Government and local authorities are established with the announcement of the results of the presidential and local elections held in December 2020.

## Facilitating supportive laws and policies

During the year, the Global Programme enhanced the capacity of its partner governments to fund, coordinate and implement national and subnational action plans and systems to end child marriage. In the Niger, the programme supported the midterm review of the 2019–2021 National Strategic Plan, with the participation of all stakeholders in September, following the lifting of restrictions on the organization of workshops by the Government. This allowed for field partners to also join the exercise. The findings of this review highlighted the actions that bring about change, namely, better involvement of traditional and religious leaders and community actors in child protection actions and the promotion of the abandonment of child marriage and diversification of awareness programmes on child marriage broadcast via community radio stations (radio debates, public broadcasts, leaders’ appeals). The main challenges raised have been the limits of programmes and initiatives to strengthen girls’ empowerment, and the lack of coordination of actors at the community level. It was proposed at the end of this review to support actions aimed at keeping girls in school and creating job opportunities; to create the conditions to strengthen intergenerational dialogue; to have harmonized model modules for all themes related to the fight against child marriage; and to make an inventory of the current best practices in order to scale them.



## Generating and applying data and evidence

The Global Programme supported a study on social demand to identify community perceptions of education and how to achieve change in the current environment. Preliminary results of this study helped to increase understanding of the critical factors affecting children's access to formal education and the different sensitivities surrounding the values underlying Nigerien society. The issues of equity and gender remain crucial and will be at the centre of future educational reforms. The study laid the groundwork for a political dialogue on the vision of education in the Niger. Overall, the responsibility and accountability of the decentralized services of the State for the implementation of interventions and their

capacity-building remain critical preconditions for the effectiveness of efforts to end child marriage.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The measures imposed by the Government for the prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic, including restrictions on movement and border closures, have had an impact on the implementation of studies involving international consultants. With the use of rapid testing and the advent of COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), a normalization of the situation will allow the completion of studies planned for 2020 that have been postponed to 2021. The priority is to continue to gather evidence in order to be able to influence the design of large-scale programmes.

## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In the Niger, the programme engages six partners: four government bodies and two civil society organizations. The government bodies run across the sectors of gender, education, protection and information – noting the importance of working across government entities and sectors to enable a holistic prevention of and response to child marriage.

UNFPA and UNICEF continue to work together at the national level and in selected elements of the community initiatives of the Global Programme. One example is how the two organizations have signed working protocols with the ACTN, under which there is a model village initiative based on a number of indicators agreed on between the two organizations.

Studies and evaluations, and advocacy at the political level for fairer legislation that respects the rights of adolescent girls, will also be jointly carried out in 2021.

The joint implementation will be further strengthened, facilitated by the incorporation of the Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls, which will target the same regions as the Global Programme (Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéry and Zinder) but increase coverage with 5 villages in each of the 60 targeted municipalities; thus, the joint child marriage programme in the country will reach 300 villages in total. The other two agencies that also jointly implement the Spotlight Initiative – UNDP and UN Women – will further focus on complementary interventions related to legal and judicial assistance, holistic care for GBV survivors, and socioeconomic reintegration.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

In 2020, the *Coping with COVID-19* video series was launched,<sup>111</sup> a global initiative of UNICEF to give adolescent girls across the world a platform to share their experiences through mobile phones during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed. Two teenage girls from the Niger, Esta and Rahilatou, took part in this enriching initiative and on 11 October, on the International Day of the Girl, they were invited on national television in the Niger to further share their stories.<sup>112</sup>

“Since the public and private schools closing, we young people are in a very challenging situation.” – **Rahilatou, 15**

“I have a friend who was married off at age 14.” – **Esta, 15**

In 2021, the programme in the Niger will continue to work to raise awareness on the need to end child marriage, including through multimedia campaigns (e.g., on digital platforms for wide-scale dissemination) and special advocacy events (e.g., cultural events).

## Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	9,940	12,471
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	4,500	276
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	8,940	6,296
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	66,680	17,852
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	204,687	36,369
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	215	734
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	85	1
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	N/A	N/A
Indicator 3211: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	4	1
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



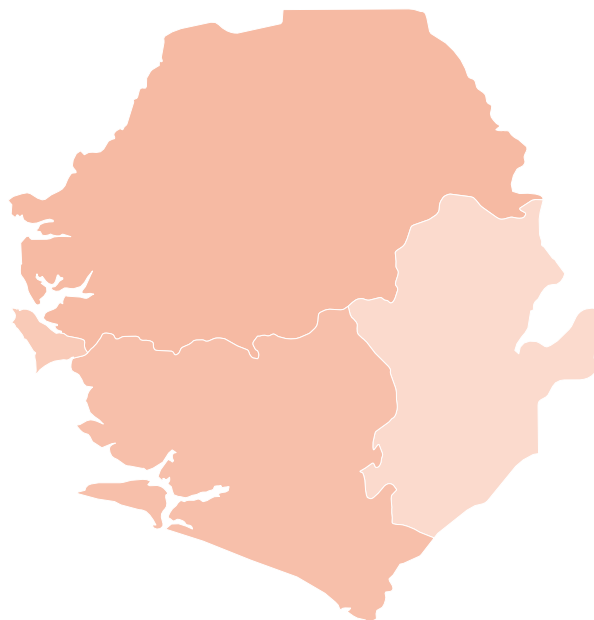
# SIERRA LEONE

COUNTRY PROFILE



# SIERRA LEONE

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Sierra Leone is home to 800,000 child brides. Of these girls, 400,000 were married before age 15. The practice of child marriage has become slightly less common in the country over the past 25 years, with 30 per cent of all girls being married in childhood today compared with 37 per cent 25 years ago.<sup>113</sup> If this rate of progress continues, still 27 per cent of all girls in Sierra Leone will marry before they turn 18 in 2030 – the target year for the elimination of the practice as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Globally, over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming child brides. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. But the global rate of progress also needs to be accelerated to enable the elimination of child marriage by 2030. In Sierra Leone specifically, even if the rate of progress witnessed over the past decade is doubled, 13 per cent of all girls will be child brides in 2030 and in 2050, the child marriage prevalence in the country will still be 4 per cent.<sup>114</sup>

Girls in Sierra Leone are not only at risk of child marriage. Among women aged 18–49, just 1.3 per cent are ‘only’ child brides, while 33.7 per cent of all women in this age group have been subjected to both child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). A further 56.8 per cent of the women have undergone FGM but

not child marriage, meaning that among women in this age group, only 8.3 per cent have not been subjected to either of these harmful practices.<sup>115</sup>

Despite progress in ending child marriage over the last decade, this achievement is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million additional girls will become child brides globally.<sup>116</sup>

Notwithstanding these challenges, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.





## Key highlights



# 12,000

**girls** were reached with life-skills training, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and information on gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health services.



Comprehensive sexuality education is now fully integrated into the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's Basic Education Curriculum Framework.



# 5,276

**adolescent boys** were engaged in gender-transformative dialogue (including CSE) that promotes healthy relationships, positive masculinities and gender equality. Some 15,927 individuals in communities were engaged in group education or dialogue sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality.



Over

# 3.6 MILLION

**individuals** were reached by mass media messaging on child marriage that also incorporated messaging on COVID-19; and 1,500 religious leaders engaged over 16,000 young people in intergenerational dialogues.



420 social workers were trained in case management and the child protection information management system within the context of the COVID-19 response.



The Communication and Advocacy Strategy for the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage was launched to harmonize communication, social mobilization and advocacy-related activities on adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in the country.

## 2020 Achievements



Overall,

# 3.9 MILLION

**mobile phone users** received messages on GBV and sexual and reproductive health, tailored to address harmful gender norms during the year.



In 2020, the programme was able to reach

# 12,000

**girls** through safe spaces, despite COVID-19.



An estimated

# 3.5 million

**people** were reached through the radio programmes by the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 corroborate findings on the positive effects of adolescent girl-focused interventions, such as support to schooling, life-skills, livelihood and employment opportunities, in delaying marriage.<sup>117</sup> In Sierra Leone, the Global Programme (to the extent that physical distancing requirements allowed) supported key activities to promote girls' empowerment during the year, including life-skills programmes directly engaging adolescent girls, and also orientation of Male Advocacy Peer Educators (MAPE) in three target districts, who engage their local communities on the need to end child marriage and support reporting of violations and harmful practices at the community level.

In 2020, the programme was able to reach 12,000 girls through safe spaces, despite COVID-19. These adolescent girls accessed life-skills training and were provided with information on sexual and reproductive health and GBV prevention and response services. Most of the year, however, in-person training could not take place due to the pandemic. To adjust for this, life-skills radio programmes were developed and aired throughout the country, with lessons six days a week and at different times for different age groups. The use of radio, and mobile phones for sending out messages to adolescents and their parents (in the form of both SMS and audio-recorded messages) on GBV and sexual and reproductive health, tailored to address harmful gender norms, were key to ensure continued outreach to adolescent girls, boys and communities during the pandemic. Overall, 3.9 million mobile phone users received the messages during the year. In the last quarter of the year, safe spaces in Kambia and Moyamba districts were partially reopened.

To ensure that girls had access to remote learning during the pandemic, the programme supported the distribution of 2,000 radios to vulnerable adolescent girls to allow them to continue with schooling and life-skills training during the pandemic. Furthermore, an estimated 3.5 million people were reached through the radio programmes by the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy, which disseminated key messages on protecting adolescent girls from child marriage, early pregnancy and GBV.

Using complementary funds, UNFPA also provided 2,500 dignity kits to vulnerable women and adolescent girls, containing essential items such as sanitary products and torches, along with COVID-19 prevention items such as face masks.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

During the year, many of the originally planned interventions had to be reprogrammed and adapted to be responsive to the COVID-19 context. With schools closed from April 2020, all life-skills and in-person training was suspended, thus the programme had to resort to extensive use of radio and mobile phones to reach adolescent girls, boys and communities. The closure of schools increased the risk of child marriage for already vulnerable girls, while limiting the ability of UNFPA and UNICEF to directly respond to this risk. However, through the use of radio and mobile phones, education and life-skills programmes could still reach girls during the year.

The pandemic also slowed or halted the standardization of a harmonized approach and curriculum for operating adolescent girls' safe spaces, the development of minimum standards for safe spaces – including a package of interventions and standard operating procedures on regulations, the mapping of adolescent girls most at risk in intervention areas, and the establishment of additional safe spaces for adolescent girls and boys.

In 2021, the programme will focus on accelerating programme activities, especially girls' and boys' safe spaces. The programme will also work to improve linkages and integrated interventions between the safe spaces and the MAPE networks for a holistic approach to girls' empowerment.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

The Global Programme continued to promote gender-equitable norms and attitudes through information and education communication and social and behaviour change interventions in 2020. The MAPE networks were supported in three target districts to promote gender-transformative attitudes among men and boys. The training of the peer educators focused on gendered drivers of child marriage, such as harmful gender norms, and placed emphasis on the important role of men and boys in addressing these issues. In addition to the men engaged through these networks, 5,276 adolescent boys participated in life-skills programmes on GBV and other harmful practices. The engagement of the MAPEs and boys in the programme has increased commitment by communities to support the aims of the programme. Training and monitoring

tools provided to MAPE members support community awareness and contribute to the safety and protection of adolescent girls. Shifts in attitudes around the practice can be seen, and according to a 2020 U-Report poll involving 4,000 individuals in the country, 75 per cent of respondents expressed that child marriage is an ineffective strategy for protection or for financial security.

In addition to the engagement of men and boys, the programme also developed a positive parenting programme during the year, to promote positive child-rearing practices. The programme is currently being piloted and will be rolled out at scale following its validation and finalization in early 2021.

The programme also engaged more than 1,500 religious leaders in 2020, to promote positive gender norms and deconstruct negative norms that put women and girls at risk. The engagement of religious leaders enabled outreach to nearly 16,000 young people through intergenerational dialogues. Working with pastors and imams, key messages on child marriage were further reviewed and contextualized so that they are relevant and appropriate in their respective religious contexts, to be further disseminated in their communities and congregations.

### Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed much of the programming during the year, and strategies for community engagement had to be adjusted. In addition, the pandemic halted the implementation of the planned symposium on child marriage in 2020.

### Strengthening systems

In 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF continued to support various systems-strengthening activities through the Global Programme, together with complementary funds, to address vulnerabilities of adolescent girls. For example, fears associated with the potential of an increase in GBV during the pandemic served to trigger momentum to enhance services for survivors: 420 social workers from the Government and civil society organizations were trained on the child protection case management information management system within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Key components of the training covered psychosocial support, including GBV risk mitigation and prevention.

The Global Programme supported the Rainbo Initiative to provide medical supplies and support operation of services to survivors of GBV in the Bo and Freetown Rainbo centres, offering free counselling and clinical care. Further, the establishment of one-stop centres



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providing free quality care to GBV survivors and ensuring an intersectoral case management and referral mechanism, were supported in six additional districts. National clinical guidelines for management of survivors of sexual violence and GBV were developed during the year (for 2020–2025). These clinical guidelines build on international best practices and have been endorsed by the Government. The clinical guidelines are being put into practice in Global Programme-supported Rainbo centres and government-run one-stop centres.

Furthermore, through complementary funds, the national toll-free 116 GBV hotline and eight one-stop centres were supported to increase the availability of quality services to survivors of GBV in Sierra Leone. In a related activity, through support by UNFPA and UNICEF, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs formed a technical working group to oversee the expansion of PRIMERO (the child protection case management information management system) to include GBV (called GBVIMS+), through the development of terms of reference and consultations held with GBVIMS+ global experts.

During the year, CSE was fully integrated into the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's Basic Education Curriculum Framework and accompanying syllabus for the following subject areas: social studies, religious and moral education, integrated sciences,

home economics and physical health education. In 2021, additional resources will be produced and teachers will be trained on the revised content.

To further promote quality of education for girls, technical support and advocacy influenced the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to establish a broad-based task force on sexual and reproductive health and rights. A key mandate of the task force is to advise the Minister of Education on issues related to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in education, such as marginalized girls and children with disabilities. A key measure of the task force's success during the year was the lifting of the ban against pregnant girls attending school.

### Challenges

Due to the closures of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, the planned school-related GBV action research, which aims to strengthen coordination mechanisms between the education and child protection sectors, could not be undertaken during the year.

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policies published in 2020 by the World Policy Analysis Center found that the rate of child marriage reduced by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced



child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts surrounding their enactment, foster improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.<sup>118</sup> In Sierra Leone, the Global Programme has continued to strengthen capacities at policy and decision-making levels to facilitate an enabling environment for adolescent girls' well-being. The Child Rights Act is currently being reviewed to identify bottlenecks that impair children from receiving child-friendly legal and welfare services in a conflicting legislative framework.

During 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF jointly supported the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy to conduct a midterm review of the implementation of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage. The outcome of the review led to a deeper understanding of progress to date, good practices that could be replicated and challenges faced. The strategy aims at promoting community engagement by using existing community platforms and ensuring that every chiefdom and ward has a body responsible for reducing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. This responsible body works closely with schools on efforts to prevent teenage pregnancy and forced marriages. The strategy also works to identify platforms, such as religious institutions, that can promote behaviour change activities for boys and men to support efforts to end child marriage. In March 2020, a communication and advocacy strategy was further developed and launched to guide the harmonization of all communication, social mobilization and advocacy-related activities in the country, focused on reducing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage.

During 2018–2020, the domestic budget allocation for child marriage ranged increased from 3.2 per cent in 2018 to 3.7 per cent in 2020. According to a recent Save the Children publication, in 2020, total government budget allocations relevant to child marriage equalled about US\$7.80 per Sierra Leonean child.<sup>119</sup> In addition to the impact of COVID-19, there has been a significant increase in budget allocation due to an increase in school fee subsidies.

### Challenges

In 2021, continued high-level advocacy will be prioritized for the enactment of a bill on the prohibition of child marriage in Sierra Leone.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

During the year, the Global Programme initiated a formative study on social norms related to child marriage in Sierra Leone. The field survey, which targeted 950 respondents across four districts (Western Area Urban, Kambia, Kenema and Pujehun), was completed and preliminary data are now available, with the final findings expected to contribute to informing policies and improving programme design once ready.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

During the COVID-19 pandemic, planned evidence generation activities were deprioritized due to restrictions on movement, and to enable addressing of the immediate needs of the COVID-19 response.

In 2021, data collection activities will be prioritized to inform all programme activities, ensuring greater effectiveness and efficiency. Focus will be on COVID-19 prevention measures and programme adaptations will be closely monitored throughout the year.

## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Sierra Leone, the programme worked with 14 partners, of which 6 were government bodies, 7 civil society organizations and 1 the national partnership of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. The engagement with the government bodies shows the importance of the multisectoral nature of the programme, as UNFPA and UNICEF engage with the sectors of health, education, social protection and gender. Of the civil society organizations, two are youth-led, aiming to ensure the participation of adolescents, and three are focusing on women's rights, aiming to ensure that the

programme empowers girls and women and that it is gender transformative.

The programme continues to prioritize coordination between UNFPA, UNICEF and implementing partners. Some of the joint activities in 2020 included support to the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy; development of messaging on GBV and sexual and reproductive health that was sent out through mobile phones; and integration of GBVIMS+ into the child protection information management system led by the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs.

## Communicating the need to end child marriage

The communication activities by the programme in 2020 focused on GBV, teenage pregnancy and child protection in the context of COVID-19, as key messages and communication materials such as posters were developed by the organizations. The posters were distributed together with dignity kits to vulnerable adolescent girls. Radio jingles were also produced

highlighting the importance of girls going back to school and staying safe during the pandemic.

Two videos produced by the programme also highlighted the situation of girls who are survivors of child marriage, as part of the UNICEF #ENDViolence Against Children campaign in 2020.

### Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	25,000	12,000
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	250	0
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	10,750	5,276
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	3,375	15,927
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	300,000	3,649,144
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	50	1,538
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	6	0
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	5	0
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



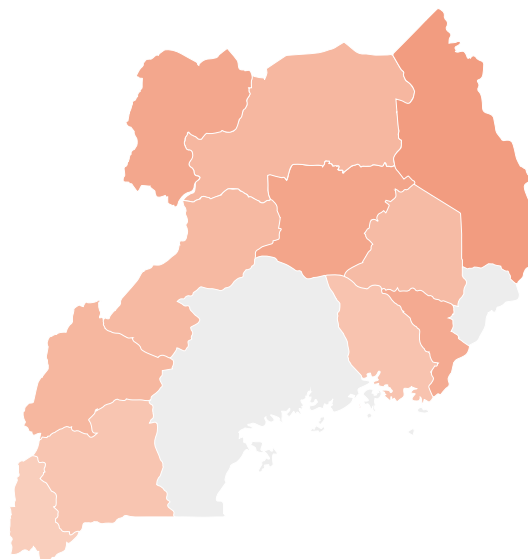
# UGANDA

COUNTRY PROFILE



# UGANDA

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers. No data for grey regions.

## The country context

Uganda is home to five million child brides. Of these, 1.3 million were married before age 15. The practice has become less common in the last 25 years, with the percentage of young women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 dropping from 45 per cent in 1991 to 34 per cent in 2016. However, this rate of progress is not enough to meet the target of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: to eliminate child marriage by 2030. If the rate of progress observed over the past 25 years continues, 29 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood in 2030 in Uganda. Even if the slightly accelerated progress observed over the past decade is doubled, 18 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030 and the level will be down to 8 per cent by 2050.<sup>120</sup>



Although the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent over the past decade, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming child brides – meaning that the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted – this remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data show that up to 10 million more girls globally are at risk of child marriage in the next decade due to the pandemic.<sup>121</sup> The pandemic has exacerbated existing risks and created new risk factors for child marriage across the world. For example, lockdowns have prevented a significant proportion of the population in many countries from going to work and many have lost their sources of income. A COVID-19 impact study conducted in July 2020 found that 71 per cent of Ugandan refugees, internally displaced persons and host community respondents had lost a job or employment income since March 2020.<sup>122</sup> Moreover,

during the lockdown, the informal sector in the country – which employs more women than men – was worst hit. The reduction of income among women and girls risks wiping out decades of gains in women's empowerment and increasing gender inequality.<sup>123</sup> This type of economic shock pressures adolescents and their families to find new survival strategies. In Uganda, girls have become more likely to engage in forms of work that put them at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. For many, this results in pregnancy. They are then more likely to cohabit with their abuser to secure basic support – or their families may marry them off to avoid the stigma associated with premarital sex and adolescent pregnancy.<sup>124</sup>

In normal times, many adolescent girls in Global Programme countries have some (albeit limited) access to quality sexual and reproductive health, education,



protection and social support services that prevent child marriage. The pandemic has disrupted and suspended many of these vital services. For example, when Uganda's Child Helpline was temporarily suspended, girls were left without a child marriage reporting mechanism or social services. With little or no access to resources to prevent unplanned pregnancy, teenage pregnancies increase, making child marriage more likely. In addition, special court sessions on gender-based violence (GBV) slated to take place in hard-to-reach areas were postponed due to COVID-19.<sup>125</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the

pandemic's economic impact.<sup>126</sup> In Uganda, school closures and the shift to online learning (without safeguards in place) have introduced new risks of online bullying and child sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, which can result in school dropout. The longer children are out of school, the more likely marriage becomes.<sup>127</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.



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The elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality.

## Key highlights



Over

# 74,000

**adolescent girls** participated in life-skills training delivered using the rights-based training manuals for in-school and out-of-school children that enhanced their knowledge and understanding of their rights to information and services, and boosted their service-seeking behaviour to protect themselves. Close to

# 3,400

**of these girls** were provided with economic empowerment and livelihood training, including funds to start up their own businesses.



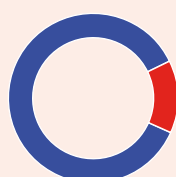
Over 13,000 girls accessed integrated sexual and reproductive health and GBV outreach services, with an estimated 40 per cent accessing emergency contraceptive services.



Through sustained coordinated approach to tackling child marriage issues and advocacy with partners, the Ministry of Education and Sports released a circular allowing **pregnant girls to return to school immediately after reopening following lockdown**, in line with increased government commitment to ending child marriage and teenage pregnancies across line ministries.



Through successful advocacy, the social welfare workforce was included in the essential staff category of the Government during COVID-19, providing services to **over 73,000 community members.**



14%

The National Development Plan III includes a specific target of **reducing child marriage prevalence to 14 per cent in the country by 2025.**

## 2020 Achievements



In total,

**74,335**  
adolescent girls and



**69,050**

boys in 12 districts participated in training during the year, covering topics such as gender, HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and child marriage.

Some

**16,706**

adolescents that are especially vulnerable (**8,168 girls and 8,520 boys**) received mentorship support and life-skills sessions during COVID-19 from peer educators through this adapted approach.



The programme contributed to **81 per cent of all students** (715,406) receiving home learning materials – recording

**121,000**

interactions with academic and life-skills content through the Kolibri e-learning platform.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

In Uganda, adolescent girls and their families, especially those most vulnerable to child marriage, are supported to access information, skills and economic opportunities to build their resilience and enable them to protect themselves, demand and seek services as needed, make informed decisions about their lives, and report incidents of child marriage. Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender-rights training) and their employment opportunities are the most successful channel for delaying their marriage among programmes evaluated to date.<sup>128</sup>

The Global Programme in Uganda supported life-skills training for in- and out-of-school adolescents in 2020, using a rights-based training manual to enhance adolescents' knowledge and understanding of their right to information and to access to services, in order to boost their service-seeking behaviour to protect themselves. In total, 74,335 adolescent girls and 69,050 boys in 12 districts participated in the training during the year, covering topics such as gender, HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and child marriage. The sessions are led by qualified club patrons, senior male and female teachers, and peer educators who have benefited from training for trainers led by the Ministry of Education and Sports and primary teachers' colleges. Members of the school clubs have gone on to take up leadership roles within their schools and through the Adolescent Volunteer Initiative, becoming advocates in their communities and participating in awareness-raising radio programmes focusing on issues related to adolescents. Post-training surveys show that 60 per cent of the participating adolescents have enhanced their knowledge of their right to information and services, and 30 per cent indicated that they now know how and where to access services and information they need.

Following the school closures due to COVID-19 in March 2020, the approach to empower adolescents with skills shifted from in-school to out-of-school club engagement. Some 16,706 adolescents that are especially vulnerable (8,168 girls and 8,520 boys) received mentorship support and life-skills sessions during COVID-19 from peer educators through this adapted approach.

The participatory 'Go to school, back to school, stay in school' campaign run during 2020 addressed factors that continue to affect retention and transition rates among adolescents, such as limited parental support for education and high school fees, especially in secondary schools. The campaign is rolled out by district authorities and district security officers have been brought on board to patrol trading centres to identify children who are not in school. Advocacy efforts have yielded results in which some district councils (Mairungi and Kobo) have committed to the process of developing by-laws to curb drug addiction, which was identified as a barrier to education in those communities. School-level monitoring at the beginning of the academic year showed that 7,337 students (5,136 female and 4,201 male) who had previously dropped out of education re-enrolled in 2020.

The programme contributed to national and district-level COVID-19 efforts, including the preparation and operationalization of COVID-19 preparedness and response plans. The focus of the plans was to minimize the adverse effects of COVID-19 on students, teachers and the education system at large, promoting coordination among education stakeholders for a more effective response and enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Sports and local district governments to promote the protection of students and to support continuity of learning. As a result, the programme contributed to 81 per cent of all students (715,406) receiving home learning materials – recording 121,000 interactions with academic and life-skills content through the Kolibri e-learning platform. Some 85 per cent of all students are, however, still denied access to education as schools remain closed. Coordination with the ministry and districts to review the partial reopening of schools is ongoing, to inform decisions by the Government on full school reopening, which is hoped to take place in 2021.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

As schools closed in March 2020, all school-based interventions, such as adolescent clubs run through schools, were cancelled. This meant that adolescents' access to protection, reproductive health and other services was made more challenging during the year. As schools were closed, many of the adolescent engagement activities moved online. There is a need for new and innovative ways to sustain the virtual engagement of adolescents during emergencies such as COVID-19, and a need to provide diverse platforms for adolescent engagement, going beyond the traditional platforms such as radio. There is also a need to improve adolescent participation in these activities, including on how to bring sexual and reproductive health services closer to the adolescents who need them.

In 2021, the Global Programme in Uganda will focus on strengthening community-based clubs as safe spaces for adolescent engagement and for the provision of protection services: aiming to reach at least 20,000 girls with integrated GBV and sexual and reproductive health services in Global Programme-targeted districts. The programme also aims to strengthen resilience-building activities for both adolescents and their parents and caregivers.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

Community-based structures, including para-social workers, SASA! activists, male action groups and village health teams, are the engine for social norms change work within the Global Programme. Community mobilization and capacity-building activities are based on annual capacity needs outlined by the Ministry of Gender and from government strategies and guidelines, such as the male action group strategy and the SASA! activist curriculum. At a logistical level, community structures are provided with equipment and materials such as bicycles, smartphones, protective gear (as a safety measure during COVID-19), public address systems, telephone airtime and fuel to enhance their capacity to coordinate among themselves and conduct home visits, sensitizing community members around the harms of child marriage and encouraging adolescents to access available services. The Global Programme in Uganda uses gender-transformative approaches, where men and boys are engaged for social change, to ensure a conducive environment for girls' empowerment. This is carried out, for example, through sexuality education via online and mass media, mobilization by religious and cultural institutions, multimedia and social media campaigns, and through the engagement of parents – to ensure change in negative gender and social norms, and to challenge inherent beliefs and attitudes that drive child marriage in patriarchal societies.

Community engagement was intensified during the year through multimedia campaigns, virtual engagements with community-based actors such as para-social workers, and home visits. Developing specific indicators to measure attitudinal and behavioural change around child marriage will be prioritized in 2021, but anecdotal information from U-Report polls conducted in 2020 indicates that attitudes have started to change among community members, with the majority (87 per cent) of respondents believing that marrying off their children before age 18 is not the best option, while 78 per cent believed that girls can go back to school after pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>129</sup> In 2020, a total of 6,043,669 individuals were reached with information to increase their awareness around violence against children and child marriage through multimedia campaigns, and another



73,073 individuals (37,821 females and 35,252 males) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality. Some 41,937 parents and caregivers (18,830 females and 23,107 males) also benefited from parenting programmes that enhanced their knowledge and skills around positive parenting, and also built their resilience to withstand the challenges faced by their adolescent children. Of these parents, 2,499 (1,301 females and 1,198 males) were adolescents aged 15–19.

A total of 3,989 local actors, including para-social workers, members of male action groups and local councils, were engaged in dialogues on child marriage before the restrictions due to COVID-19 were implemented, and through virtual spaces for engagement (closed user groups) once the lockdown was in place. These actors, after their engagements, reached out to 46,871 individuals (10,321 boys, 11,852 girls, 12,112 men and 12,586 women) through home visits to further spread awareness on child marriage during the year.

Through platforms like U-Report, over 42,000 community members, including adolescents and their parents, were provided with critical information and knowledge about services available for adolescent girls, especially those that had become pregnant during the COVID-19 lockdown. In addition, the programme supported a youth-led organization called RAHU to create awareness among girls and duty-bearers and implement comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Throughout the whole lockdown period, RAHU ran a media campaign on CSE and also hosted several online conferences and webinars to support a sustained conversation at the national level on the importance of CSE. The activism around CSE in part shaped inter-ministerial dialogues and influenced the joint statement to the President on child marriage by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Education and Sports; and Makerere University – resulting in the Ministry of Education and Sports issuing a circular to permit pregnant girls to go back to school upon school reopening.

Engagement of men and boys through male action groups emerged as a strong structure for social change in 2020, and in sub-counties where the groups are present there was evidence of promotion of sexual and reproductive health services and of GBV prevention activities. The engagement with men and boys is guided by the strategy on male engagement developed by the Ministry of Gender. During the year, members of the groups intervened and stopped 350 cases of child marriage or female genital mutilation in their districts.

Leveraging the joint United Nations Programme on Gender-based Violence and the Spotlight Initiative, seven major religious institutions (Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Muslim, Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist and Born-Again Federation), congregating under the Interreligious Council of Uganda, for the first time ever issued joint policy guidance in the form of five pastoral letters focusing on family planning, HIV preventions, maternal health, GBV prevention and teenage pregnancy. This guidance has harmonized thinking around issues that have been approached differently by different denominations, and in some cases in conflict with national policies – for example, over the stance against and age of use of modern family planning methods. In addition to informing commitments at denominational level, the pastoral letters have facilitated capacity-building of religious leaders in close contact with communities, and have helped build consensus across denominations through common messaging and accountability in religious structures for implementation. Moreover, the intensified awareness of religious institutions and the implementation of action plans on the prevention of child marriage by cultural institutions have led to by-laws on education and alcohol abuse being enacted in half of the Global Programme focus districts. An estimated 1 million people have been reached through the religious institutions, while cultural institutions have engaged around 3,000 girls directly affected by child marriage, and signed declarations to curb negative cultural practices such as child marriage.

The engagement of cultural and religious leaders, and parish chiefs as community-based legal volunteers has increased legal awareness in communities, improved reporting and referral mechanisms, and ensures a more sustainable approach to ending child marriage. The same is the case for the engagement of SASA! activists, which has led to broad sensitization and awareness creation on healthy relationships and power imbalances between men and women, boys and girls, and how these perpetuate child marriage and GBV, as well as inhibit the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for everyone.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Due to COVID-19, interventions on social and gender norms change slowed during the year.

Poor parenting has been identified as a major driver of violence against children and child marriage in Uganda. Hence, there is a need to increase the support for and investments in programmes that target parents to build their capacities, skills and knowledge on how to nurture and provide for their children and how to protect them from harmful practices such as child marriage. There is also a need to increase support for resilience-building

programmes that reach and engage adolescents, their parents and caregivers to build their capacity to find alternatives for their family well-being and livelihood besides child marriage.

There is a need to continue to identify and engage community gatekeepers, including religious and cultural leaders, on positive social and gender norms change to ensure that demand-related barriers to services are challenged. It is evident that religious and cultural leaders remain powerful structures and champions for change to end child marriage. For example, part of the high visibility of child marriage issues seen in the country was because of the relentless highlighting of child marriage and teenage pregnancy prevalence by the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, and his public support for sexuality education. Further, male engagement as a way of creating sustainable gender transformation that favours girls and women, as well as creating a supporting and protective system, has been seen as a key aspect in the fight against child marriage, and will continue to be a key strategy for the programme.

The Global Programme in Uganda will continue to engage with key gatekeepers, opinion leaders and custodians of culture and religion in the communities. The programme will sustain community engagement on positive parenting and on social and gender norms change through volunteer para-social workers, SASA! activists, male action groups, the Interreligious Council and other cultural structures. The programme will adopt intergenerational dialogues that provide a platform and space for adolescents and adults to discuss issues that drive child marriage and teenage pregnancies, and explore transformative approaches for the engagement of men and boys, and of cultural and religious institutions.

### Strengthening systems

In Uganda, the programme adopts a child protection systems-strengthening approach from national to subnational levels, including at the household level where the adolescent girls reside, to achieve the Global

Programme vision. This approach integrates the actions of families, with a central focus on adolescent girls and their communities; formal (education, social welfare, health, legal institutions, local district governments, cultural and religious institutions) and non-formal (volunteer) structures; state and non-state actors and institutions across all sectors, to work together to protect children from child marriage. The capacity of the Government to deliver coordinated, quality services and programmes that respond to the specific needs of adolescents has been built through technical, material and financial support of the Global Programme. This was done through various multisectoral initiatives, such as the development of the child policy approved by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in June 2020. The policy provides a framework within which all child protection work is to be undertaken, ensuring a coordinated and systematic approach to the prevention of and response to all forms of violence against children, including harmful practices such as child marriage. Several other guidelines and strategies in the health, education and social development sectors were also reviewed, revised, finalized and approved during the year for the standardization and improvement of coverage and quality of adolescent-responsive services. These guidelines will further ensure a coordinated and systematic approach to delivering adolescent programmes and services, and also ensure their quality.

The Global Programme continued to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services, especially in response to COVID-19 lockdown measures, during 2020. UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Health and Reproductive Health Uganda to piggyback on ongoing immunization and HIV/AIDS programmes, which ensured that 13,595 young people aged 10–24 (6,390 girls) had access to integrated sexual and reproductive health and GBV outreach services. This led to over 4,000 girls receiving family planning services. Through fuel voucher support to district health offices, adolescent girls and young women aged 13–20 years old also had access to life-saving services such as antenatal care (673 girls), safe and clean deliveries at health-care facilities

In Uganda, the programme adopts a child protection systems-strengthening approach from national to subnational levels, including at the household level where the adolescent girls reside, to achieve the Global Programme vision.

(2,281 girls), emergency obstetric and neonatal care services (324 girls), postnatal services (4,360 girls), family planning commodities (5,766 girls) and treatment within 72 hours for survivors of sexual violence and GBV (643 girls). Through coordinated efforts with the joint United Nations programmes on GBV and HIV/AIDS, the Global Programme partnered with a private transport motorcycle company, SafeBoda, to distribute over 1 million condoms to young urban people during the COVID-19 lockdown; and an e-personal health shop was set up to support young people, girls and women seeking information and ordering sexual and reproductive health services online, with over 22,000 orders being recorded, of which 40 per cent were from girls aged 13–19 years old looking for emergency contraception.

Also in the health sector, several guidelines were revised to include adolescent-specific output areas on HIV/AIDS, nutrition and GBV. The guidelines include:

- National Young People and Adolescent Peer Support (YAPS) Model Mentors' Guide, which details roles and responsibilities of service providers in ensuring HIV-positive young people and adolescents receive appropriate care and support.
- National Strategy and Implementation Guidelines for Sexual and Reproductive Health, HIV and AIDS, and Gender-Based Violence Integration (for 2020–2024), which will assist in providing a standardized approach to sexual and reproductive health, HIV and GBV integration across the country, including in humanitarian settings.
- Consolidated Guidelines for Prevention and Treatment of HIV and AIDS in Uganda.
- Guidelines on Maternal, Infant, Young Child and Adolescent Nutrition (MIYCAN), which provides guidance for the health sector to deliver high-quality nutrition interventions to prioritized vulnerable target groups.
- Menstrual Health Management Guidelines, which will be used to orient girls, boys, and male and female teachers in 2021.

All these guidelines are in their final stages for approval by the high-level national management.

In the education sector, both UNFPA and UNICEF provided financial and technical support to the Ministry of Education at national level to advance gender equality and improve girls' education, especially contributing to removing gender biases and discrimination in terms of access to education for pregnant girls and child mothers. Guidelines and frameworks developed include the revised Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings; the National Guidelines for Implementation of Roles

and Responsibilities of Senior Male and Senior Female Teachers; the National Guidelines for Formation, Management and Strengthening of School Clubs; and the Menstrual Health Management Guidelines for Schools.

During the year, 492 schools were supported to meet at least two of the key elements for quality prevention of and response to violence against children in schools, including recording data on violence, implementing the Reporting Tracking Response and Referral Guidelines, being aware of and having in place a teachers' code of conduct, establishing functional school clubs, and committing to practising positive discipline. Some 420 of the schools were further supported to integrate life-skills and citizenship education in their school development plans, as a sustainable approach for keeping adolescent concerns and strategies to address these high on the agenda – supporting girls to stay in school, including transition to higher grades. During the year, 897 teachers (348 female and 549 male), including senior teachers and club patrons, gained better knowledge on violence against children, menstrual hygiene management, HIV, and gender-responsive pedagogy, while another 320 lower secondary teachers were trained on sexuality education guidelines and teaching materials that had been developed in 2019 together with the Spotlight Initiative. In 2020, CSE reader guides for schools and menstrual health management guidelines were finalized. The out-of-school CSE guidelines were reviewed again by the senior management at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development with support from the Global Programme, with the guidelines being tabled for approval in 2021. Implementing CSE in and out of schools will be a priority in 2021.

In the child protection sector, civil society partners and local district governments were supported to provide critical child protection services to children directly and indirectly affected by emergencies during the year, including floods, displacements and the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 35,681 children received psychosocial support during the year, while an additional 30,798 children and their parents, affected by the pandemic, received mental health and psychosocial support services. Some 2,142 unaccompanied children in refugee and flood contexts benefited from alternative care support and 2,049 children impacted by COVID-19 received social care and support services in 2020. The continuation of services during the pandemic was made possible through the provision of supplies and materials such as mobile phones, bicycles, protective gear and case management books to 5,612 para-social workers, which allowed them to sustain community engagements through house-to-house visits for psychosocial support and counselling to both adolescents and their parents to prevent child marriage.

The capacity of the Government to deliver gender-equitable services was enhanced during the year through the recruitment of 67 social welfare officers, boosting the capacity of the social service workforce to prevent and respond to violence against children and GBV in the 67 sub-counties across 9 districts where these officers are based. Thirty-six justice professionals (13 male and 23 female) were also supported to enhance their capacity to prosecute child-related cases, resulting in the fast-tracking of cases involving 3,484 children (1,562 boys and 1,922 girls) and the diversion of cases involving 687 children (473 boys and 214 girls) from the justice system (national diversion rate of 74.3 per cent).

The inclusion of the social welfare workforce in the COVID-19 response resulted in strengthened linkages between the social welfare and health sectors, and led them to be recognized as a critical part of the workforce for addressing the effects of future pandemics. This was achieved thanks to technical support and guidance to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to advocate and build a case for the successful inclusion of the social welfare workforce (social workers, community development officers, para-social workers and justice actors) in the essential staff

category of the Government during COVID-19, which enabled them to continue working during the lockdown, providing services to over 73,000 community members. The provision of sexual and reproductive health, GBV and menstrual health management services was also successfully integrated into the COVID-19 essential services guidelines and training packages developed by the Ministry of Health, allowing these services to continue during the pandemic. However, there was still a break in the social service delivery during the year, and capacity-building activities such as training were put on hold to follow the standard operating procedures that were put in place for the health sector. To counter the temporary suspension of services, community-based volunteer para-social workers were provided with technical and material support to sustain community engagement, interpersonal communication and remote case management through technology platforms (by phones) at district and sub-county levels.

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

COVID-19 containment measures halted and affected programme interventions that require people coming together (e.g., training and community engagements) and limited access to communities, vulnerable/at-risk

Thirty-six justice professionals (**13 male and 23 female**) were supported to enhance their capacity to prosecute child-related cases, resulting in the fast-tracking of cases involving **3,484 children (1,562 boys and 1,922 girls)** and the diversion of cases involving **687 children (473 boys and 214 girls)** from the justice system (national diversion rate of 74.3 per cent).





children and services. For example, special court sessions and GBV/sexual and reproductive health outreach camps in Sebei were postponed due to the pandemic. Underfunding further constrained the breadth and depth of the child protection emergency response.

COVID-19 led to a break in protection, health and education services. As a result of a directive for the social service workforce to work from home and the temporary closure of the SAUTI child helpline, girls could not receive social services or even report cases of child marriage. Initially, the presidential directive was to focus on health and the prevention of COVID-19, which left social workers and justice affairs stranded and unable to deliver services. With the closure of schools, girls could not meet in their groups/clubs to look out for and protect one other either, which led to many girls being married off during the lockdown. While the Global Programme ensured continued access to sexual and reproductive health services during the lockdown through its partnerships with SafeBoda, Reproductive Health Uganda and local district governments, many girls still had limited or no access to essential and life-saving sexual and reproductive health services as a result of restrictions on movement and closure of schools. This resulted in unwanted and unintended pregnancies among girls, which in turn put pressure on them to marry. The limited access to sexual and reproductive health information has been identified as one of the contributing factors for teenage pregnancy and child marriage, confirming that many adolescents engage in sexual activities without sufficient knowledge of their bodies or potential consequences.

Hence, some of the key lessons from this period include the need for strengthened community protection and surveillance systems that link to the education and health sectors, to ensure that adolescents at risk of harmful practices or violence are identified, protected, referred and linked to adolescent-friendly services, even during emergencies. There is also a need to strengthen community response mechanisms through providing support to temporary shelters for adolescents who run away from home due to child marriage and through providing social workers the time and space needed to engage with parents for reconciliation and re-unification with their children.

There were contingency plans put in place to counter the challenges brought on by COVID-19, including increasing and strengthening case management through support to the child helpline and the formal and non-formal community-based protection structures available, such as the para-social workers. The programme also contributed to UNICEF's support to national and subnational preparations and operationalizations of

COVID-19 preparedness and response plans to ensure minimalization of adverse effects on students and teachers. This included support to the education system at large to promote coordination among actors and to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Sports, local district governments and other stakeholders to promote the protection of students and to support continuity of learning during lockdown. To ensure continuation of education, the Global Programme contributed to the printing and distribution of home learning materials, including revamping the online learning content via the Kolibri e-learning platform.

Going forward, the programme will focus on supporting existing routine reporting mechanisms, including the SAUTI child helpline, to enhance reporting of child marriage cases. There will also be a continued focus on providing a holistic approach to addressing child marriage, for example, through systems integration and by continuing with the SAUTI child helpline to support appropriate and comprehensive case management. The priority in 2021 will be to disseminate and operationalize all the finalized and approved guidelines across sectors at sub-county level in collaboration with the local district governments in targeted districts.

### Addressing poverty

The programme sought to reduce vulnerabilities of girls and their families through economic empowerment activities. In 2020, some 2,500 out-of-school girls were enrolled in the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) clubs in targeted districts. By the end of the year, all girls had participated in livelihood and financial literacy training. Some 850 girls in 25 groups, previously engaged in sex work, benefited from seed funding of 4 million Ugandan shillings each, with 20 of the groups creating village saving schemes based on which group and individual businesses were started. The ELA clubs were also used as platforms for linking the girls to GBV and sexual and reproductive health services, with 2,272 girls reporting to have accessed services such as support with modern contraceptives for child spacing and to avoid unintended pregnancies.

In addition to the ELA clubs, initiatives by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) BRAC and Aids Information Center benefited 3,350 girls directly with economic empowerment and livelihood training and business start-up capital.

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

To strengthen governance to end child marriage and support adolescent girls, the Global Programme in Uganda supports advocacy at the national level, which

has led to the inclusion of child marriage elimination and teenage pregnancy reduction in the new National Development Plan III and the United Nations framework for the country, with a specific target to reduce child marriage prevalence to 14 per cent by 2025. Partnerships have been established with government at both national and subnational levels, and with civil society organizations, for the implementation of adolescent-friendly social protection programmes and for the integration of child marriage outcomes in multisectoral approaches, leveraging resources for a catalytic effect and a more sustainable approach to ending child marriage.

The Government of Uganda has increased its capacity to deliver coordinated, quality programmes and services that meet the needs of adolescents. For example, the approval of the Child Policy will ensure a coordinated and systematic approach for the prevention of and response to issues affecting children, including harmful practices such as child marriage. The Government has also reviewed, revised, finalized and approved various guidelines across the health, education and social development sectors, to include critical aspects that address adolescent-related issues. These include:

- revised guidelines on the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings
- national guidelines for the implementation of roles and responsibilities of senior male and senior female teachers
- national guidelines for formation, management and strengthening of school clubs
- YAPS Model Mentors' Guide
- national strategy and implementation guidelines for sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, and GBV integration (for 2020–2024)
- consolidated guidelines for prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS
- guidelines on MIYCAN, and menstrual health management guidelines, which will be used to orient girls and boys, and male and female teachers in 2021.

In 2020, the Global Programme enhanced the foundation for accelerated achievements for the elimination of child marriage in Uganda, by enforcing a coordinated approach to tackling child marriage issues in the country as a whole rather than as separate agencies/actors. This was evidenced, for example, by a series of inter-ministerial meetings on the risk for escalating cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancies, which led the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the Ministry of Health; and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to write a joint statement and meet with the representative of the President, resulting in the immediate release of a circular by the Ministry of Education and Sports allowing pregnant girls to return

to school immediately after school reopening. The Government also committed to increase investments in ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy through line ministries, and to continue to include child marriage indicators in data generation and reporting systems.

One of the main outcomes of the ongoing efforts to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Uganda has been the amplification of child marriage as a harmful practice, and the observed growing levels of awareness and recognition by the Government, partners and community members, of the devastating cost of inaction to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy. As a result, concrete actions have been taken by the Government to ensure its elimination, including the review, revision and fast-tracked approval of guidelines to address specific drivers of child marriage, and child marriage being included in two programme areas of the National Development Plan III, putting it firmly on the agenda of the Government. This has been achieved through sustained engagement, orientation and training of various multisectoral stakeholders, including the National Planning Authority, which has garnered and increased political will to fight child marriage.

With the approval and launch of the Child Policy in 2020, and the inclusion of child marriage into two of the government programmes in the National Development Plan III, all of which provide frameworks and guidelines for actions aimed at ending child marriage, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development demonstrates its capacity to advocate for coordinated implementation of national and subnational action plans and systems. The plans also include a specific target of reducing child marriage prevalence in the country to 14 per cent (from 34 per cent) by 2025.

The programme partnered with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the Ministry of Education and Sports; Makerere University and 15 local district governments to ensure that child marriage and teenage pregnancy – and the impact of COVID-19 on these issues – featured in national inter-ministerial meetings in 2020. As a result, a joint statement on child marriage by the Ministry of Health; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; Ministry of Education and Sports; and Makerere University was developed, advocating for increased investment in the elimination of child marriage, and a policy pronouncement was issued to ensure that pregnant girls would be able to access education once schools reopened. The joint statement was presented to the representative of the President at the State House, resulting in immediate circulation of a circular by the Ministry of Education and Sports permitting pregnant girls to access education. In addition, on World Population Day, 11 July, the Global Programme

organized a virtual e-conference on child marriage with all local district government chairpersons, which resulted in a joint agreement by the chairpersons and chief administrative officers to include strategies for addressing child marriage in the District Development Plans.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

During the year, there was strengthened cross-sectoral coordination of adolescent programmes at various levels of management and administration (from village to sub-county, district and national levels) and across various partners. The subnational, district and sub-county levels proved to be the most effective platforms for bringing adolescent issues to the attention of decision makers.

A key lesson was that, thanks to the leveraging of the joint United Nations programmes on GBV and female genital mutilation, and the Spotlight Initiative, the Global Programme was able to reach a wider audience and improve coordination and advocacy, especially at national level, where there was widespread publicity on child marriage and teenage pregnancy during the year. As a result, child marriage was a key subject of discussions in

inter-ministerial meetings, COVID-19 response structures (the COVID-19 GBV sub-committee), the medico-legal task force, the National Gender-Based Violence Reference Group and the Gender Development Partners Group.

Regional complexities such as human trafficking and cross-border female genital mutilation from neighbouring countries, such as Kenya and South Sudan, require a rethink if the national strategy on child marriage and teenage pregnancy is to be effective. Another challenge in Uganda is the lack of harmonization of laws regarding the legal age for marriage, which further problematizes the concept of being 'underage' and the legal definition of child marriage, especially as most children still lack a birth certificate.

The programme will continue to enhance national-level advocacy and coordination, especially through inter-ministerial dialogues and by following up on previous recommendations. Focus will also be on ensuring the integration of child marriage prevention in all government coordination mechanisms.

## Generating and applying data and evidence

The Global Programme in Uganda supports data and evidence generation and analysis for evidence-based programming and policymaking. However, this strategy was challenged in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. To better understand the new context, there are ongoing efforts to generate data on child marriage and risk factors through the community integrated system, and an impact assessment on the pandemic in the country includes a section on child marriage.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development was supported to conduct a midterm evaluation of the national strategy to end child marriage in 2019, and the final report provided evidence on trends and emerging issues related to child marriage in Uganda – feeding into advocacy papers that informed the discussion of including child marriage in the National Development Plan III in 2020. The evidence also led to acceleration of the approval of guidelines for school re-entry, and retention of child mothers, which has the potential to reduce child marriage, especially post COVID-19. The evaluation also provided information on progress, challenges and lessons learned in terms of addressing child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the country, making recommendations for improvements to ensure a multisectoral and comprehensive response.

The findings revealed critical aspects related to child marriage that will influence programming going forward.

For instance, the report reveals that, according to both parents (75.4 per cent) and adolescents (70.3 per cent), peer pressure is the major reason why boys marry or make girls below age 18 pregnant. This informed the development of resilience-building initiatives for adolescents themselves and for their parents, through the parenting programmes. Although findings suggest that many adolescents are largely empowered to decide when to have sex, the first sexual experience of girls was found to have been consensual in only 69.9 per cent of the cases, which explains increasing rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. This evidence informed the need to focus on resilience-building activities to empower adolescents and enable them withstand peer pressure. The report also revealed that the general perception in regions that perform female genital mutilation is that the practice is becoming increasingly unpopular among parents and adolescents because of the increased awareness of risks for child marriage and teenage pregnancy associated with female genital mutilation.

The report highlighted key practices in addressing child marriage, which were adopted and will be strengthened by the programme; for example, the multidimensional-multisectoral nature of the national strategy and the joint supervision and monitoring by line ministries.

Looking ahead, an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices (child marriage and female genital mutilation) is under way and expected to generate new evidence to better understand the situation for girls in the country. The programme will also intensify routine data collection, analysis and evidence generation overall; strengthen monitoring and data collection for enhanced accuracy and quality in reporting; and advocate for the inclusion of all required disaggregation variables in data collection tools at national and subnational levels.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

During the year, monitoring and evaluation activities and data collection related to activity implementation and the situation of child marriage were challenged by COVID-19 restrictions that did not allow for field visits as planned. Hence, the programme had to rely on anecdotal evidence to a large extent. The adoption of improved data collection approaches by the Government and other implementing partners, and the COVID-19 impact assessment on GBV, were also delayed due to the pandemic.



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## Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Uganda, the programme works with 16 partners: 11 civil society organizations and 5 government bodies. Four of the civil society partners have a specific focus on women’s rights, and two of these have an additional focus on children’s rights. The engagement with the government bodies shows the breadth of the programme in Uganda, and the importance of multisectorality: engaging the sectors of health, education, gender, social protection and statistical services across 15 local district governments.

In 2020, there was increased geographic and thematic convergence of UNFPA and UNICEF interventions at both national and subnational levels. Geographic convergence on a subnational level was achieved through the implementation of programmes by UNFPA and UNICEF in the same geographical locations in 13 of the 15 targeted districts in 2020.

Thematic convergence was most evident at national level, where both organizations worked with line ministries

to ensure that adolescent issues are mainstreamed into government plans. For example, both organizations coordinated, engaged with and advocated through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to ensure that child marriage is adequately addressed within broader initiatives and plans of the Government, and that plans promote gender equality and are gender transformative. Both organizations are also working with the Ministry of Education and Sports on the guidelines addressing pregnancies among students, leading in 2020 to their revision and the allowing of adolescent girls who have given birth to re-enter education.

Joint planning, evaluation and monitoring will be further strengthened in Uganda within the Global Programme, including strengthening of coordination at subnational level. UNFPA and UNICEF will also continue to strengthen convergence with other programmes, especially the Spotlight Initiative on Violence Against Women and Girls and other joint United Nations programmes such as those on GBV and female genital mutilation, and other initiatives focused on improving access to justice for girls.



**Summary of output indicator performance (2020)**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	155,690	74,335
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	22,886	183
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	30,000	28,000
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	90,000	46,876
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	329,849	338,060
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	1,540	1,623
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	3	4
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	215	492
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	900	N/A
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	4	3
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	17	N/A
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



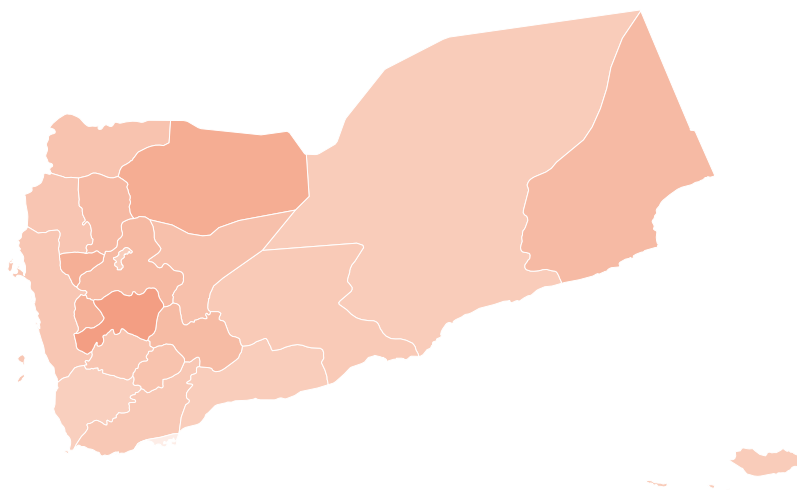
# YEMEN

COUNTRY PROFILE



# YEMEN

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Yemen Demographic and Health Survey 2013. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Yemen is home to 4 million child brides. Of these, 1.4 million married before age 15. According to data from the Yemen Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) from 2013, almost a third (32 per cent) of all young women aged 20–24 had been married before age 18, and 9 per cent before age 15. Despite a reduction in child marriage prevalence from 58 per cent in 1988, analysis by UNICEF based on the latest DHS shows that the speed of progress is not enough to meet the ambitious Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of eliminating child marriage by 2030: if the observed progress over the past 25 years continues, child marriage prevalence will still be at 21 per cent at the end of this decade, and if the slightly accelerated observed progress over the past 10 years is doubled, 9 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030.<sup>130</sup>



Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming child brides. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. However, this remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls around the world will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19, putting the total number of girls at risk by 2030 at 110 million girls.<sup>131</sup> And some countries also grapple with other pressing challenges, putting girls at a further increased risk. One such country is Yemen.

Girls in Yemen struggle not only with the harmful practice of child marriage, but also with female genital mutilation (FGM). Among women aged 18–49, a third (33.2 per cent) have experienced child marriage ‘only’, while 8 per cent of all women in this age group have experienced both child marriage and FGM.<sup>132</sup>

These data are from 2013 and the conflict in Yemen, which broke out in 2015 and is still ongoing, has exacerbated risk factors for child marriage. About 3 million people are internally displaced in the country, and a recent study commissioned by Johns Hopkins University and the Women’s Refugee Commission for the Global Programme shows that the prevalence of child marriage among girls is higher among internally displaced persons, with about one in five displaced girls aged 10–19 currently married, compared with one in eight in the adjacent host community. Displacement was seen by the respondents in the study as the main reason for growing economic insecurity among families, and internally displaced respondents noted that their economic instability made them more inclined than their host counterparts to relieve financial burden by marrying off their daughters.<sup>133</sup>



Poverty and economic insecurity are primary risk factors for child marriage. As a result of the direct and indirect effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF data indicate that an estimated 117 million children globally could have been pushed into monetary poverty in 2020 alone. Border closures and lockdowns are driving these effects. A COVID-19 impact study conducted in July 2020 in Yemen found that 47 per cent of respondents in five governorates experienced a drop in income of half or more during the pandemic, 24 per cent experienced a complete loss of income, and 40 per cent of respondents who had a job before COVID-19 had lost it.<sup>134</sup> In Yemen, home to the world's worst humanitarian crisis even before COVID-19, a rapid assessment conducted in October 2020 found that the economic impact of the pandemic had led poor families to adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as marrying their daughters to obtain bride wealth (*mahr*). At the same time, men find it cheaper to marry girls during this time of heightened poverty, as desperate families become more willing to marry off their daughters, allegedly to protect them from hunger.<sup>135</sup> Further, border closures significantly increased the cost of basic essential items, thereby exacerbating risk factors that contribute to child marriage in the country.<sup>136</sup>

In addition to increased poverty and economic insecurity, boys and girls are more likely to marry early if they are out of school, especially when they lack the ability to study remotely. The Malala Fund estimates that 20 million more secondary school-age girls globally

may be lost from school systems after the first COVID-19 wave.<sup>137</sup> In Yemen, 2 million children were already out of school before the pandemic. Subsequent school closures in both the north and the south have worsened the country's learning crisis, especially since distance and e-learning options are not possible for most students, given adolescents' limited access to new technologies and the internet.<sup>138</sup> The risk of marriage in childhood in Yemen for girls with no education or only primary education is 3.5 times higher than for girls with secondary or higher education, pointing to the potential impact of girls being out of school due to the conflict and the pandemic.<sup>139</sup>

Yemeni culture restricts movement of girls more than that of boys, leaving girls with even less access to services of any kind during lockdown. The most vulnerable girls in Yemen are unlikely to be reached via any remote communication modality. Movement restrictions in Yemen have prevented many internally displaced, refugee and migrant adolescent girls from accessing services that are not available in their settlements, putting them at greater protection and health risks, including being exposed to child marriage.<sup>140</sup>

More in-depth data collection and evidence generation was delayed due to COVID-19 in 2020 and will continue in 2021 – to give a deeper understanding of the prevalence and drivers of child marriage in the country.



## Key highlights



Over

# 17,000

**girls, boys, women and men** were reached with awareness-raising activities on GBV and child marriage to instil social and behaviour change.



Over 2,400 adolescent girls were reached through life-skills and literacy classes, to provide information and basic health, financial and legal skills; and to build their self-esteem and self-confidence.



Vocational training and cash support were provided to

# 194

**vulnerable out-of-school girls**, while

# 88

**girls** returned to school after dropping out earlier.



Capacity-building of **33 social workers** on remote GBV and child protection case management **ensured continued access to services for girls** during the pandemic.



Over 3,300 adolescent girls who are survivors of child marriage were supported with medical, psychosocial and counselling sessions, and with legal representation as a result of improved and structured case management systems and referral pathways.

## 2020 Achievements



In 2020, a total of

# 2,457

**adolescent girls**, either survivors of or at risk of child marriage, were reached with life-skills and literacy courses delivered in schools and safe spaces.



Despite challenges related to COVID-19, **the skilling and empowerment orientation of the programme was scaled up from 17 to 31 districts during the year**, including Sa'ada District where authorities had previously shown reluctance to programme implementation.



Some

# 10 per cent

**of the adolescent girls** who had received life-skills training (including before the pandemic) were supported to lead peer-to-peer awareness-raising activities within their communities, on issues around gender norms and child marriage.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities are the most successful channel for delaying their marriage among programmes evaluated to date.<sup>141</sup> The Global Programme in Yemen therefore continues to invest in providing adolescent girls with knowledge of their rights and equipping them with skills necessary to exercise their choices.

In 2020, a total of 2,457 adolescent girls, either survivors of or at risk of child marriage, were reached with life-skills and literacy courses delivered in schools and safe spaces. Despite challenges related to COVID-19, the skilling and empowerment orientation of the programme was scaled up from 17 to 31 districts during the year, including Sa'ada District where authorities had previously shown reluctance to programme implementation. Working with parent councils in schools has resulted in enhanced acceptance for the courses among the communities.

In addition to equipping the adolescents with skills covering different learning dimensions (cognitive, instrumental, individual and social), the courses increased adolescent girls' knowledge on, for example, their human rights, the negative impacts of child marriage on girls (related to health, education, etc.), and risks related to early pregnancy. This integrated approach seeks to offer a chance to the adolescent girl not only to gain new skills but also to be elevated from a perceived liability to a productive, strong and self-sufficient woman, capable of making informed choices about her sexual and reproductive health, rights and well-being. The literacy courses offered to out-of-school adolescents have also contributed to them regaining their self-esteem. At least 88 girls who were enrolled in literacy and catch-up classes supported by the programme felt confident enough to return to formal education during the year, with the aim of completing secondary school.

Some 10 per cent of the adolescent girls who had received life-skills training (including before the pandemic) were supported to lead peer-to-peer awareness-raising activities within their communities, on issues around gender norms and child marriage.

The peer-to-peer approach has been instrumental in keeping adolescents informed during COVID-19, when other activities have been suspended due to restrictions on movement and closures of schools and safe spaces, and given that remote learning is a challenge in the context of Yemen.

Despite schools being closed during the pandemic and challenges with establishing remote learning modalities, 105 adolescent girls were directly supported to be able to return to school following school reopening in October. UNFPA and UNICEF, together with partners, continue to work on identifying and supporting out-of-school girls to return to and remain in education.

● **Khadija is 19 years old**, divorced and mother of two children. She lost custody of her children after her divorce and had not been seen them for months when she joined the life-skills training in her community in January 2020.

**"I felt so empowered by the life-skills training that I received, that I found the necessary courage to engage with my ex-husband on shared custody."**

With the legal support that she received through the programme and thanks to counselling from social workers, Khadija is now able to have her children stay with her every weekend.

**"I thought I would never see my children again! I feel like my life is back, and I cannot thank this programme enough!"**

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

As it was for many countries around the world, 2020 was challenging in terms of ensuring the continuation of implementation of programmes addressing child marriage in Yemen. Lockdowns, closures of schools and other learning facilities, and of social services delivery points, and a decrease by 80 per cent of the government workforce, led to a suspension of main programme activities, including life-skills and literacy classes and economic empowerment components.

Life-skills are perceived by many communities and authorities in Yemen as a 'western' idea aimed at changing the culture of the country and the relationships between children and elders. Girls' empowerment programmes

are therefore seen as providing adolescent girls with 'weapons' to challenge their families and to become disrespectful. This perception of the content and aim of the life-skills programme has continued to negatively affect the acceptance of the interventions in more conservative locations in the country, therefore hampering programme scale-up to these areas. However, in locations where possible, UNFPA and UNICEF continue to invest in sensitizing communities through key influencers and local leaders for greater acceptance of the programme – as was the case, for example, in Sa'ada District in 2020.

In 2021, the programme will continue to work on strengthening referral systems with the education sector, including a campaign on 'back to learning' to ensure girls' access to education.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

To promote a supportive and gender-equal environment, as an important aspect of grounding changes in behaviours within the community, the programme in enhancing the knowledge of community members around the negative impacts of child marriage, specifically targeting community leaders and key influencers as gatekeepers for change. In a context where there is a lack of government-led strategy or action plan to end child marriage, partnerships with local women, child and youth organizations have proven to be a better approach to promoting and instilling change led by communities themselves. The programme is therefore working with, and constantly building the capacities of, partners at the governorate and district levels, focusing on gender-based violence (GBV) case management to enhance the provision of services to girls and their families.

UNFPA and UNICEF design interventions with an improved human rights situation in mind, while making sure that all issues are dealt with in a culturally sensitive way. The programme raises awareness on child marriage by engaging community leaders, parents, men and boys for broad support to the issue, and aims to get commitments from the communities that they will continue to work to uphold the rights of girls.

Changes in behaviour around child marriage and gender equality are still not perceptible on a wide scale in Yemen. However, since the inception of the Global Programme within targeted districts, families, traditional and community leaders, and other influencers have demonstrated more gender-equitable attitudes and support for girls' rights and against child marriage. The number of community leaders who now help convince parents to avoid child marriage and support actions undertaken by child marriage survivors – to either obtain a divorce or to be granted custody over their

children – has increased. Even though the observed changes remain on a community level, the social norms and behaviour change interventions have contributed to the prevention of hundreds of child marriages.

During 2020, the programme continued to engage adolescent boys in life-skills classes – combining skills development with information on human rights, GBV and child marriage as in the classes for girls. Overall, 604 boys were supported by the Global Programme throughout the year. Engaging adolescent boys on child marriage has helped shift mentalities of child marriage being considered a ‘girl issue’ to an issue that concerns everyone. Even though to a smaller extent, child marriage affects boys too in the context of Yemen, as some families resort to marrying off their sons to prevent them from being recruited by armed forces and groups. The manual used for the boys’ life-skills sessions is the same as that used for girls; however, practical exercises are adapted to speak to the targeted group. The programme is currently working with an international consultant to review the manual and integrate more specific content for girls and boys, keeping in mind the gender-transformative approach of the programme. For boys, the updated manual will, for example, include topics around positive masculinities and gender roles.

The target of engaging community members on issues related to child marriage, to support a conducive environment for the empowerment of girls and for the

elimination of the harmful practice, was exceeded in 2020 in Yemen. Despite challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the implementation of some programme components, the pandemic at the same time offered a unique opportunity to increase awareness-raising activities on GBV and child marriage. Through remote psychosocial support and family counselling, partners of the Global Programme and partners from the GBV sub-cluster were able to sensitize 17,529 women, men, girls and boys on GBV risks, including child marriage, during the year.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Child marriage is deeply embedded in the culture of Yemen; therefore, it takes holistic and integrated efforts to address its root causes. While empowering adolescent girls, boys should not be left out. At the same time, families’ socioeconomic empowerment should be granted more importance, given the economic factors driving the practice. UNFPA and UNICEF have learned through programme implementation that the programme has been most successful in terms of acceptance and impact in locations where adolescent girls have also been supported with vocational training and with small grants to start income-generating activities, beyond life skills and community awareness.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Men2Men network activities, where men are engaged on social and gender norms, could not take place in 2020.





## Strengthening systems

In line with the global vision, the programme in Yemen aims to strengthen referral pathways between different sectors, such as education and health, to improve adolescent girls' access to services in programme areas. This work became especially important during 2020, and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that continuity of and access to services for girls was upheld.

Capacity-building of 33 social workers on remote GBV and child protection case management, and on standard operating procedures (SOPs) during COVID-19, has strengthened and improved cross-sectoral referral mechanisms and ensured continued access to services for girls during the pandemic – preserving the safety and security of those seeking services. Further, mappings of

GBV services have been regularly updated to ensure that appropriate services that meet the needs of survivors are available and referral pathways known by all service providers. As a result of this improved and structured case management system and referral pathways, 3,365 adolescent girls were provided with multisectoral services in 2020, including health, psychosocial and legal support.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Delivering services through remote modalities has been challenging during COVID-19, especially in terms of safeguarding the confidentiality of beneficiaries while maintaining their sense of safety and trust in the system. Remote delivery was also challenged by the lack of network coverage in hard-to-reach locations, where survivors in need of services often reside.

## THE STORY OF NASSAR

Today, Nassar is a 19-year-old girl living in Ibb in Yemen, and mother of a child. One day, when she was in fourth grade, she heard the sound of wedding music from her house when she came back from school. In her mind, Nassar thought this must be her brother's wedding, but suddenly her father came out of the house, approached her and said, "prepare for your wedding ceremony".

Nassar was shocked, and could not understand what was happening around her, feeling too young to resist as her father and mother insisted on her being married off. "I got married at age 13 without any basic rights or even supplies for the bride. I lived with my husband, who deprived me not only of my life, but also of everything. He treated me cruelly, beat me and insulted me every day." Nassar recalls.

Under these harsh circumstances, Nassar also gave birth to a child. Due to the circumstances, she developed a psychological disorder and started to lack confidence in people around her. However, she decided to

run away and fled to her brother's house in the city where she decided to live without her husband and her son.

At her brother's house, Nassar was introduced to one of the girls from the services that the Yemen Women Union provides through the Global Programme, and she asked her for help. Thanks to this, Nassar was able to receive legal and psychosocial support and life-skills training. She also decided to continue with her education by enrolling in literacy classes, and participated in livelihood training, focusing on learning how to sew.

Being one of the most outstanding students in the group, and feeling more empowered than before, Nassar's mental health stabilized as she had become free from her abusive marital restrictions. As her husband has refused to divorce her, the case has now been taken to court. In the meantime, Nassar has been able to move on with her life and regain her confidence in those around her, setting new ambitions and goals for herself and her life.

A lesson from the year is that good coordination among actors is key when faced with an unpredictable crisis. During COVID-19, coordination among service providers helped to ensure continuity of services where possible. The regular updating of the gender-based services mapping was instrumental in making sure that gaps were filled and that services were available to those in need. A key lesson was also that, sometimes, survivors' resourcefulness and resilience might have more impact on their lives than the service itself.

In 2021, the capacity-building of case workers will continue, taking a strengthened and scaled-up approach, including through support to the referral system between child protection and GBV services, and between the work of the two sub-clusters in the humanitarian response (child protection and GBV).

### Addressing poverty

Strengthening the social protection component for adolescent girls and their families is also being progressively integrated into the programme strategy as UNICEF seeks to increase analysis of the emergency cash transfer programme in Yemen and its impact on reducing negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage among the targeted families.

Vocational training was provided to 194 vulnerable out-of-school adolescent girls by the Global Programme in 2020, focusing on incense manufacturing, hairdressing and tailoring – topics chosen on the basis of a market survey. The training also included basic courses on how to manage finances. At the end of the training period, the girls were supported with a small grant to equip themselves with materials and resources required to start their business, such as buying a sewing machine. This training and the grant helped girls to regain control of their lives and support their families economically.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

In 2021, the programme aims to create stronger linkages with and leverage the emergency cash transfer system in Yemen, which benefits over 1.4 million of the most vulnerable households.

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## Partnerships and working as one

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In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Yemen, the programme works with six local non-governmental organizations, three of which are youth-led, showing the importance of adolescent participation in programming and policymaking to end child marriage.

Building on the joint collaboration that has been in place since the inception of the Global Programme in Yemen, UNFPA and UNICEF continue to work closely together to enhance the impact of the programme, with the support of their regional offices. For example, in 2020 the two organizations initiated a coordinated review of the life-skills manual, with the purpose of adapting it to different learning paths, for different target audiences (girls and boys), and to integrate a gender-transformative approach into the session delivery structure.

Currently, UNFPA and UNICEF are jointly present in 4 out of 31 districts in Yemen. In 2021, they will continue to increase the number of areas where the programme is jointly implemented, along with the overall coverage of the programme, while leveraging the comparative advantage of each organization. Even if the two organizations are not present in the same areas or are not working with the same partners, the strategy of the programme is to harmonize the approach used to deliver interventions, to ensure that quality interventions are in place for girls, their families and the communities, whatever the location and implementing organization.

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**Summary of output indicator performance (2020)**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	1,170	2,457
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	N/A	88
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	570	604
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	28,668	17,529
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	5,000	5,560
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	44	143
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized by the Global Programme in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality	N/A	3
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	16	N/A
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	16	33
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



# ZAMBIA

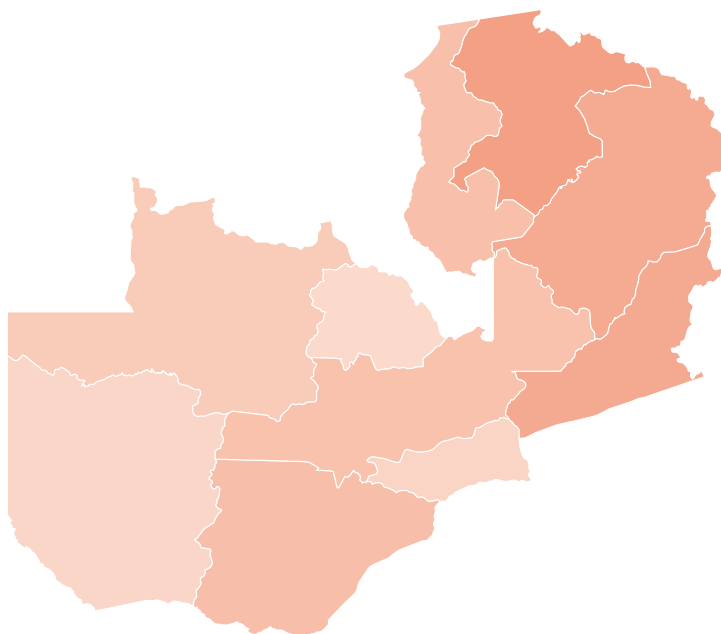
COUNTRY PROFILE





# ZAMBIA

**Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**



**Source:** Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013–2014. **Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or the delimitation of any frontiers.

## The country context

Zambia is home to 1.7 million child brides. Of these, 400,000 were married before age 15. The practice has become less common in the past decades, with 29 per cent of all young women aged 20–24 married before 18 years old, and 5 per cent before turning 15, in 2018, compared with 46 and 10 per cent, respectively, in 1993. However, the progress observed is not enough to eliminate child marriage by 2030 as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – if the progress observed over the past 10 years continues, 22 per cent of all girls in Zambia will still be married in childhood at the end of this decade, and even if the rate of progress is doubled, 16 per cent of all girls will still be child brides in Zambia in 2030.<sup>142</sup>



These data refer to the situation in the country before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data show that over the next decade, 100 million girls globally are at risk of becoming child brides, according to pre-COVID-19 projections. Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19.<sup>143</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million

girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic’s economic impact.<sup>144</sup> Equity is the principal concern of the school closures, as it disproportionately affects vulnerable and disadvantaged students. Alternative distance learning modalities can exacerbate learning inequities due to the gaps in access to technology and in the resources and capacities of schools and teachers. A national survey conducted during the near-six-month school closures in Zambia (including in Global Programme-targeted Katete and Senanga districts) revealed that less than 20 per cent of all children accessed technology-based distance learning (e-learning, through television or radio) during the pandemic, with the majority relying on paper-based take-home assignments and textbooks for their continued education. Only 8 per cent of the surveyed

children agreed that they could learn from home as well as or better than how well they learned in their schools before the closures. The survey also showed that 52 per cent of the teachers never contacted their students during the time of school closure and 29 per cent of the schools (143 of the 500 schools surveyed) reported incidences of teenage pregnancy among their students – a risk factor for both school dropout and child marriage.

Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.



Zambia is home to 1.7 million child brides. Of these, 400,000 were married before age 15. However, the practice has become less common in the country in the past decades.

## Key highlights



Over

**2,200**

**adolescent girls** were supported to enrol and remain in school. In addition, the engagement of traditional leaders and chiefs through the community action groups has increased local ownership of the programme, as evidenced by them mobilizing funds to return

**181**

**girls** who had dropped out back to school.



In safe spaces, over

**4,300**

**boys** were mentored on positive masculinity and zero tolerance to violence, and

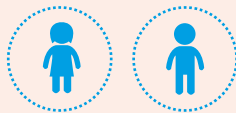


**2,200**

**community members** engaged in dialogues on gender norms, positive masculinities and alternatives to child marriage.



Child marriage modules were institutionalized within the national community-based case management training manuals and implementation guidelines for social workers. The programme also supported the development and roll-out of guidelines for guidance and counselling teachers, and a learner's handbook aimed at strengthening the provision of personal, social, academic and vocational counselling to at-risk and vulnerable girls.



Close to

**6,000**

**adolescent girls and boys** engaged in life-skills sessions through a systematic mentorship programme delivered within safe spaces.





## 2020 Achievements



The mentorship programme focuses specifically on ensuring that no one is left behind, and during the year,

# 121

**girls with disabilities** and



# 91

**adolescent** mothers were engaged to participate in the safe spaces and hence able to access information on sexual and reproductive health and rights and other life-skills sessions.



In total,

# 5,923

**girls** (3,923 aged 10–14 and 2,000 aged 15–19) completed safe space sessions during the year.

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The strategies adopted by the Global Programme in Zambia are aligned with the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and the overall aims of the Government and the broader United Nations network in the country. Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities are the most successful channel for delaying their marriage among programmes evaluated to date.<sup>145</sup> In Zambia, to ensure that girls can make informed decisions and choices, and that boys are respectful of these, safe spaces for in- and out-of-school adolescents have been established. Adolescents are taught financial literacy and life skills, covering, for example, human rights, relationships, positive masculinities, and sexual and reproductive health. Using local organizations as implementers of the safe spaces ensures improved engagement with girls and boys, and promotes local, community-based solutions. The programme also supports schools to run Student Alliance for Equality (SAfE) clubs, teaching life skills for girls and boys, and career clubs for girls to encourage and support completion of secondary education. This is enhanced by the provision of menstrual hygiene products and by engaging community platforms to support the re-entry of girls into school after pregnancy and childbirth.

In 2020, the Global Programme facilitated mentorships for adolescent girls through the safe space model, with 108 safe spaces established during the year (45 for girls and 63 for boys). The mentorship programme focuses specifically on ensuring that no one is left behind, and during the year, 121 girls with disabilities and 91 adolescent mothers were engaged to participate in the safe spaces and hence able to access information on sexual and reproductive health and rights and other life-skills sessions. In total, 5,923 girls (3,923 aged 10–14 and 2,000 aged 15–19) completed safe space sessions during the year. Girls were mentored on several topics, including gender equality, self-confidence, HIV, gender-based violence (GBV), goal-setting, menstrual hygiene management and entrepreneurship. Based on tests conducted before and after the mentorship programme, 85 per cent of the girls were more confident and assertive after the training and had gained more information about the various topics and life skills covered.



One key result from the safe space intervention was that 49 girls who were previously out of school opted to start small businesses and piecemeal work, which enabled them to pay for themselves to go back to school when classes opened up after the first wave of COVID-19 in the country. The girls feeling empowered enough to stand up for themselves and decide to fund their own education was a result of lessons in the safe spaces focusing on goal-setting, dealing with peer pressure and decision-making skills. Another 60 girls (42 in Senanga district, 11 in Katete and 7 in Lusaka) re-entered into formal education during the year thanks to support from traditional leaders engaged by the programme. For example, some of the traditional leaders supported the girls with stationery and other school requisites from their own resources – aiming to overcome both a financial barrier for the girls, and the cultural barrier that does not recognize formal education as a priority. To further overcome this barrier, the use of community-level platforms, such as community action groups (CAGs), utilizes the expertise of trained community members who understand community attitudes and practices, and are able to hold culturally sensitive conversations on topics such as the importance of girls' education – also after pregnancy or child marriage – in the communities. This helps to address underlying norms and attitudes that restrict the realization of girls' rights. During the year, dialogues were held in 25 communities and, as a result, 72 girls from 25 schools were supported to return to school after pregnancy or marriage. To further support girls' education, 409 teachers from 54 schools were also equipped with knowledge and skills to roll out menstrual hygiene management interventions in their schools and surrounding communities.

That the mentorship programme was sustained during the year can in itself be considered an achievement, as many operations and sectors closed during the pandemic. Most girls were not able to continue learning during the six months that the schools were closed, so the mentorship programme offered an opportunity for sustained engagement with adolescent girls, ensuring continued protection against adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. Instead of discontinuing the mentorship programme, the programme adhered to COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions, so fewer adolescent girls and boys met at any given time and for a shorter period of time, while observing physical distancing. In addition, hygiene supplies such as face shields, masks, sanitizers, soaps and buckets were provided in the safe spaces. As a result of the entrepreneurship training provided in the sessions, two girls were able to make the masks for all the girls in the safe spaces themselves, using the cloth and sewing machines they already had as part of their work on making reusable menstruation pads.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Due to the school closures in Zambia for most of the academic year, the previously run in-school clubs (SAfE clubs and career clubs) were not operationalized in 2020. These sessions will be prioritized in 2021, with life-skills education rolled out in primary schools, and career and livelihood skills clubs being operationalized in secondary schools. As mentioned, however, safe spaces continued to be operated to ensure continued outreach to and engagement with adolescent girls during the year. This was possible thanks to adaptations in the form of reduced numbers of participants in each session, provision of personal protective equipment and hygiene supplies, and the introduction of virtual safe spaces as a complement to the face-to-face spaces – using tablets and smartphones to reach out to girls, especially in the central business areas of the districts.

Seventy-two adolescent girls were supported by the CAGs to return to education when schools reopened. However, the target for the year had been set at 188 and this was not reached as fewer girls than expected returned to school after the COVID-19-closures. All the girls who were supported to return were older than the targeted age for their specific grade: they returned to primary school despite being aged between 15 and 19. This serves to highlight that despite multiple challenges (being over-age and being adolescent mothers), when provided the support and opportunity, girls want to continue their education.

One lesson from the year is that the inclusion of parent-teacher association members in the menstrual hygiene management training helped trigger menstrual hygiene management-related activities at the community level, including after the COVID-19-induced school closures.

In 2021, the programme will continue with the same strategies for girls' empowerment and further develop adaptive approaches to be prepared for a potential surge in cases of COVID-19 or the reintroduction of stricter guidelines on physical distancing. This approach will include exploring opportunities for hybrid safe spaces (combining face-to-face and virtual sessions), especially for girls in urban areas. During 2021, the aim is also to finalize the handbook for safe space facilitators to ensure a coordinated and strengthened approach across the targeted areas.

### Enhancing the family and community environment

To promote a supportive and gender-equal environment, evidence-based tools such as the Start Awareness Support Action! (SASA!)<sup>146</sup> are adapted to the Zambian context to address gender norms through community dialogues and engagements with boys and men, and

youth groups are specifically engaged to develop and roll out peer-to-peer tools on positive gender and social norms in the communities. Traditional leaders and traditional marriage counsellors are further engaged to discuss adolescents' rights, including those related to menstrual hygiene management, sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS, gender equality and GBV. To institutionalize the work with the marriage counsellors, the Zambia National Traditional Counsellors' Association and the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs have developed a traditional counsellors' manual. The manual will be rolled out in 2021 through the traditional marriage counsellors' association. It aims at ensuring that gender-transformative information and approaches are included in counselling for adolescent girls and young women. The manual will also contribute to the challenging of – and in the end, elimination of – harmful gender and social norms that perpetuate patriarchy and male dominance.


COVID-19 slowed the implementation of planned community dialogues in 2020, due to restrictions on public gatherings. However, it picked up again in the last quarter of the year as 42 district stakeholders were capacitated on facilitating dialogues on gender norms, masculinities and child marriage. The capacitation built on an already developed gender-transformative tool, which was adapted for community dialogues. The tool covers topics such as gender roles deconstruction, gender power relations, sharing responsibilities and decision-making at the household level, as well as male involvement in child marriages. This resulted in the training of 140 community volunteers who rolled out dialogues at the community level in December, reaching a total of 2,200 community members (1,300 men and 900 women) with at least five of the eight sessions, lasting 1.5 hours each.

The community volunteers, in addition to facilitating community dialogues, also participated in a total of 22 radio programmes alongside district staff during the year, reaching an estimated listenership of 300,000 people and providing a platform for public conversations around issues related to adolescent and child well-being and the impacts of child marriage, including girls' education, re-entry to education after pregnancy, and children's access to social protection programmes. This activity was especially important during the pandemic when other community engagements were impossible. The radio programmes are built on a guide called *Stronger Together on Gender Norms, Gender Transformation, Positive Masculinities and Child Marriage*, developed by the Zambia Center for Communications Program, together with social welfare officers in Katete and Senanga, with district stakeholders

and radio staff oriented on its content. Through the engagement of the community volunteers in the radio programmes, the community dialogues led by the volunteers enabled a follow-up discussion around the issues raised in the programme, for deeper engagement among community members. The radio programmes also consist of a live phone-in format, which allows listeners to contribute to the conversation as it is aired; 413 callers participated in the programmes in 2020. As a result of the radio programmes, the multisectoral district child marriage team in Katete was requested by listeners to provide mentorships to 111 girls in five schools in the district.

To support positive masculinities and promote a conducive environment for the realization of girls' and boys' rights, the programme supported the formation of 30 boys' and 30 men's networks in the targeted districts, with 4,266 adolescent boys being mentored on positive masculinities and on zero tolerance to violence through the safe space clubs also run for girls. The integration of gender-transformative content and approaches in the boys' safe spaces resulted in most boys expressing a will to return to school and support positive masculinity actions. The engagement with the adult men targets men who lead traditional initiation rites and rites of passage for boys, since these men have close interactions with adolescent boys. The engagement focused on helping the men to instil values among the boys that foster positive masculinities and support girls' and women's well-being. UNFPA and UNICEF had planned to jointly develop a tool for boys' and men's engagement during the year, but due to delays caused by COVID-19, this priority has been shifted to 2021.

In 2020, 37 traditional leaders were engaged in communications around the dangers of child marriage, gender equality, and availability of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning and GBV services. As a result, these traditional leaders have continued to mobilize themselves in support of adolescent girls and young women in their communities, including identifying adolescents who have dropped out of school due to marriage or pregnancy, engaging with their parents and spouses to raise money for the girls to return to school, identifying organizations in the communities that are working with educational support, and referrals to services for young people. These traditional leaders have become more vigilant of incidents of child marriage and discourage the practice. The traditional leaders and chiefs mobilized and supported 181 girls and 85 boys who had dropped out of school and provided them with school necessities such as stationery and school uniforms to enable their return when schools reopened during the latter part of the year after the pandemic-induced closures.



To support positive masculinities and promote a conducive environment for the realization of girls' and boys' rights, the programme supported the formation of 30 boys' and 30 men's networks in the targeted districts.

Another 30 traditional initiators, who work with adolescent girls and boys to ensure a smooth rite of passage to adulthood, were reached in 2020. Thanks to capacity-building and mobilization, they have been able to explore different organizations to support the empowerment of adolescent girls with knowledge and skills; they are now more systematic in their engagement of the adolescents, in collaboration with community-led organizations. UNFPA supported the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, the Ministry of Gender and the Zambia National Traditional Counsellors to codify the curriculum used during rites of passage for adolescent girls in 2020. This review was done with the view of ensuring that traditional marriage counsellors engage girls in a way that is gender transformative. The analysis was based on various gender norms, sayings and songs from various provinces to ensure that the content does not promote male dominance or perpetuate the low status of women and girls in the communities. The draft is currently being finalized and will be launched in 2021.

The Global Programme also supported capacity-building for 7 youth-led organizations and 23 women's rights organizations, which primarily work with women and adolescent girls and boys on issues such as economic empowerment and rites of passage at a community level. The youth-led organizations have an existing mandate on youth engagement and youth empowerment interventions, and throughout the year they referred 20 adolescent girls to other service providers, including education and health services.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The main challenge during the year was that face-to-face community dialogues could only take place in the fourth quarter, when the COVID-19 situation in the country had subsided and the restriction on public gatherings was lifted. To ensure the safety of participants in the dialogues, the duration of the sessions was reduced, and the number of participants was lower than normal. However, radio programmes had already been adopted in the second quarter of the year to ensure continued outreach to the communities during the pandemic.

The inclusion and engagement of community volunteers as facilitators for community engagement interventions has proven to be key, as they are well established to ensure relevance to the local context and language appropriateness. Orientation of key district partners on the content of various activities such as radio programmes and community dialogue is critical for shared understanding of intended programme outcomes.

The programme continued to engage with the ActionAid Global Platform during 2020, specifically on the development of a peer-to-peer tool on gender norms.

However, due to staff movements and delays during COVID-19, this work stopped in the middle of the year. In 2021, a consultant will be engaged to support the finalization and field-testing of the tool, in collaboration with ActionAid.

Despite the fact that comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) was introduced in schools in Zambia in 2014, in 2020 the church mother bodies raised concerns about its content and appropriateness for school-going children. This might have been provoked by reports of high levels of adolescent pregnancy among schoolgirls. These concerns provoked a heated debate in Zambia among various stakeholders during the year, especially among some traditional and religious leaders and within the Government. Faith-based actors and churches were strongly opposed to CSE, as were some traditional leaders. The acceptance of providing age-appropriate information on sexuality remains contentious and impacts strongly on the ability of the health sector to provide adolescent sexual and reproductive health services and address issues of adolescent pregnancy and school dropout – both drivers of child marriage. This highlights the need to continue to engage with the faith-based community and leaders and leverage other voices among traditional leaders to have an honest and broad discussion that focuses on addressing the needs and rights of adolescents – since it became evident that traditional leaders who had previously participated in dialogues supported by the Global Programme came out in support of CSE during this debate.

In 2021, some of the priorities for engaging community members around the issue of child marriage include: the development of a tool for boys' and men's engagement, including male traditional initiators; the development and roll-out of a tool for community dialogue, co-created by United Nations bodies, the Government and the non-governmental organization network on ending child marriage; further engagement with chiefs and their spouses; further engagement with ZINGO (the network of inter-religious organizations) to ensure that marriages involving children are not officiated by religious leaders; the implementation of a mass-media campaign; and finalizing the curriculum for engaging traditional marriage counsellors (alangizi).

### Strengthening systems

To further promote an environment conducive to girls' rights, and to ensure a scaled-up and sustainable approach to ending child marriage, the Global Programme in Zambia works with the education, health and social welfare sectors to strengthen quality services that respond to the needs of girls and boys. In the education sector, and to enhance links



between sectors, the Global Programme focuses on strengthening the role of guidance and counselling teachers in schools to identify vulnerable children and provide counselling support and/or referrals to services. The programme also supports water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in schools, specifically focusing on menstrual hygiene management to support girls' attendance in school, and works with community platforms to help girls re-enrol in education when they have dropped out due to adolescent pregnancy.

In Senanga District, continued efforts to strengthen the capacity of 25 CAGs engaging 637 community members (259 male and 208 female), resulted in the re-entry of 72 girls into school after pregnancy and marriage. CAGs are created to work closely with schools and communities to identify children and adolescents who have dropped out of school and to support them based on their individual needs (e.g., through the provision of uniforms or stationery). They also lead negotiations with the girls' school and/or parents to allow them to return.

Each CAG is linked to a specific school in the community and the CAG members are all from that same community – ensuring that there is a level of trust in the platform. Schools are also supported with grants for CAGs to lead income-generating activities; funds raised are used to improve the environment for girls, for example, through the provision/production of sanitary pads (in schools where menstrual hygiene management clubs are not already making sanitary pads) or sanitation products (e.g., basins or soap).

To further support girls' education, the National Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools Strategy (2019–2030) and the National School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Standards and Guidelines, both drafted in 2019, were finalized and approved with the support of UNICEF in 2020. These documents will guide the sector in the provision of WASH services in schools, including services related to menstrual hygiene management. As part of scaling up of the menstrual hygiene management interventions, 409 teachers (193 female)



In Senanga District, continued efforts to strengthen the capacity of 25 community action groups engaging **637** community members (**259 male and 208 female**), resulted in the re-entry of **72 girls** into school after pregnancy and marriage.

and 570 parent-teacher association members (287 female) from 54 schools were trained in menstrual hygiene management promotion during the year. Basic sanitation facilities – such as gender-segregated toilets with menstrual hygiene management facilities and group hand-washing stations – were established in eight schools in Katete District, benefiting 3,764 students, including 2,127 girls.

In 2020, the Global Programme supported the development of guidelines for guidance and counselling teachers and handbooks for teachers and students. The guidelines support the implementation and administration of guidance and counselling services in schools. The availability of the guidelines and the handbooks, coupled with training and mentoring of guidance and counselling teachers, will strengthen the provision of personal, social, academic and vocational guidance and counselling to girls, especially in primary schools, who are vulnerable or at risk of teenage pregnancy, GBV and/or child marriage. A total of 125 school managers and guidance and counselling teachers from 58 schools in Senanga and Katete districts were equipped with knowledge and skills to establish and run guidance and counselling committees, develop school action plans on guidance and counselling, provide guidance and counselling services to students, and use standard referral forms, monitoring and reporting tools.

In the health sector, the programme focuses on ensuring adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services through the development of normative and operational guidance for service delivery. This work includes, for example, support to the National Operational Plan for the Adolescent Health Strategy (2017–2021) and to the updated service quality assessment (SQA) tool for adolescent health services. The operational plan has been instrumental in supporting improved service delivery, while the SQA tool has been used to undertake assessments of the quality of service provision, identifying implementation challenges and subsequently implementing remedial action where appropriate. The support to the health sector is further provided by supporting the establishment of adolescent-friendly spaces in health-care facilities, and capacity development of health-care facility staff and peer educators to provide community- and school-based outreach. It does so by linking community-based distributors, safe motherhood action groups (SMAGs) and peer educators with each other to provide adolescent sexual and reproductive health services at community level.

Continued advocacy on the need for age- and sex-disaggregated data in the health management

information system (HMIS) to enable progress in adolescent health programming to be ascertained, led to the revision of HMIS registers, where some data – including uptake of family planning services – will now be disaggregated by age. Given the links between adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Zambia, this modification in the HMIS is an important step in ensuring evidence-based programming also occurs at subnational level. One of the targeted districts (Senanga) was also supported with requisite hardware and software, and staff capacity development, to set up an electronic HMIS, something which is expected to improve the efficiency of generating relevant data for decision-making.

During the year, the programme supported capacity-building of 89 health workers in five districts, reaching a total of 67 health-care facilities. The capacity-building focused on running newly established adolescent-friendly spaces at the health-care facilities, and on continued functionality of previously established ones. In addition, 348 peer educators were engaged: these peer educators are based in the health-care facilities and undertake school and community outreach with the support of health workers. Given the context of COVID-19, continuation of the delivery of adolescent-friendly health services entailed supporting the districts where the facilities are located with masks, sanitizers, and information and education communication materials on COVID-19. Thanks to the programme support to the health sector, all health-care facilities in Katete and Senanga districts now have adolescent-friendly spaces established. A secondary review of HMIS data is ongoing in both districts and will ascertain service utilization patterns for services linked to child marriage in 2020 and preceding years, with the data intended to inform subsequent delivery of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and HIV services.

Finally, in the social welfare sector, a nationally endorsed community-based case management approach has been rolled out to enable social welfare volunteers to identify vulnerable children and families and provide, and/or refer them to, services. Linkages have been made with the social protection sector to ensure that horizontal expansion of the regular and emergency social cash transfer interventions are gender sensitive and aligned with ongoing child protection case management efforts as part of 'Cash Plus' programming.

In 2020, national tools and training for community-based case management were revised and endorsed by the line ministry to include more specific references to child marriage and to include a new module on intensive family support. The training activities are led by the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, and target community volunteers through 140

community welfare assistance committees, enabling them to identify vulnerable children and families, address issues at household level where possible and/or refer them to services or a social worker when needed. Six government master trainers were re-oriented on the new tools and training in 2020, thereby ensuring a sustainable approach in rolling out this revised approach to three wards in each of the two districts of Katete and Senanga as target areas for the Global Programme. In 2020, thanks to this new training, 974 cases were opened in the two districts using the community-based case management approach (gender disaggregation not available yet). Through advocacy with the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services to ensure uniform application of community-based case management by United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the country, the tools and training were also expanded to 29 more districts during the year. A case management technical working group offered the opportunity to advocate for this uniform approach to community-based case management, resulting in buy-in from NGOs to expand this approach to new districts. Across the country, a total of 2,012 community volunteers have been trained since 2017 in this programme, which was initially supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID); in 2020, a total of 28,556 cases were opened using the community-based case management approach.

In 2020, the programme carried out a technical review of the India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) programme implemented by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), which developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for dealing with cases of child marriage. The SOPs are similar to the existing GBV multidisciplinary guidelines available in the country, but focus on child marriage. Discussions are ongoing to ensure one comprehensive set of GBV guidelines that can be applied to any case of GBV, including child marriage cases, rather than duplicating the guidelines for specific issues. The work is

overseen by the Ministry of Gender, which leads all work on GBV and child marriage in Zambia.

In 2020, draft guidelines for the protection of child victims and witnesses through judicial proceedings, including for child-friendly interviews, were drafted with technical support from the ministries of gender, health, education, home affairs, and community development and social services, as well as the National Prosecution Authority.

In addition to this, the child protection subgroup became an effective mechanism to support the roll-out of the child-related components of the COVID-19 response plan of the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services during the year.

#### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

COVID-19 led to school closures, disrupting learning for children and adolescents. To prevent prolonged school closures, the Government reopened schools for examination classes on 1 June, and subsequently schools were fully reopened by the end of September. To mitigate the period of school closures, UNICEF, in partnership with i-School, supported the development and transmission of an eight-week series of lessons through national and community radios. A nationwide assessment on school readiness for reopening, status of continuity of learning, major gaps for safe reopening of schools and the challenges in the provision of remote learning contributed towards informing the full reopening of the schools in September 2020.

Going forward in the education sector, the programme will focus on the roll-out of 13 radio programmes on the prevention of school-related GBV and training of teachers on the code of ethics. The programme will also continue strengthening guidance and counselling services in schools and the capacity and sustainability of CAGs to record, monitor and support girls who have dropped out of school. Provision of WASH services and scaling up of menstrual hygiene management

In the health sector, the programme focuses on ensuring adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services through the development of normative and operational guidance for service delivery.

interventions in additional schools in Katete and Senanga districts will also be prioritized.

In the health sector, districts have been supported to scale up community-based outreach sessions for adolescent-friendly services, given that the facility-based approach was reaching fewer adolescents and young people with integrated sexual and reproductive health and HIV services than hoped. While districts had been supported with bicycles and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to provide technical support and monitor progress of the activities.

Through programme monitoring visits prior to COVID-19 and virtual discussions in the context of COVID-19, consensus has emerged that the scope of the training for peer educators and health workers in adolescent-friendly services is inadequate. For example, key aspects such as sexual violence and GBV, inclusion of disability and other equity-focused areas are not emphasized. Moreover, the quality of training has not been extensively monitored, leading to situations where peer educators and health workers may not be adequately prepared to provide services that are responsive to the needs of adolescents. Emerging lessons therefore suggest that it is imperative to revise the peer educators and health workers training manual to expand the scope of topics and also ensure quality of training. Hence, in 2021, the peer educator and health worker manual will be revised to further promote gender equality and inclusion of disabilities, and health-care facilities will be further supported to ensure continuation of adolescent-friendly services.

The Ministry of Health has developed guidelines for continuity of services during COVID-19, in which adolescent health services are considered essential services. However, despite these guidelines, the development of the situation with regards to the pandemic will determine the implementation landscape in 2021. In this regard, UNFPA and UNICEF will continue to use alternative delivery modalities for services, including digital platforms and mobile services that adhere to safety measures and that engage young people and the private sector in its modes of service delivery.

Face-to-face training of community volunteers on community-based case management took place early in the year, before COVID-19 hit. However, refresher training was moved to 2021. After the first training was conducted, district social welfare officers took the initiative to address challenges faced by newly trained community volunteers by starting up their own mentoring support platforms.

In 2021, the programme will also continue to support the Government with strengthening referrals and linkages between critical groups and platforms (e.g., peer educators, SMAGs) and provide targeted mentorships for these actors to improve the quality of community- and school-based outreach activities. In the area of GBV, the programme will continue to work with stakeholders within the United Nations joint programme on social protection and national GBV actors, including the World Bank, to strengthen GBV coordination and multidisciplinary guidelines, and include child marriage district actors in the GBV training under the joint programme, which includes guidelines on dealing with victims and witnesses, and statutory case management for child marriage cases.

### Addressing poverty

The work to address poverty and strengthen livelihoods is funded through complementary streams to the Global Programme, leveraged to increase the impact of programme interventions. In 2020, UNICEF expanded its partnership with the World Bank in the social protection sector, with the World Bank now providing funding to the social cash transfer programme in Zambia. Thanks to ongoing advocacy with the Government, the national treasury also released funds to the programme, especially in the fourth quarter of the year. UNICEF further supported this programme – which is in line with the seventh national development plan of the country – through enhancements of the management information system, continued roll-out of a grievance mechanism, improvements of the payment delivery system, implementation of a new financial management and reporting system, and through a strengthened strategic planning framework. The programme currently reaches 632,223 households, of which 68 per cent are female headed.

Throughout the year, UNICEF continued providing technical support to the government-led drought-response emergency cash transfer (ECT) programme, reaching 92,202 households (approximately 400,000 people). A similar COVID-19 ECT programme was also successfully developed, targeting 118,000 households directly or indirectly affected by the pandemic through additional resources mobilized (a total of US\$21 million). The ECT benefited both households in chronic poverty and already part of the social cash transfer programme (vertical expansion) and households that have become vulnerable due to the emergency context (horizontal expansion). The programme is aligned with other emergency response sectors, including health, WASH, GBV, case management, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, child protection, nutrition and disability. It is expected to continue in 2021. These ECT programmes do



not specifically target child marriage, but, as adolescent girls in the households reached would be at risk of child marriage due to poverty, the aim is that they will contribute to a decreased risk for the girls.

In addition to the cash transfer initiatives, the programme engaged with actors through the national-level GBV coordination mechanism and with the World Bank, which is implementing the girls' education and women's empowerment and livelihood programme focused on keeping girls in school (providing additional educational support to households within the social cash transfer programme that consists of adolescent girls) and securing women's livelihoods (providing women in the targeted households with livelihood packages).

### Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policies published in 2020 by the World Policy Analysis Center found that the rate of child marriage reduced by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts surrounding their enactment, foster improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.<sup>147</sup> This is consistent with the hypothesis that gender egalitarian laws positively impact norms regarding women's equality and empowerment at national and subnational levels.<sup>148</sup>

In Zambia, the Global Programme continues to advocate that the Government adhere to international human rights standards and include a minimum age of marriage of 18 for statutory and customary marriages in the Children's Code (defining a child as anyone under the age of 18 and that no child can be married). The Children's Code – currently with government drafters and the final content embargoed until it is endorsed by Cabinet and taken to Parliament – includes provisions on limiting the use of residential care for children; on lifting the age of criminal responsibility from 8 to 14; and on regulating diversion, limiting detention and stipulating disability-inclusion measures aligned with international human rights treaties. It introduces a ban on corporal punishment in family settings, new child rights monitoring mechanisms, and mandatory child participation and protection measures for all entities directly interacting with children. It also secures protection of child victims/witnesses and ensures child testimonies carry equal weight to those of adults. It states that any child in a marriage is in need of care and protection, which paves the way for a social welfare response, and states that forced marriage is considered maltreatment and a harmful practice constituting modern slavery, thereby allowing for other laws to impose penalties on adults who contravene this

provision. The Global Programme continues to leverage its role in bringing different actors – including the judiciary, ministries, civil society and actors within the child marriage field – together around a common goal, and to support consensus building between the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services and the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development to help resolve long-standing challenges delaying the enactment of the Children's Code.

Because of COVID-19, the implementation and coordination of the national action plan on ending child marriage was slow in 2020. However, the programme continued advocacy with the Ministry of Gender to hold an annual review of child marriage programming in Zambia, led by the Government. In 2020 for the first time, national-, provincial- and district-level actors from the two programme focus districts of Katete and Senanga were involved, alongside representatives from the ministries of education, health, agriculture, chiefs and traditional affairs, and provincial planners, among others. In 2021, the programme will support a review of the national action plan, and advocacy for public financing for children, to ensure budget allocations from line ministries towards the action plan.

The programme made strong efforts to include multiple stakeholders in providing technical support to the development of guidelines, solidifying the strong convening role of the United Nations, and ensuring that policies and frameworks gained multisectoral buy-in to support adolescents. UNFPA made continuous efforts to collaborate with the Ministry of Gender and the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs to increase the national-level coordination on ending child marriage, including supporting dialogue on child marriage in the House of Chiefs and other national forums.

UNFPA appeared before the Parliamentary Committee on Youth, Sport and Child Matters with the main topic of discussion being sexual and reproductive health and rights of children and young people in Zambia. This sparked a good discussion and elicited debate, with the Members of Parliament expressing willingness to tackle issues around sexual and reproductive health and rights in their constituencies. The programme also advocates for a reduced age of consent to access health services.

The United Nations in Zambia jointly developed a draft conceptual document for a proposed presidential initiative on ending child marriage, which was completed in June and submitted to the Ministry of Gender for review. Due to COVID-19 and competing priorities within the ministry, feedback has not yet been received. The aim of the presidential initiative is to leverage the role of the President in his capacity as the African Union

Champion for Ending Child Marriage, and design a robust initiative that increases the scale, scope and speed of interventions to ensure Zambia meets its target of reducing child marriage by 40 per cent by the end of 2021.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Beginning in March 2020, the Government focused on addressing COVID-19. However, the Global Programme continued to advocate for and engage with multiple government actors to find space to finalize important laws such as the Children's Code, and started work on developing key guidelines related to ending child marriage. This highlights the important convening role of the United Nations in driving key regulatory frameworks forward. Further, UNFPA and UNICEF supported the Government in its emergency programming during the pandemic, especially with regards to child protection and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and GBV.

The long delay in finalizing the Children's Code and the lack of movement on the Marriage Bill prolonged the confusion in addressing child marriage in the country, as customary law allows a child to marry at puberty, whereas statutory law puts the minimum age of marriage at 21 years. The continued lack of clarity on the legal age of marriage also impacts national discussions on the definition of a child, with a knock-on effect on age of sexual consent, CSE in schools, access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health services, age of criminal responsibility, and promotion of child participation of different ages in programming and policy processes.

The programme will prioritize organizing a review meeting with all 10 provincial planners engaged. The inclusion of provincial planners in the annual review process highlighted the need to leverage the role of previously untapped government officials in scaling up efforts to end child marriage and expand accountability for results across the Government. Significantly, the provincial planners recognized the importance of addressing child marriage to ensure improved outcomes for children, and suggested the inclusion of multisectoral child marriage work as one of the key performance indicators of the provincial permanent secretary. The programme intends to take this suggestion forward in 2021.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, planned learning visits to wards within Katete and Senanga districts from other districts within Eastern and Western provinces could not take place during the year. However, online meetings were held with the district social welfare offices that are leading the programme on ending child marriage in the two targeted districts, to provide ongoing technical support.

### Generating and applying data and evidence

For strengthened governance to end child marriage, the Global Programme supports government information management systems and district actors to collect and use data to inform policymaking and programming. Implementation research and surveys on social and behaviour change provide additional evidence to inform decision-making and track progress.

The strong partnership between UNFPA and UNICEF in Zambia ensured a solid sub-analysis of the 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey in 2020. The results highlighted the ongoing work required to address child marriage, with the rates of child marriage dropping less than expected from the previous round of the survey. The sub-analysis also highlighted the link between quality education and child marriage. This important piece of work will help inform decision-making and planning processes in 2021, and has already informed the annual child marriage review in 2020, where line ministries agreed on multisectoral indicators to inform 2021 planning.

The programme built upon its recognized role in leading child marriage programming in Zambia to technically support the Canadian High Commission to conduct research on the role of social workers in preventing and responding to child marriage. The document was reviewed by all stakeholders working on child marriage and will be used to guide the development of statutory case management guidance notes for child marriage cases in 2021.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

COVID-19 impacted the implementation of field-level activities in 2020, including local learning visits and conducting research, such as the social and behaviour change baseline planned for the year. This study will instead be conducted in 2021, using local entities and processes as far as possible while aligning with the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office cross-regional work on social norms. In 2021, implementation research linked to the programme will also be conducted, and support to district actors will continue, to ensure documentation of the process to end child marriage and to strengthen the collection and use of data.



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## Partnerships and working as one

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In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Zambia, the Global Programme worked with nine partners: six government bodies, two civil society organizations (both focusing on children’s rights and one of them also focusing on women’s rights) and one media institution. The engagement with the government bodies shows the multisectoral nature of the Global Programme, as UNFPA and UNICEF are working with partners across the sectors of health, education, youth, social protection, gender, and chiefs and traditional affairs.

To ensure joint, coordinated implementation of the Global Programme in Zambia, the two organizations met

at the beginning of 2020 to map out accountabilities of each actor, including targets to be achieved. During the year, the organizations continued to meet regularly to track progress of programme implementation and assess achievements of targets.

The Global Programme continues to focus on two learning districts (Katete and Senanga), with joint implementation in six wards in those districts. In addition to the focused implementation in these wards, support to adolescent sexual and reproductive health services covers all health-care facilities across both districts and the support to the education sector was scaled up to an additional five wards in 2020.

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## Communicating the need to end child marriage

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In 2020, the Government of Zambia once again co-hosted, with the Government of Canada and with support of the Global Programme, a high-level side event at the United Nations General Assembly in September. Given the current situation, the event was virtual; it brought together over 500 participants from 56 countries. The event provided a platform to bring up youth voices and for governments and development partners to recommit to the need to accelerate action to end child marriage if we are to reach the SDGs. Zambia was represented by Minister of Gender, Elisabeth Phiri, who noted in her opening statement that: “child

marriage continues to deny girls’ fundamental rights, and Zambia remains committed to ending this; making national investments in multiple sectors, including education, social protection and health; and providing continental leadership.”<sup>149</sup>

The Global Programme in Zambia also ensured that communication on child marriage was spread through social media, and enhanced the programme’s aim of lifting girls’ voices on the Day of the Girl in the context of Generation Equality.<sup>150</sup>

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**Summary of output indicator performance (2020)**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	5,840	5,923
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	2,163	2,264
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	5,150	4,325
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	7,739	2,200
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	300,000	N/A
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	500	141
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized by the Global Programme in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality	30	23
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	50	58
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	24	191
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	1	1
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	3	1
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	2	N/A
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.



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UNFPA-UNICEF  
GLOBAL PROGRAMME  
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

**ACT NOW:**  
Accelerating gender equality  
by eliminating child marriage  
in a pandemic

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