

Phase III Summary Narrative

*UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme
to End Child Marriage*



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The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the Global Programme) was designed as a 15-year programme (2016–2030) to contribute to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3, which aims to eliminate all harmful practices, including child marriage. The Global Programme targets adolescent girls (ages 10–19) at risk of child marriage or already in union, in 12 selected countries with high prevalence or high burden of child marriage: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

The programme promotes the rights of adolescent girls to avert marriage and pregnancy, and enables them to achieve their aspirations through education and alternative pathways. The Global Programme supports shifts in attitudes within households, empowers adolescent girls to direct their own futures, and strengthens the services that allow them to do so, including sexual and reproductive health and social protection programmes. It also addresses the underlying conditions that sustain child marriage, advocating for laws and policies that protect girls' rights while highlighting the importance of using robust data and evidence to inform such policies.

This document provides a brief narrative of the Phase III (2024–2030) programme document (proposal) for the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

GLOBAL PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

Summary of achievements
since 2016

**21 million
girls**

reached with life skills
and comprehensive
sexuality education

**1.2 million
girls**

supported to enrol in,
return to, and/or remain
in school

**58 million
community
members**

engaged in dialogues on gender
equality and child marriage

**700,000 prevention and
care service delivery points**

supported to provide quality
health, education and protection
services for girls

**455
partnership**

established to support
social protection and girls'
economic empowerment

**63 research
and evidence
products**

on ending child marriage
produced at country level



8 of the 11 (in the 12 targeted Global Programme countries)
costed national action plans to end child marriage are
financed by the government, while global advocacy
engagements have resulted in 33 countries now having
costed national action plans, from 7 in 2018

**94 policies and
legal instruments**

addressing child marriage in line with
international human rights standards
drafted, proposed or adopted with
Global Programme support

During Phase II (2020–2023), the Global Programme solidified its role in leading the global agenda to end child marriage by 2030. Key achievements included:

Promoting gender-transformative programming: The programme ensured the articulation, operationalization and roll-out of an ambitious approach to gender-transformative change across countries, regions and partners. This approach aimed at addressing the root causes of gender inequality to transform harmful gender roles, norms and power relations.

Leaving no one behind: The programme made major strides to ensure an intersectional approach and to create implementation structures and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the most marginalized and most vulnerable adolescent girls are included in interventions to end and respond to child marriage (in particular, but not limited to, adolescent mothers, married girls, girls with disabilities, girls in poverty, girls affected by humanitarian crises or conflicts, and out-of-school girls).

Contributing to a gender-equitable family and community environment. Recognizing that social and gender norms are an important driver of child marriage, the programme invested in strengthening social norms and social and behaviour change programming, through capacity development and implementation of evidence-informed social and behaviour change community engagement interventions at scale. Social and gender norms programming and measurement courses and training have been delivered to country offices, government and civil society partners, and a systematic approach to behaviourally informed evidence generation has been implemented to tailor programming according to relevant drivers.

Strengthening the availability and quality of data and evidence: UNFPA and UNICEF continued to strengthen and expand the availability and quality of data and evidence on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and bodily autonomy of women and girls through research, analysis, and numerous publications, including country profiles, data portals and regular updates. The agencies responded quickly to document and analyse the effects of COVID-19 on child marriage and on adolescent girls, and on efforts to adapt multisectoral programming to the pandemic.



Coordinating research and building capacity for evidence generation and uptake: In collaboration with partners, global and regional networks, the Global Programme greatly expanded investments in research and in mechanisms for high-quality evidence generation and application. This included, among others, the Global Programme Research Strategy; the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK); the Strategic Technical Assistance for Research (STAR) Initiative to End Harmful Practices; and the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism.

Synthesizing the evidence of what works to end child marriage: The Global Programme contributed to the analysis and synthesis of global evidence on effective interventions to prevent child marriage. As a result, there is now much greater clarity on what works and what does not work to end child marriage worldwide.

Expanding knowledge management: The Global Programme continued to expand the production and dissemination of knowledge products to ensure that available evidence is easy to understand, is being used and reaches the largest possible number of actors involved in efforts to end child marriage around the world.

Ensuring effective advocacy and communication: The Global Programme supported high-level advocacy at global, regional and country levels to ensure that child marriage remains on the public policy agenda and that financial investments are made by donors and country governments to support adolescent

girls around the world. At global level, advocacy included regular contributions to the Commission on the Status of Women and to United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions related to ending child marriage. At regional level, the Global Programme engaged with the African Union (e.g., the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage) and the League of Arab States, as well as with Regional Economic Commissions (e.g., the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA)) and other regional mechanisms such as the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Collaborating with other global initiatives:

The Global Programme partnered with e.g. the civil society organization Girls Not Brides, the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP) and with the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation to strengthen complementarities for increased impact.

Adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Spurred by the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, the Global Programme invested heavily in adapting programme strategies to continue to reach adolescent girls and communities with empowerment interventions, information and services.

Leading a global agenda to end child marriage:

Child marriage is a global issue, and no region is on track to end the practice by 2030. Therefore, the Global Programme has supported countries and regions beyond the 12 focus countries with technical assistance and by sharing knowledge products, the latest evidence and technical resources to ensure that progress towards the achievement of the SDG target to end child marriage is accelerated globally.

All these achievements have been made possible because of the committed leadership of governments; continuous donor support; and the strong partnerships that translated to consistently high levels of achievements in Global Programme countries.¹



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1. The Global Programme is generously supported by the Governments of Belgium, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom, the European Union and Zonta International.

ONE VISION

Adolescent girls, especially the most marginalised, fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of child marriage, and experience healthier, safer and more empowered life transitions, including making informed choices about their education, livelihoods, sexuality, relationships, marriage and childbearing

1

THREE CHALLENGES

Polycrisis and megatrends

Pusback against gender equality

Slow decline in child marriage

2

THREE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Ensuring a human-rights based approach

Leaving no one behind

Fostering gender-transformative change

3

THREE FOCUS AREAS

Promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls

Adapt to the polycrisis and megatrends

Accelerate results and leverage partnerships and resources

VISION FOR PHASE III

The vision of the programme in Phase III is for **adolescent girls**, especially the most marginalized, to fully enjoy their childhood **free from the risk of child marriage**, and experience healthier, safer and more empowered life transitions, including making informed choices about their education, livelihoods, sexuality, relationships, marriage and childbearing.

THREE CHALLENGES

The polycrisis and megatrends of the twenty-first century have radically changed the context in which the Global Programme operates. The interplay of conflicts, climate change and environmental disasters, humanitarian emergencies, rising inequalities and poverty, and the persisting effects of COVID-19 are putting at risk the gains made in eliminating child marriage. The invasion of Ukraine sparked a sharp spike in food and energy prices that has roiled global markets and led to rising global hunger and exacerbating poverty – risk factors for child marriage. Food and energy have also been the leading components of global inflation, triggering an aggressive rise in interest rates by each of the world's major central banks. Rising interest rates have driven up the value of the dollar against other currencies, hampering low- and middle-income countries' access to external financing and raising the burden of existing debts and shrinking the fiscal space available for investments in gender equality.²

The pushback against gender equality globally affects efforts to end child marriage. The promotion of gender-transformative approaches has encountered an increasing pushback against gender equality and the rights and empowerment of girls and women. This includes resistance against legislation to ban child marriage and to raise the age of consent; a rise in legislation that criminalizes adolescent sexuality and hinders their autonomy and protection; opposition to the provision of contraception and other sexual and reproductive health services to adolescent girls; and resistance to the provision of comprehensive sexuality education to adolescents in and out of school, among other effects.

The decline in child marriage is much too slow to achieve the SDG target 5.3 of ending child marriage by 2030. While there has been a decline in the practice globally, progress would need to be 20 times faster than what has been observed in the last decade to ensure elimination by the end of this decade. Moreover, progress to end child marriage is uneven among regions and has mainly benefited adolescent girls from the richer quintiles, highlighting the need to redouble efforts to reach the poorest, uneducated, rural and most vulnerable girls.

THREE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Ensuring a human rights-based approach: Human rights will continue to underpin the Global Programme's vision, approach and strategies throughout Phase III. This includes leveraging political opportunities to advance gender equality and the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls, ensuring that duty bearers protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of girls and that adolescent girls acknowledge themselves as rights holders who know and can claim their rights.

Leaving no one behind: Globally, the context for the work of the Global Programme keeps getting more difficult. Today's multifaceted, complex crises limit adolescent girls' access to basic services and protection. However, the achievements and results from the Global Programme's Phases I and II are promising and create opportunities for renewed ambition towards 2030. In a global context of polycrisis and megatrends, the Global

2. See for example: <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/03/15/blog-how-war-in-ukraine-is-reverberating-across-worlds-regions-031522>; <https://www.un.org/en/desa/one-year-war-ukraine-leaves-lasting-scars-global-economy>

Programme must remain focused on the most vulnerable adolescent girls and their families facing intersectional forms of exclusion and discrimination. This requires applying the principle of leaving no one behind to prioritize the poorest, pregnant, already married, widowed or divorced girls, adolescent mothers, and girls with disabilities as well as those in humanitarian settings. It also means expanding opportunities for those at risk of child marriage, keeping adolescent girls in school, making sure they have economic opportunities and access to social protection programmes.

Fostering gender-transformative change:

Phase III requires the Global Programme 'to go deeper' by (i) continuing to build the evidence base on what works for gender-transformative change; (ii) advancing gender-transformative programming beyond the Global Programme countries by promoting the wider application of the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool³; (iii) advocating for gender-transformative approaches in programmes and interventions of public sectors in order to leverage resources at scale; (iv) increasing proactive engagement with feminist movements and women- and youth-led organizations; (v) promoting positive masculinities and engaging boys and young men as agents of change; (vi) using a gender-transformative lens to address intersectional issues and multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination; (vii) ensuring gender-transformative change is integrated into multisectoral programming; and (viii) fine-tuning quantitative and qualitative measurements of gender-transformative change.

THREE FOCUS AREAS

Building on the past eight years of programming, the Global Programme's Phase III strategy will invest in three mutually reinforcing focus areas that correspond to the three key challenges: polycrisis and megatrends, pushback against gender equality, and the slow decline in child marriage. Combined, these investments aim to accelerate efforts to end child marriage and promote gender equality:

Promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls

Sustain and scale up intensive support interventions for adolescent girls' empowerment

by implementing evidence-based and gender-transformative targeted life skills interventions and comprehensive sexuality education, particularly in non-formal settings.

Contextualize behaviour change to promote gender-transformative change across all levels of the socio-ecological model rather than focusing only on the community level.

Work with boys and young men to promote positive masculinities to be strengthened and systematized. This involves mobilizing and engaging key influencers such as fathers, traditional and religious leaders and other gatekeepers to shift gender and social norms that perpetuate child marriage within the country context, including challenging intergenerational practices.

Mobilize adolescent girls, women and young people as changemakers. The Global Programme will continue to expand partnerships with youth- and women-led and feminist organizations, coalitions, networks and movements to support and harness their power as changemakers, including through social accountability and policy advocacy to end child marriage.

Broaden global and regional partnerships for gender equality at global, regional and national levels.

Adapt to the polycrisis and megatrends of the twenty-first century

Ensure crisis-adaptive programming: Integrating child marriage prevention and response into humanitarian action is an imperative which should be approached as part of a lifesaving response. This includes situating the work on ending child marriage within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle and applying humanitarian-development nexus approaches. It is possible to harness humanitarian crises as an opportunity to do better for adolescent girls who are at risk of child marriage, already married or pregnant. To achieve

3. Read more about the GTA tool developed by the Global Programme here: <https://www.unicef.org/documents/gender-transformative-accelerator-tool>

these results, the Global Programme needs to be integrated into 'the humanitarian architecture' and be able to access humanitarian funding streams.

Build rapid cycles of monitoring, evaluation, learning and adaptation: The polycrisis, megatrends and the ticking SDG clock require much shorter learning cycles and faster programme adaptations. Monitoring, learning and adaptation will become a core programme strategy, rather than a set of activities that are separate from the core programme work. To be able to adapt to rapidly changing contexts, the Global Programme will strengthen outcome and impact monitoring and evaluation and accelerate learning cycles to continuously inform and adjust programme interventions towards 2030 and the vision for a post-2030 agenda.

Accelerate results and leverage partnerships and resources

Invest in systems and services at scale: To accelerate durable declines in child marriage prevalence, the Global Programme will scale up evidence-based, multisectoral, high-impact interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage. Health (particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights), education, child protection, social protection, economic development and other sectors need to work closely together to develop a shared vision and implement congruent strategies and plans.

Gender-responsive social protection tackles two of the main drivers of child marriage: poverty and gender inequality. When well designed and adequately funded, social protection can be one of the most scalable approaches to end child marriage. Six out of the twelve Global Programme countries currently have the potential to leverage large-scale social protection programmes with proven or promising potential for impact on child marriage and opportunities to test what works for even stronger results.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are another priority area for leveraging existing systems and strategies to accelerate results related to the prevention of adolescent pregnancies and preventing child marriage. Adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) programming has to be coordinated between the health, education and protection sectors to accelerate change. In some countries, partnerships



with HIV/AIDS structures and agencies offer untapped opportunities for ASRH, as well as the work with the gender-based violence Area of Responsibility in humanitarian settings.

Leverage public finance and strengthen government accountability: The Global Programme will continue to work closely with national governments, regional and global bodies, advocate for policy and legislative change and lobby for greater investments related to ending child marriage, prevent adolescent pregnancies and enhance adolescent girls' access to health, education and protection services.

Leverage technological innovations for large-scale results: Building on the proliferation of technological innovations triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Programme will invest in a rigorous approach to identify, design, implement and monitor inclusive, safe and ethical digital innovations to end child marriage, prevent adolescent pregnancies, and promote ASRH, bodily autonomy and gender equality.