



Learning series on child marriage

Gender-transformative promising practice from Latin America and the Caribbean

State of child marriages and unions in Latin America and The Caribbean

- **Over 1 in 5 girls (21%) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) marry or enter a union before they turn 18**, above the global average (19%). LAC is home to six of the 20 countries with the highest prevalence, and two of the countries with the highest absolute numbers of child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) in the world, Brazil and Mexico. 58 million women in LAC were married or entered a union before age 18. Despite this, CEFMU is not recognised as a priority, and prevalence has not declined over the past 25 years.

Control of girls and adolescents sexuality

- **CEFMU is naturalised in LAC through social norms around romantic love and control of girls' and adolescents' sexuality.** As a result, girls and adolescents are educated to see (heterosexual) marriage and union as their only desirable life choice. These social and patriarchal norms and structures create a taboo around adolescent sexuality; in the absence of quality and comprehensive sexuality education, adolescents often are forced to marry or enter a union once they start to exercise their sexuality. Pregnant and LGBTQIA+ adolescents are most at risk.
- **Aligning the age of consent with the minimum age of marriage denies girls' and adolescents' evolving capacities.** Such laws tend to criminalise adolescent sexuality and pregnancy and are often implemented without first building consensus with those most affected. This can drive increases and secrecy around informal unions, reducing girls' and adolescents' freedoms and access to services, including sexual and reproductive health care and justice.

Gender-transformative approaches (GTA) are an essential tool to address the root causes of CEFMU.

- Successful approaches critically assess gender roles and norms from the individual to the systems level; they work across sectors to redistribute power and resources to ensure girls and women – in all their diversity – can express their sexuality, freedom, and intentions, free from violence and regardless of their marital status. Practical examples include:
 - **Providing safe spaces** for girls and adolescents and their communities to come together, reflect around gender norms and act in solidarity. This may include providing legal and psychosocial support for girls and women who have experienced gender-based violence, including CEFMU.
 - **Using participatory approaches to CEFMU** – with accessible, context-specific content – that centre girls and adolescents and ensure they can make decisions and take advantage of opportunities that impact on their lives.
 - **Creating public platforms for girls and adolescents** to express their leadership, needs, desires, and solutions, and be seen to do so.
 - **Providing comprehensive sexuality education** that is age-appropriate, rights-based, context-specific, and holistic, so that girls and adolescents can critically assess and make informed decisions about their bodies and lives.
 - **Working long-term through open dialogue with communities** – including boys and men – to address the root causes of gender inequality and violence – including harmful masculinities, CEFMU and control of adolescent sexuality – building support and preventing backlash.



- **Increasing the availability, accessibility, and acceptability of services for girls and adolescents**, including education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, child protection and legal support services.
- **Other factors of success at the national level include inclusive economic development, more girls completing secondary education and dignified, paid employment for women.**

Case study: Núcleo de Apoyo a la Mujer NAM, Dominican Republic.

NAM is a feminist social organisation based in Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, focused on working with women, girls, adolescents and young women. They provide legal and psychological counselling services for women victims of gender-based violence.

“Crecer Contentas” Programme

- Provides girls, adolescents and young women with information about their human rights and in particular their sexual and reproductive rights.
- Extracurricular learning on "Life Skills" as well as scholarships for independent study that can help them strengthen their economic empowerment.
- Reinforcement of formal and school-based learning through reading and writing spaces.
- Emotional wellbeing club a space to talk about emotions to care for self-esteem.

More information on the “Crecer Contentas” programme can be found in the report: *Confronting taboo in Latin America and the Caribbean: Sexuality and gender transformative programmes to address MUITFs* (2022).