

# Ending Child Marriage

## Issue

More than 700 million girls and women alive today were married as children. This is a human rights violation on a vast scale and a major obstacle to sustainable development. While the practice of child marriage has slowly been declining, particularly for girls under age 15, additional, more concerted efforts are needed to accelerate the pace of change. If there is no reduction in child marriage, up to 280 million more girls alive today are at risk of becoming brides before they turn 18. The effects of population growth mean that this number will approach 320 million by 2050. If current trends continue, the total number of women alive that were married in childhood will grow from more than 700 million today to almost 1 billion women and girls by 2030.

## Action

The global momentum and opportunities to make significant progress on ending child marriage have never been more favourable. The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage offers a framework promoting the right of girls to delay marriage, addressing the conditions that keep the practice in place, and caring for girls already in union.

The programme will focus on enabling girls at risk of child marriage to choose and direct their own futures, supporting households in demonstrating positive attitudes towards adolescent girls, and strengthening the systems that deliver services to adolescent girls. It will also seek to ensure laws and policies protect and promote adolescent girls' rights, and highlight the importance of using robust data to inform policies relating to adolescent girls.

The programme targets adolescent girls (ages 10-19) at risk of child marriage or already in union, in 12 selected countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia. The countries were selected according to four criteria deemed important for additional United Nations investment and accelerated

global progress—high prevalence of child marriage, large projected burden, government engagement and regional distribution.

## Impact

The Global Programme envisions progress in three phases. The *initial phase*, or the first four years of the programme, will strengthen critical institutions and systems in select localities and countries to deliver quality services and opportunities for girls. It will also lay the foundation for attitudinal change among families and communities for a longer-term shift in behaviours and norms. Governments will be supported in developing strategies to deliver on the SDGs target on child marriage, including through action plans on child marriage. Regional and global momentum on child marriage will be ensured through partnerships with regional bodies such as the African Union and the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children, and global actions at UNGA and HRC.



Over the *midterm* (5-10 years), the Strategic Objective is to use the demonstration and catalytic power of this critical mass of strengthened systems, communities and girls to further accelerate progress at significant scale. It is expected that by this phase, a broader range of governments and donors would enhance investments in and support for married and unmarried girls as the corresponding benefits become more visible.

The programme is engaging a broader number and range of key actors—including entrepreneurs, the

private sector, and especially young people—as agents of change for positive gender norms. Strengthened political support, positive policies and frameworks, and continuous improvements in data and evidence in both phases would provide a strong base for implementing and measuring effective interventions at scale.

The vision for the *longer term* (10-15 years), is that more girls fully enjoy their childhood free from the risk of marriage. Further, they experience healthier, safer and more empowered lives, making decisions about their education, sexuality, relationships, marriage and childbearing.

## UNFPA and UNICEF Commitment to End Child Marriage

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is the lead UN agency for delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. UNFPA's sectoral efforts on child marriage bring together an understanding of population dynamics, and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and services including those for family planning, maternal health and HIV, while accounting for gender dynamics and cultural context.

UNFPA's Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, identifies child marriage as a priority at the impact level, and under its work on adolescents and youth, Outcome 2, as well as under Output 8, which is dedicated to adolescent girls and child marriage. The programmatic implications are further elaborated in the 2013 Strategy on Adolescents and Youth, which are operationalized in the multi-country initiative 'Action for Adolescent Girls'.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) UNICEF is a leading humanitarian and development agency working globally for the rights of every child. UNICEF's work on child marriage is a top-level corporate priority, reflected in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, at both the impact level and at the outcome level, under Outcome 6: Child Protection. The Gender Action Plan, 2014-2017, was endorsed by the UNICEF Executive Board and identified ending child marriage

as one of four targeted priorities, further raising the profile of ending child marriage within the organization.

UNICEF's expanded vision for ending child marriage recognizes that all sectors, from education to Communication for Development (C4D), health, HIV and social protection, need to be mobilized to address multiple deprivations that girls are likely to undergo during the second decade of life.

## Global Programme Principles

The following core principles capture the key value-added of this joint programme:

- Human rights-based approach
- Government ownership and alignment with national strategies and plans
- Multi-stakeholder partnership
- Leveraging investment
- Increasing the reach of programming
- Multi-country programming
- Increasing the reach of programming
- Working across sectors
- Global learning
- Value for money

[www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)

UNFPA  
Sexual and Reproductive Health Branch  
Technical Division  
605 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10158, USA  
Tel: +1 (212) 297-4931  
Email: [hq@unfpa.org](mailto:hq@unfpa.org)

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

UNICEF  
Child Protection Section  
Programme Division  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Tel: +1 (212) 326-7000  
Email: [childprotection@unicef.org](mailto:childprotection@unicef.org)

***Generous early support to individual projects, and to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage has been provided by the Governments of Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom as well as the European Union.***