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2025 ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT

Protecting Progress: Adapting to a Changing Aid Landscape



UNFPA-UNICEF
Global Programme to End Child Marriage

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
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Acronyms and abbreviations

AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEFM	Child, early, and forced marriage
CIFF	Children's Investment Fund Foundation
CO	Country Office
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPIMS+	Child Protection Information Management System
CRANK	Child Marriage Research to Action Network
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GFF	Girls First Fund
Global Programme	UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage
GNB	Girls Not Brides
GTA	Gender-Transformative Approaches
ICDP	International Child Development Programme
JPFGM	UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation
RO	Regional Office
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAIEVAC	South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children
SBC	Social and Behaviour Change
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STAR	Strategic Technical Assistance for Research Initiative to End Harmful Practices
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WLO	Women-Led Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
YLO	Youth-Led Organization

Executive summary



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ABOUT THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME

The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (hereafter, "the Global Programme") was designed as a 15-year programme (2016–2030) to accelerate the progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3, which calls for the elimination of harmful practices against women and girls, including child marriage. The Global Programme focuses on adolescent girls, ages 10–19, who are at risk of, or already affected by child marriage across 12 high-prevalence or high-burden countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia. Beyond country-level programming, the Global Programme is also a global advocate for adolescent girls and a leading voice in advancing efforts to end child marriage worldwide.

The programme promotes the rights of adolescent girls to avert child marriage and prevent adolescent pregnancy, empowering them to pursue their aspirations through life skills, comprehensive sexuality education, access to, return to, and retention in education, and creating alternative pathways to their future.

The Global Programme fosters changes in attitudes, values, expectations and behaviours in households and communities and strengthens quality and uptake of services like sexual and reproductive health and social protection. The Global Programme also advocates for laws and policies protecting adolescent girls' rights, emphasizing the use of robust data and evidence and human rights standards for policy formulation and implementation.

The Global Programme's strong focus on prioritizing adolescent girls has delivered significant results across a range of sectors including education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), social protection, child protection, gender-based violence, adolescent health and development, and community accountabilities to protect girls while promoting an enabling legal and policy environment that protects girls' rights and choices.

The Global Programme has also served as an incubator, catalyst and model of United Nations system-wide joint initiatives that put girls and women at the centre, not just in advocacy, but also in evidence-based programming that meets their comprehensive needs and safeguards their rights across regions.

ABOUT THIS RESULTS REPORT

This 2025 results report is organized into five chapters:

Chapter 1: The global situation presents an overview of the latest child marriage trends and patterns, the global regulatory landscape, the main challenges to ending child marriage, and the latest estimates of the cost of inaction.

Chapter 2: Global Programme highlights and thought leadership presents the Global Programme's main achievements and thought leadership in 2025 at the global and regional levels, spanning advocacy, policy influence, partnerships, gender-transformative approaches, evidence generation and technical support. It also includes a summary of the Global Programme Biennial Meeting.

Chapter 3: Global Programme performance presents key Global Programme results for 2025 in the 12 focus countries. The results are organized by three intermediate and six immediate outcomes. It also discusses the main challenges to programme implementation and lessons learned.

Chapter 4: Programme management highlights achievements and challenges in financial resource mobilization and outlines monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts.

Chapter 5: Looking ahead provides an overview of the Global Programme's priorities for 2026 and beyond.

In addition, **Annex 1** presents the Results Framework, while **Annex 2** details the Global Programme's contribution to evidence generation at the global and regional levels in 2025.

GLOBAL SITUATION

Global context:
An estimated 650 million girls and women alive today were married before the age of 18. Each year, 12 million girls are married before they turn 18—about one girl every three seconds. Recently released data show that child marriage carries severe economic costs for countries, with losses linked to maternal deaths, poorer health outcomes, and reduced earnings reaching up to US$175 billion per year[1]. Yet despite the scale and consequences of the practice, progress is possible, and has been achieved. Child marriage has declined globally over recent decades, reflecting important gains across many countries and regions. Worldwide, 68 million child marriages have been averted over the last 25 years.

1 Center for Global Development, *An Economic View on Investment to End Child Marriage*, 2026, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/economic-view-investment-end-child-marriage

This progress has been driven by gains in poverty reduction, girls' education and women's participation in labour markets, addressing some of the main drivers of child marriage across regions. However, this progress remains fragile and must be protected. Humanitarian crises, conflict, displacement, economic insecurity, digital harms, growing pushback against human rights and gender equality, and shrinking development financing are reshaping the context in which child marriage occurs, with the potential to stall or reverse hard-won gains.

Child marriage trends:

Today, 18 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 worldwide were married before age 18, down from 22 per cent a decade ago[2]. Regional trends[3], however, show that progress has been uneven. South Asia still has the highest number of child brides, with India alone accounting for one third of the world's child brides, but it has also seen the most significant reduction in prevalence over the past decade, falling from 39 per cent to 26 per cent. By contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa now has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, at 31 per cent, down from 38 per cent 10 years ago. Its share of the world's child brides is projected to grow, driven by slow progress and rapid population growth, particularly among the poorest quintiles. In the Middle East and North Africa, 1 in 6 young women marry before age 18, although most countries in the region have seen progress over the past 25 years, with the region standing out for the most equitable gains between rich and poor populations. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where 9 per cent of the world's child brides live, child marriage has remained stagnant for decades, and the region is projected to have the second-highest prevalence globally by 2030. Eastern Europe, Central Asia and East Asia have comparatively low but still persistent levels, with girls from marginalized groups continuing to face heightened risk. Recently released data[4] has shown that one in 13 young women in East Asia and the Pacific were first married or in union before their 18th birthday. The region is home to 93 million child brides, accounting for 14 per cent of the global total.

In 2025, several Global Programme countries continued to record declines in child marriage. In Bangladesh, prevalence fell to 47 per cent (MICS 2025), down from 51 per cent in 2022 (DHS 2022). Zambia also maintained a positive long-term trend, with prevalence declining to 24 per cent in 2024 (DHS 2024) from 29 per cent in 2018. Nepal experienced a particularly sharp reduction over a short period, with prevalence dropping from 35 per cent in 2022[5] to 28 per cent, according to the 2024–25 Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (NMICS)[6].

At the same time, national and regional gains can mask persistent subnational hotspots and growing vulnerabilities in humanitarian settings. For example, in Lebanon, recent data[7] has shown that child marriage affects 58 per cent of women aged 20–24 living in settlements of displaced Syrians, compared with 15 per cent in Beirut, while in Gaza, reports[8] [9] suggest that the practice may be increasing amid conflict, displacement, poverty, and the erosion of protection and basic services.

Global overview of the regulatory landscape on child marriage:

Child marriage is addressed or condemned in a wide range of international human rights frameworks as a violation of human rights. Key instruments include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which together affirm the principles of free and full consent to marriage, the need to set a minimum age for marriage, and the obligation to eliminate harmful practices that undermine children's health, education and development. Additional international, continental, and regional agreements further reinforce these protections. The global normative framework is also strengthened through UN resolutions on child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). Most recently, the sixth UN General Assembly resolution on CEFM, adopted in December 2024, called on States to enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies to prevent and end CEFM, while also supporting girls and women to leave such unions and affirming that marriage must be entered into only with free and full consent. The UN Human Rights Council's resolution on CEFM is another important instrument for advancing both the understanding and implementation of human rights standards in this area.

2 Source of prevalence data in this report: UNICEF Global Databases, 2026
3 UNICEF, *Is an End to Child Marriage Within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects*: May 2023 update, https://data.unicef.org/resources/is-an-end-to-child-marriage-within-reach//
4 UNICEF, *A Profile of Child Marriage in East Asia and the Pacific*, 2025, https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-profile-east-asia-pacific/
5 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2022
6 Note: Due to the timing of the release, the latest Nepal MICS findings have not yet undergone the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) country consultation process, and will be reviewed and validated in the next consultation in late 2026.
7 Central Administration of Statistics and UNICEF, *Sub-National Lebanon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2023: Statistical Snapshots, Beirut, Lebanon: CAS and UNICEF*, December 2025, https://mics.unicef.org/sites/mics/files/2025-12/Lebanon%20%28Subnational%29%20MICS%202023%20Statistical%20Snapshots_0.pdf
8 UNFPA, *Surge in Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy Threatens a Generation of Girls in Gaza*, 2026, https://palestine.unfpa.org/en/news/surge-child-marriage-and-adolescent-pregnancy-threatens-generation-girls-gaza
9 UNFPA, *Child marriages surge in Gaza as war tightens grip on girls' futures*, 2026, https://www.unfpa.org/news/child-marriages-surge-gaza-war-tightens-grip-girls%E2%80%99-futures

According to a 2025 UNESCO report[10], 18 per cent of all countries still allow marriage before age 18 for girls, while only 26 per cent have set the legal age at 18 without exceptions. A further 54 per cent set the legal age at 18 but still permit exceptions below that age, usually with parental or judicial consent, and in some cases without establishing an absolute minimum age. Against this backdrop, **Burkina Faso**[11], a Global Programme country, advanced important legal reform in 2025 through revisions to the Personal and Family Code that harmonized the legal age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys, replacing earlier unequal age thresholds, although some uncertainty remains as to whether judicial exceptions could still be granted in certain circumstances. Elsewhere, **Colombia**[12] and **Bolivia**[13] adopted reforms that raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 and removed exceptions that had previously allowed marriage below that age. In **Pakistan**[14], progress was made at the subnational level, with the Islamabad Capital Territory adopting a new law setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys and introducing stronger penalties related to child marriage.

Global challenges to ending child marriage:

Despite policy reforms and declines in the prevalence of child marriage at the global, regional and country levels, the current pace of progress remains too slow to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3, which calls for the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, by 2030. At current rates, more than 9 million girls are projected to marry in 2030 unless efforts accelerate significantly, particularly in high-burden countries. In addition, the hard-won gains of the last 25 years are now under increasing threat. In 2025, efforts to end child marriage came under unprecedented strain, due to several interconnected challenges:

- **Declining foreign aid:** While targeted funding to end child marriage has undergone a steady decline since 2019, in the first half of 2025, international development and humanitarian assistance underwent a widespread and dramatic contraction, with significant cuts announced by several of the world's largest donor governments. This had immediate effects on programming to end child marriage and left girls more vulnerable. In Yemen, for example, funding shortfalls forced the closure of several safe spaces and protection hubs in 2025.

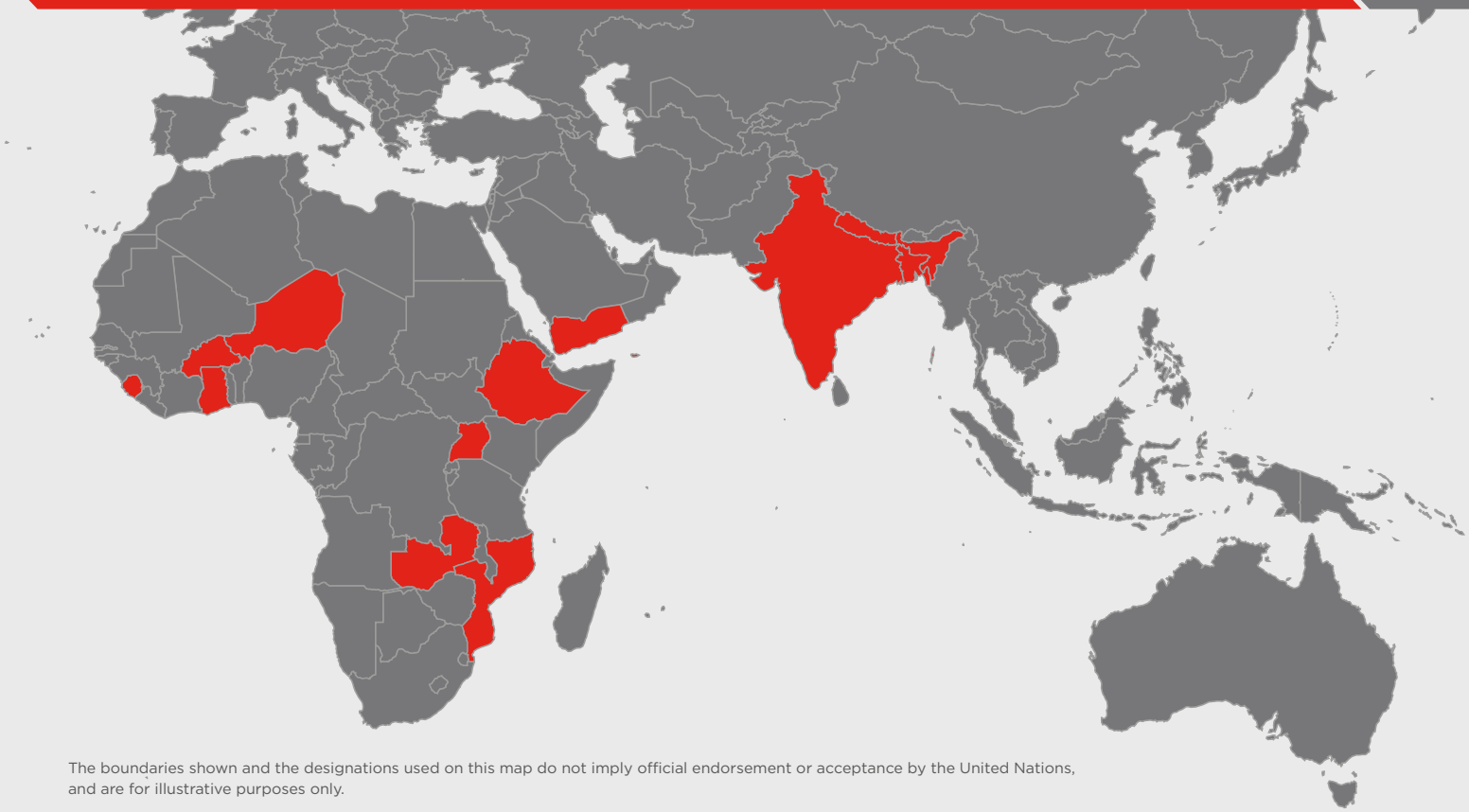
- **Shrinking fiscal space in lower-income countries:** Governments in lower-income countries are grappling with shrinking fiscal space due to rising debt burdens, low economic growth, higher tariffs and global geopolitical volatility, leaving them less able to invest in social development. As debt servicing outpaces spending on health and education, public services and government systems are coming under increasing strain, heightening girls' vulnerability.

- **Global pushback against gender equality**: In 2025, rising global pushback against human rights and gender equality, together with deeply entrenched harmful social norms in implementing countries, continued to constrain Global Programme activities. Across multiple contexts, resistance to gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) created a more difficult environment for advancing girls' rights and required efforts to challenge child marriage to be more cautious, adapted and context-specific.

- **Escalating humanitarian crises and climate shocks:** In 2025, humanitarian crises—including conflict, displacement, climate shocks, and disease outbreaks —continued to intensify the drivers of child marriage across multiple programme countries by weakening education, protection and other essential systems and increasing pressure on vulnerable households. Yet efforts to prevent child marriage were often underfunded or deprioritized in emergency responses, leaving adolescent girls in crisis settings at greater risk while also limiting programme reach and implementation.

In light of these challenges, and the catastrophic cost of inaction[15], sustained investment in what works to end child marriage[16] is essential to ensure that girls stay in school, have choices about their futures, and are protected from child marriage.

10 UNESCO, *How marriage laws can contribute to protecting every girl's right to education*, 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-marriage-laws-can-contribute-protecting-every-girls-right-education
11 Girls Not Brides, *Burkina Faso raises the legal age for marriage to 18 years old*, 2025, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/burkina-faso-raises-the-legal-age-for-marriage-to-18-years-old/
12 Plan International, *Colombia's child marriage ban comes into effect*, 2025, https://plan-international.org/news/2025/02/07/colombias-child-marriage-ban-comes-into-effect/
13 Plan International, *Bolivia bans child marriage in a historic victory for girls*, 2025, https://plan-international.org/news/2025/09/26/bolivia-bans-child-marriage-historic-victory-girls/
14 Freedom United, *Pakistan passes law banning child marriage sending a powerful global message*, 2025, https://www.freedomunited.org/news/pakistan-bans-child-marriage/
15 Institute of Global Politics, *Child Marriage Is a Human Rights Crisis — and Costs the World $175 Billion a Year. New Research Provides a Strategy to End It*, 2026, https://igp.sipa.columbia.edu/news/child-marriage-human-rights-crisis-and-costs-world-175-billion-year-new-research-provides
16 UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence- Innocenti, *What works to prevent child marriage?*, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/what-works-prevent-child-marriage



The boundaries shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations, and are for illustrative purposes only.

2025 KEY RESULTS ACROSS PROGRAMME COUNTRIES

7,326,903 adolescent girls
(aged 10-19) were empowered through life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions

9,757,683 adolescent girls
were supported to enrol in, return to, or remain in school

5,716,639 boys and men
actively participated in group education and dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms

14,158,728 individuals
(boys, girls, women and men) were engaged in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality

1,156,705 local actors
(traditional, religious, community) were mobilized by the Global Programme to advocate for an end to child marriage

2,252 women-led or youth-led CSOs
were supported financially by the Global Programme

2,013 women-led or youth-led CSOs
were convened by the Global Programme to support the ECM agenda (non-financial contribution)

5,507,860 boys and girls
in programme areas accessed prevention and protection services

3,320,789 adolescent girls
benefited from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes

436 partnerships
(formal and informal) were established to deliver adolescent- and gender-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services

2025 PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Despite a challenging year of funding cuts, Global Programme performance in the 12 implementing countries indicates that results have largely been maintained since the launch of Phase III (2024–2030), with some areas showing evidence of scale-up in 2025.

Providing intensive support to the most marginalized adolescent girls to prevent child marriage: In 2025, the Global Programme **empowered over 7.3 million vulnerable adolescent girls** (including already married and parenting adolescents) through life skills and comprehensive sexuality education interventions. While this was slightly below the 2024 level, mainly due to India's results, a number of countries increased their reach in 2025, notably Bangladesh, Niger, Sierra Leone and Uganda, despite declines in most programme countries. **Over 9.7 million vulnerable girls were also supported to enrol in, return to, or remain in school - a key strategy to effectively end child marriage.** Most countries exceeded their 2024 results for this indicator, signalling significant progress and the value of investing in this key child marriage prevention strategy.

Fostering a supportive family and community environment: In 2025, **over 14 million people participated in group education and community dialogues** on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, girls' rights and gender equality. These efforts helped challenge harmful norms, strengthen collective commitment to gender equality, and build community support to end child marriage. Successful approaches to engage households and communities include leveraging social protection schemes, using traditional festivals and other community gatherings, and supporting locally owned initiatives. Across most programme countries, there was also a growing and systematic emphasis on promoting male engagement and positive masculinities, with more than **5.7 million men and boys reached globally through dialogues aimed at challenging patriarchy and promoting gender equality.** Most programme countries exceeded their 2024 results, reflecting a growing focus on engaging boys and men as allies, as a key gender-transformative strategy. Several countries increased their engagement with influential local leaders to strengthen community commitment to ending child marriage. **Overall, more than 1.1 million local actors, including traditional, religious and community leaders, were mobilized to advocate for an end to child marriage.**

Enhancing the capacity of education, health, GBV prevention and response, social protection, and child protection systems to deliver gender-responsive services: In 2025, over **5.5 million boys and girls accessed prevention and protection services** - a significant scale up from 2024, driven largely by stronger-performing government systems in India and Ghana.

Addressing poverty drivers of child marriage: In 2025, over 3.3 million adolescent girls benefited from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes - **another consistently proven strategy to end child marriage.**

GLOBAL PROGRAMME THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Leading evidence-based advocacy: In 2025**,** the Global Programme continued to lead evidence-based advocacy to end child marriage at the global, continental, regional, and national levels. Global highlights include participation in the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), where the Global Programme convened a high-level side event titled "*Bridging the Gap: From Beijing to 2030 – Ending Child Marriage in All Forms*", co-organized with the Governments of Canada, the United Kingdom, Zambia, the Dominican Republic, and the Netherlands, alongside the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), Girls Not Brides (GNB), Girls First Fund (GFF), and Zonta International. At the continental level, the Global Programme was instrumental in ensuring ending child marriage was a key focus during the African Union (AU) *Fourth African Girls Summit* in Addis Ababa and was featured in its conclusions.

Leveraging partnerships: In 2025, the Global Programme leveraged strategic partnerships at global and regional levels to strengthen collective advocacy, reinforce movement-building, and expand the reach and impact of efforts to end child marriage including new collaborations with Girls Not Brides, Equality Now, the Child, Early, Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) and Sexuality Working Group and digital CSE partners.

Advancing gender-transformative approaches: In 2025, the Global Programme further strengthened its role as a thought leader in advancing gender-transformative approaches. At the global level, the Global Programme supported countries in implementing their GTA roadmaps while undertaking a stocktaking exercise across 17 countries that had participated in GTA accelerator tool workshops under both the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (JPFGM). The exercise found that GTA roadmaps are increasingly shaping annual workplans, Phase III design and national strategies, while programming is becoming more integrated and multi-dimensional, combining girls' agency, engagement of men and boys, family and community mobilization, service delivery, policy advocacy, and stronger systems rather than relying on siloed interventions.

The Global Programme, together with the JPFGM and Collective Impact, also contributed to the evidence base on gender-transformative approaches through the publication and dissemination of the academic article "*Moving*

beyond jargon: Operationalising gender-transformative approaches to end harmful practices against adolescents"[17].

In parallel, the Global Programme deepened partnerships with women-led and women's rights organizations and networks to address the gender inequality drivers of child marriage, collectively advocate for girls' rights, and advance strategies to respond to pushback against gender equality.

Promoting social and behaviour change (SBC): In 2025, the Global Programme deepened its social and behaviour change (SBC) work with faith leaders, including by finalizing a review of effective faith engagement strategies to end harmful practices, which identified 10 key challenges intensified by pushback against gender equality and child rights[18]. It also mapped resistance trends across 15 countries, showing how opposition is increasingly expressed through evasion tactics, misinformation in digital spaces, and cultural and religious narratives[19]. Building on this work, the Global Programme developed practical tools to help faith leaders engage congregations more effectively and advocate for stronger protection of girls. It also strengthened youth leadership through the establishment of a Global Youth Advisory to mobilize young people against child marriage and female genital mutilation, and finalized a Child Marriage Survey[20] to support programme monitoring and formative research, helping country offices better understand the social and behavioural drivers of child marriage and use this evidence to strengthen programme design.

Strengthening global research on ending child marriage: In 2025, the Global Programme, through the Strategic Technical Assistance for Research (STAR) Initiative to End Harmful Practices at UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti and the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK) in partnership with Girls Not Brides, further advanced the evidence base on child marriage and strengthened its role as a global leader in evidence generation, collective learning and technical support. With a strong focus on translating research into policy, programming and collective action, it produced flagship outputs including guidance on reducing child marriage through gender-responsive social protection and research on child marriage in humanitarian settings[21], fragile contexts and climate-affected environments. A key milestone was the advancement of a *Shared Global Research Agenda to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage*, developed collaboratively by UNICEF, UNFPA, Girls Not Brides through CRANK, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

MOBILIZING RESOURCES IN A CHANGING AID LANDSCAPE

With the global aid landscape becoming increasingly constrained in 2025, the Global Programme intensified its resource mobilization efforts to strengthen sustainability and scale. This went beyond donor engagement to include diversifying funding sources, making better use of existing resources, strengthening national capacities, and supporting a shift away from donor dependence towards more sustainable, innovative and domestic financing at global, regional and country levels. It worked with governments to strengthen commitment and ownership by encouraging greater prioritization of ending child marriage and related adolescent girls' needs in public budgets.

These efforts became increasingly visible across the programme, including through support for the development of investment cases and budget analysis documents. In 2025, UNICEF also supported the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in establishing a historic mandate on investment and budgeting for children. At the country level, several Global Programme countries made progress in allocating national resources to address child protection, gender-based violence and harmful practices, offering promising models that can inform similar efforts elsewhere. The Global Programme also elevated good practice and encouraged peer learning across countries. During the Global Programme's biennial meeting, for example, Malawi's successful experience in Financing for Children was shared to inspire other countries.

LOOKING AHEAD: Strategic Priorities for 2026 and Beyond

As the Global Programme approaches the midpoint of Phase III in 2026, **accelerating efforts to end child marriage by 2030 remains an urgent priority**, aligned with the

17 Luna M., Jose-Roberto; Rock, Amelia; Alem, Ellen; Mabirizi, Joseph; Ricker, Chelsea L.; Das, Madhumita; Akoro, Joseph Sewedo; and Kolundzija, Alana, '*Moving beyond jargon: Operationalising gender-transformative approaches to end harmful practices against adolescents*', Global Public Health, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1 August 2025, https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2025.2516707

18 UNICEF, *Review of Effective Faith Engagement Strategies for Addressing Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/documents/review-effective-faith-engagement-strategies-addressing-child-marriage-and-female-genital

19 UNICEF, *Countering Pushbacks to Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage: Synthesis Paper and Country Briefs*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/documents/countering-pushbacks-ending-female-genital-mutilation-and-child-marriage-synthesis-paper?auHash=9CwZg5y7aluluwy_q_sn9AaXSK8njJdoiyKWtGl3Ims

20 UNICEF, *Survey Questionnaire: Behavioural Drivers Related to Child Marriage*, 2025, https://www.sbcguidance.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/Social%20and%20Behavioral%20Factors%20Related%20to%20Child%20Marriage%20Programme%20Monitoring%20Questionnaire.pdf

21 UNICEF, *Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon: Barriers and facilitators to programming*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/delivering-interventions-address-child-marriage-humanitarian-settings-iraq-jordan-lebanon

new UNFPA[22] and UNICEF[23] strategic plans for 2026–2029. Despite this renewed ambition, a constrained 2026 funding landscape has led to more conservative country work-plans. Even so, the Global Programme remains focused on high-impact, evidence-based interventions, especially those that reach adolescent girls at scale through life skills education, comprehensive sexuality education, and stronger efforts to keep girls in secondary school, which continues to be seen as the most effective intervention.

To sustain impact in this context, the Global Programme will **build on its learning and partnerships to optimize existing systems at scale.** This includes expanding proven social protection plus and system-integration models, as seen in India, Ghana, Ethiopia and Niger, and strengthening government-led delivery of SRHR, GBV and child protection services for the most vulnerable girls. Results from countries such as Nepal and Ghana show that targeted system strengthening and strategic partnerships can improve both reach and quality, while supporting more sustainable, government-led programming.

At the global level, the Global Programme will **intensify advocacy in response to changing financial and geopolitical realities.** This includes reframing child marriage prevention as a matter not only of rights, but also of economic development, stability and security, and using investment cases, cost-benefit analysis and return-on-investment data to mobilize donors, governments, philanthropies and other partners. Priorities include increasing attention to girls in development and humanitarian budgets, continuing efforts to prioritize girls in government budgets and policies, and diversifying resource mobilization efforts.

Other priorities for 2026 include **strengthening legal and normative frameworks, deepening the use of evidence and data, investing in digital innovation and online safeguarding**, supporting girl-, youth-, women- and survivor-led movements, building coalitions with influential leaders, and continuing reform of the Results Framework to better measure outcome-level change for girls and communities.



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22 UNFPA, *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2026-2029*, 2025, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/main-document/UNFPA%20Strategic%20Plan%202026-2029%20-%20FINAL%20-%2014Jul25.pdf
23 UNICEF, *Strategic Plan 2026-2029*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/documents/unicef-strategic-plan-2026-2029-srs-2025

1 The global situation



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1.1 CHILD MARRIAGE TRENDS

Child marriage is a human rights violation. Rooted in gender inequality and harmful gender norms, the practice disproportionately affects girls compared to boys. Each year, 12 million girls are married before they turn 18—about one girl every three seconds. Child marriage disrupts education, increases the risk of early pregnancy and violence, and limits girls' future opportunities[24]. Child marriage also has severe cost implications for countries, with the costs from maternal deaths, health declines and lost earnings amounting to up to US$175 billion per year[25].

Globally, child marriage has declined over recent decades. Today, 18 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before age 18, down from 22 per cent[26] a decade ago. Worldwide, 68 million child marriages have been averted in the last 25 years[27]. Because poverty, lack of education and limited livelihood opportunities are the main drivers of child marriage across all regions[28], progress has been fuelled by gains in poverty reduction, girls' education and women's participation in labour markets.

At the same time, this progress remains uneven and fragile. Humanitarian crises, conflict, displacement, economic insecurity, digital harms, increasing pushback against human rights and gender equality, and shrinking development financing are reshaping the context in which child marriage occurs. Without sustained political commitment and investment, gains can stall or reverse.

Since its inception in 2016, the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (hereafter, "the Global Programme"), now in its third phase of implementation (2024–2030), has contributed to strong progress. Working in partnership with governments, civil society organizations and community actors, including traditional and faith-based leaders, women- and youth-led organizations, parents, and adolescents, especially girls, the Global Programme has enabled millions of girls across 12 high prevalence and high burden countries and beyond to shape their futures free from the harmful effects of child marriage. This has been achieved by equipping girls with education and life skills; providing health (including sexual and reproductive health), legal, and economic support; creating protective environments; and transforming the unequal gender norms at the root of the practice.

Despite these global advances, child marriage remains a challenge, with an estimated 650 million girls and women alive today married before the age of 18.[29] Although child marriage mostly occurs in developing countries, the practice exists in every region of the world, including in countries such as the United States of America, challenging the perception that it is limited to low- and middle-income countries. While some countries and regions have made progress towards ending child marriage, others have seen little change, and in certain hotspots the practice has even increased. Figure 1 shows the distribution of child brides across the regions most affected by the practice, highlighting how child marriage is unevenly concentrated around the world:

- Nearly half of all child brides (45 per cent) live in South Asia, with India alone accounting for one third of the world's child brides. Despite carrying the highest burden, it is also the region where progress has been most significant: the prevalence of child marriage fell from 39 per cent to 26 per cent over the past decade.

- The next largest share of child brides lives in Sub-Saharan Africa (20 per cent), a region of growing concern: While some progress is evident - with prevalence declining from 38 per cent to 31 per cent over the past decade - it is now the region with the highest prevalence of child marriage worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africa will therefore account for a growing share of the world's child brides, as well as a steadily increasing absolute number, due to relatively slow progress and rapid population growth in the region, and in particular in poor quintiles.

- In Latin America and the Caribbean, where 9 per cent of the world's child brides reside, 1 in 5 girls marry in childhood — most often through informal unions. Child marriage in the region have shown no decline, remaining stagnant for several decades. By 2030, the region is expected to have the second-highest prevalence of child marriage, after Sub-Saharan Africa.

- In the Middle East and North Africa, where 1 in 6 young women are married before the age of 18, some progress has been made, with most countries experiencing a decline in prevalence over the past 25 years. The region stands out for achieving reductions in child marriage across both rich and poor populations, more equitably than other parts of the world. However, these gains are increasingly at risk in humanitarian and conflict-affected settings, where fragility, displacement and economic

24 UNICEF, *Child Marriage*, https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/
25 Center for Global Development, *An Economic View on Investment to End Child Marriage*, 2026, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/economic-view-investment-end-child-marriage
26 Source of prevalence data in this report: UNICEF global databases, 2026
27 UNICEF, *Is an End to Child Marriage Within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects*: May 2023 update, https://data.unicef.org/resources/is-an-end-to-child-marriage-within-reach//
28 UNICEF, *Towards Ending Child Marriage*, 2021, https://data.unicef.org/resources/towards-ending-child-marriage/
29 The Child Marriage Portal, *Global Trends and SDG Progress* https://childmarriagedata.org/global-trends/

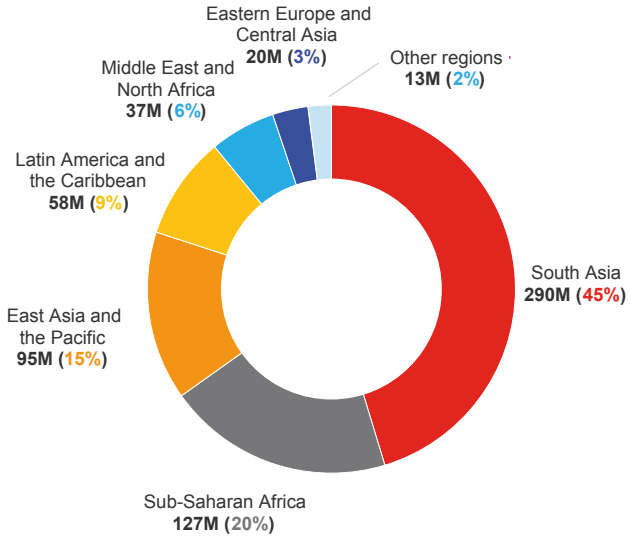
insecurity heighten vulnerability to child marriage. Recent data underscores the strong link between humanitarian crisis and child marriage: in Lebanon, 58 per cent of women aged 20–24 living in settlements of displaced Syrians were married before age 18, compared with 15 per cent of women aged 20–24 in Beirut (MICS 2023)[30]—a rate nearly four times higher than in the capital. Similarly, in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory, reports[31] [32] suggest a rise in child marriage amid ongoing conflict, as displacement, poverty and the erosion of social, legal, health and protection systems heighten insecurity and pressure on families, increasing the risk of child marriage for girls. However, comprehensive and verified data are not yet available. Together, these trends demonstrate the critical intersection between child marriage and humanitarian crises in the region.

- Levels of child marriage in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as in East Asia and the Pacific, remain low but stagnant, with girls from marginalized groups still at risk[33]. Recently released data has shown that one in 13 young women in East Asia and the Pacific were first married or in union before their 18th birthday. The region is home to 93 million child brides, accounting for 14 per cent of the global total[34].

Against this broader global backdrop broader trends, evidence shows that India, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia are among those driving the global decline in child marriage. For instance, while child marriage remains prevalent in Bangladesh, the rate has nearly halved since 1970, when over 90 per cent of young women were married before the age of 18. Newly released data shows that the prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh is now 47 per cent (MICS 2025), down from 51 per cent in 2022 (DHS 2022).

Other Global Programme countries are also experiencing progress; the latest data from Zambia (DHS 2024) indicate a continued long-term decline in prevalence, now standing at 24 per cent - down from 29 per cent in 2018. In Nepal, the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (NMICS) 2024–25, released in February 2026[35], also shows a sharp decline in the practice over just three years, with the prevalence now at 28 per cent, down from 35 per cent in 2022[36]. At the same time, these national gains can mask persistent subnational hotspots that require targeted attention.

Figure 1: Global distribution of girls and women first married or in union before age 18, by region



Note: Values do not sum to total due to rounding.
Source: United Nations Children's Fund, Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 edition, UNICEF, New York, 2023

30 Central Administration of Statistics and UNICEF, *Sub-National Lebanon Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2023: Statistical Snapshots, Beirut, Lebanon: CAS and UNICEF*, December 2025, https://mics.unicef.org/sites/mics/files/2025-12/Lebanon%20%28Subnational%29%20MICS%202023%20Statistical%20Snapshots_0.pdf
31 UNFPA, *Surge in Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy Threatens a Generation of Girls in Gaza*, 2026, https://palestine.unfpa.org/en/news/surge-child-marriage-and-adolescent-pregnancy-threatens-generation-girls-gaza
32 UNFPA, *Child marriages surge in Gaza as war tightens grip on girls' futures*, 2026, https://www.unfpa.org/news/child-marriages-surge-gaza-war-tightens-grip-girls%E2%80%99-futures
33 See 27
34 UNICEF, *A Profile of Child Marriage in East Asia and the Pacific*, 2025, https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-profile-east-asia-pacific/
35 Note: Due to the timing of the release, the latest Nepal MICS findings have not yet undergone the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) country consultation process, and will be reviewed and validated in the next consultation in late 2026.
36 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2022

DIGITAL SPACES AND CHILD MARRIAGE: EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Digital technologies can support efforts to prevent child marriage by expanding adolescents' access to information, awareness and support. Digital platforms can also provide spaces where adolescents access education, peer networks and information that may help them challenge harmful practices.

At the same time, access to this information remains highly uneven. In many contexts, particularly in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the highest prevalence of child marriage, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, including limited access to technology, connectivity and digital skills. These barriers restrict girls' ability to benefit from digital information and learning opportunities and limit the potential of digital tools to support child marriage prevention efforts.

Where access does exist, however, digital spaces are increasingly shaping how relationships form and develop. A 2020 joint UNFPA APRO–UNICEF ROSA study on child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia[37] , which covered 1,400 adolescents in earthquake-affected districts of Nepal, found that about one-third of those who married as children had first connected with their spouses through social media—the most common way of meeting. It also found that adolescents who met online tended to marry younger than those in arranged unions. Similarly, a 2025 study by Plan International[38] found that girls in Asia and Latin America consistently reported meeting future husbands online through social media platforms. While these interactions may appear to increase young people's agency in choosing partners, they can also expose girls to manipulation, coercion and unequal power dynamics. Older men on social media may exploit emotional or economic vulnerabilities and present marriage as a pathway out of hardship.

Digital platforms are creating new vulnerabilities, including online grooming, harassment and exploitation. *"I have heard and seen disturbing things in my community that happened because of social media,"* a 22-year-old Syrian man told UNFPA[39]. *"The girl gets to know a young man and, after gaining her trust, [she] sends him ordinary or unusual pictures of her, and he exposes her... it is possible that the girl will be killed by her family under the pretext of preserving honour, or in the best case scenario, they will marry her off as a minor."*

These dynamics illustrate how digital technologies can both expand opportunities for prevention and introduce new risks. As digital spaces become increasingly central to adolescents' social lives, efforts to end child marriage must address both sides of this reality: closing the digital divide that limits girls' access to information while also strengthening digital literacy, online safety and protection.



37 UNFPA in Asia and the Pacific, *Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia*, 2020, https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/child-marriage-humanitarian-settings-south-asia
38 Plan International, *The State of the World's Girls 2025: Let Me Be a Girl, Not A Wife*, 2025, https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-experiences-child-marriage/
39 UNFPA, *From DMs to I dos: Five ways social media is reshaping child marriage*, 2026, https://www.unfpa.org/news/dms-i-dos-five-ways-social-media-reshaping-child-marriage

1.2 GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF THE REGULATORY LANDSCAPE ON CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage is addressed in a number of international conventions and agreements:

- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** covers the right to protection from child marriage in article 16, which states: "*The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage...*"

- The right to '*free and full*' consent to marriage is recognized in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which says that consent cannot be 'free and full' when one of the parties involved is not sufficiently mature to make an informed decision about a life partner.

- Although marriage is not mentioned directly in the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, child marriage is linked to other rights – such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to protection from all forms of abuse, and the right to be protected from harmful traditional practices. Article 24(3) of the CRC requires that '*States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children*.' Although the CRC does not explicitly mention child marriage, this provision has been interpreted as applying to it because child marriage is a harmful practice that undermines children's health, education and development.

- In practice, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other human rights bodies have frequently used Article 24(3) to call on states to eliminate child marriage as part of their obligation to abolish harmful practices that are detrimental to children's health and well-being. In their joint general comment/recommendation on harmful practices[40], the CRC and CEDAW committees state: "*While the nature and prevalence of the practices vary by region and culture, the most prevalent and well documented are female genital mutilation, child and/or forced marriage, polygamy, crimes committed in the name of so-called honour and dowry-related violence.*"

- Other international agreements related to child marriage are:
  - **The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages**,
  - **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and**
  - **The Protocol[41] to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa**.

Another key normative instrument shaping the global landscape on child marriage is the **UN General Assembly resolution on child, early and forced marriage (CEFM)**. Since 2014, Canada and Zambia have jointly led this biennial resolution. Most recently, the sixth resolution on CEFM, formally adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2024, secured 123 co-sponsors and marked the tenth anniversary of Canada and Zambia's joint leadership. The resolution calls on States to enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies to prevent, address and end child, early and forced marriage. It includes measures to enable women and girls to leave marriage without undue financial or administrative burden, to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the informed, free and full consent of the intending spouses, and to recognize child, early and forced marriage as a harmful practice that violates, abuses or impairs human rights.

Similarly, the **UN Human Rights Council's sixth resolution on CEFM**, adopted in July 2023, constitutes a key normative instrument in advancing the comprehension and implementation of human rights principles to prevent and respond to this harmful practice. The Global Programme contributed to shaping both the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council resolutions through consultations and technical support during negotiations, particularly on definitions, terminology and data.

According to a 2025 UNESCO report, 18 per cent of all countries still allow marriage before the age of 18 for girls, while only 26 per cent have set the legal age at 18 without exceptions[42]. The remaining 54 per cent permit marriage at 18 but allow exceptions below that age, usually with parental or judicial consent. In some cases, the law specifies the absolute minimum age for such exceptions; in others, no such minimum age is established. Regionally, Latin America and the Caribbean has the fewest countries permitting marriage under 18 without exceptions[43]. In 2025, several countries advanced significant legal and policy reforms to strengthen protections against child marriage.

40 Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices (2019 Rev 1)
41 Also known as the Maputo Protocol of 2003, it states in Article 6(a) that no marriage shall take place without the free and full consent of both parties, and in Article 6(b) that the minimum age of marriage for women shall be 18 years.
42 UNESCO, *How marriage laws can contribute to protecting every girl's right to education*, 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-marriage-laws-can-contribute-protecting-every-girls-right-education
43 UNESCO, *Key data on girls and women's right to education*, 2023, updated 6 November 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/key-data-girls-and-womens-right-education

These developments reflect growing global momentum to align national legislation with international standards that set 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage.

- In **Colombia**, a landmark reform fully came into effect in February 2025, establishing 18 as the minimum age for marriage without exceptions[44]. The reform followed a Constitutional Court ruling that abolished earlier provisions allowing minors as young as 14 to marry with parental consent. The decision closed longstanding legal loopholes and aligned the country's legislation with international child protection standards.

- In **Pakistan**, progress was made at the subnational level. In May 2025, the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act was enacted, setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys and criminalizing underage marriage.[45] The law introduces strict penalties for those involved in facilitating or coercing child marriage, including prison sentences and fines, and classifies sexual relations within a marriage involving a minor as statutory rape. Although the law currently applies only to the federal capital, it represents an important legislative step that could influence reforms in other parts of the country.

- In **Bolivia**, a historic reform was enacted in September 2025 with the adoption of Law No. 1639, which bans child marriage and early unions without exceptions[46]. The law amended the previous Family Code (Law No. 603) by eliminating provisions that had allowed adolescents aged 16 and 17 to marry with parental or judicial authorization. The reform marked a significant advance in protecting the rights of girls and adolescents and reinforced efforts to prevent early and forced unions.

- Similarly, in **Burkina Faso**, reforms to the Personal and Family Code were adopted in September 2025, harmonizing the legal age of marriage at 18 for both girls and boys[47]. Previously, the minimum legal age was 17 for girls and 20 for boys, with judicial exceptions permitting marriage at younger ages. The new bill represents a key step toward strengthening legal protection against child marriage, although questions remain regarding whether judicial exceptions could still be granted in certain circumstances.

These reforms illustrate the continued importance of legislative change as part of broader national and global efforts to end child marriage. By removing legal exceptions and strengthening enforcement mechanisms, such measures contribute to creating more protective legal environments for girls and adolescents.

It is worth noting that while setting the minimum legal age of marriage at 18 represents critical progress, evidence and international experience shows that this alone is insufficient to end child marriage—not only because laws are sometimes not enforced, but because a comprehensive approach is needed. Legal reforms require a nuanced and holistic approach to prevent unintended consequences, particularly on the interrelated ages of consent to sexual relationships and to access health services.

Ending the harmful practice requires civil, administrative, and protective measures that take into consideration local realities; harmonizing personal, civil, customary, and religious laws; ensuring birth and marriage registration; strengthening enforcement and accountability; and ensuring that at-risk and married girls have access to social, legal, and protection services. Without these complementary measures, legal bans risk remaining symbolic, driving the practice underground, or exposing girls to further harm.

44 Plan International, *Colombia's child marriage ban comes into effect*, 2025, https://plan-international.org/news/2025/02/07/colombias-child-marriage-ban-comes-into-effect/
45 Freedom United, *Pakistan passes law banning child marriage sending a powerful global message*, 2025, https://www.freedomunited.org/news/pakistan-bans-child-marriage/
46 Plan International, *Bolivia bans child marriage in a historic victory for girls*, 2025, https://plan-international.org/news/2025/09/26/bolivia-bans-child-marriage-historic-victory-girls/
47 Girls Not Brides, *Burkina Faso raises the legal age for marriage to 18 years old*, 2025, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/burkina-faso-raises-the-legal-age-for-marriage-to-18-years-old/

1.3 GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE BY 2030

Despite policy reforms and declines in the prevalence of child marriage at the global, regional and country levels, the current pace of progress remains too slow to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3, which calls for the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, by 2030. At current rates, more than 9 million girls are projected to marry in 2030 unless efforts accelerate significantly, particularly in high-burden countries.

In addition, the hard-won gains of the last 25 years are now under increasing threat. In 2025, efforts to end child marriage came under unprecedented strain due to dramatic shifts in the foreign aid landscape, the rise of movements opposing established human rights standards, escalating humanitarian crises, and shrinking fiscal space for governments in lower-income countries.

1. The collapsing foreign aid landscape

Since 2019, there has been a steady decline in targeted funding to end child marriage[48]. However, in the first half of 2025, international development and humanitarian assistance underwent a dramatic and widespread contraction[49], with significant cuts announced by several of the world's largest donor governments. Alongside this, the world is experiencing a wave of challenges to human rights, characterized by increasing isolationist policies, a resurgence of conservative agendas, the consolidation of autocratic governance, and politics that prioritize inward-looking approaches over international cooperation. Key donors have channeled their resources away from development aid[50] and towards military defence, stricter immigration, and economic challenges closer to home[51]. The OECD estimated that aid would drop by another 9 per cent to 17 per cent in 2025[52], on top of a 9 per cent drop in 2024[53]. These actions are reshaping the development ecosystem in real time, not only impacting funding for programmes which directly target an end child marriage[54], but also he overall momentum on ending harmful practices and violence against women and girls, and the work of grassroots and women-led organizations to respond to issues at the community level. In April 2025, UN Women estimated that 90 per cent of the women-led organizations that they surveyed were impacted by 2025 funding cuts, and almost half of them expected to shut down within 6 months if the current conditions persisted[55].

In 2024, the Global Programme reached 16 million girls with empowerment initiatives. However, in 2025, funding cuts reduced the target to 12 million girls, with immediate and devastating impacts on efforts to end child marriage. For example:

- In **Ethiopia**, UNICEF partnerships funded by the Global Programme have been reduced in Gambella and Somali regions. Some civil society organizations, like the Center for Development Expertise and the Ethiopia Muslim Relief Agency, have had to close their operations in specific areas. Community-focused interventions aimed at shifting social norms had to be reduced. The innovative interactive voice response system which provided support to victims and information to girls at risk, had to be discontinued. As a result, more girls dropped out of school, jeopardizing their future.

- In **Yemen**, the dismantling of long-standing UNFPA-supported protection and support networks has severely impacted the ability of women's rights defenders and humanitarian organizations to operate. Girls have lost access to critical services like safe spaces, legal aid, and psychosocial support, leaving them significantly more vulnerable. There are now fewer channels to protect at-risk girls and fewer resources to help survivors of gender-based violence, ultimately reversing progress on their rights and safety.

The Global Programme faces an increased need to diversify funding sources, maximize existing resources, strengthen national capacities, and support the transition from donor funding to sustainable domestic financing to successfully navigate this challenging period.

48 GNB and GFF unpublished report, and UNICEF analysis of Global Programme funding.
49 UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, Girls Not Brides, and Girls First Fund, *Protecting Progress: The Global Impact of Funding Cuts on Ending Child Marriage Advocacy brief*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/media/176031/file/ECM%20Advocacy%20Brief_5%20Nov%202025.pdf.pdf
50 Donor Tracker. *The Budget Cuts* Tracker, 2025, https://donortracker.org/publications/budget-cuts-tracker#tracking-oda-budget-cutsl
51 Whipkey, Katie M.; Spogmay Ahmed; and Lyric Thompson, *'Defining Feminist Foreign Policy 2025', with Jillian Montilla, Beth Woroniuk, Lorena Torres Peña and Mabel Bianco, Defining Feminist Foreign Policy, Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative*, 21 October 2025, https://www.ffpcollaborative.org/dffp-2025
52 These numbers are projections based on announced budget cuts by donor countries. Official numbers will be available later in 2026.
53 OECD, *Cuts in official development assistance*, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_8c530629-en/full-report.html
54 GNB and GFF unpublished report, UNFPA internal analysis, and UNICEF analysis of declining funding for the Global Programme which indicated that in 2024, against a fundraising target of US$37.4 million, the Global Programme received US$21.1 million from its donors (56 per cent of what was planned)
55 UN Women, *At a breaking point: The impact of foreign aid cuts on women's organizations in humanitarian crises worldwide*, 2025. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digitallibrary/publications/2025/05/at-a-breaking-point-the-impact-of-foreign-aid-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-crises-worldwide

2. Shrinking fiscal space

Governments in lower-income countries are grappling with shrinking fiscal space and global geopolitical volatility which includes imposition of new tariffs and a new social and economic contract for the international community. A recent report by the ONE Data initiative found that many low- and middle-income countries, especially in Africa, are now sending more money back in debt repayments than they are receiving in fresh loans[56]. Together with lower-than-required economic growth, this means that governments in poorer countries have less money to spend on social programmes or are running fiscal deficits—or both. Debt servicing is a higher percentage of overall government expenditure than health or education, resulting in weakened public services, overstretched systems, and growing vulnerability among girls.

Given the current context of declining external aid and shrinking fiscal space, there is a need to strengthen the Global Programme's intentionality in leveraging large-scale sectoral platforms, including health, education, and social protection, to advance the adolescent girls agenda, building on successful interventions and results already demonstrated in several programme countries.

3. The global pushback against human rights and gender equality

In 2025, the rising global pushback against human rights and gender equality, along with deeply entrenched harmful social norms in implementing countries, continued to impact Global Programme activities:

- In **Yemen**, extreme socio-cultural sensitivities and resistance required the programme to substantially adapt its messaging and approaches to maintain access to communities and girls at risk of child marriage. In areas under de facto authority (DFA) control in the north, heightened scrutiny of programme content and sensitivities around gender equality, GBV and child marriage limited the ability of humanitarian and development actors to initiate or expand related interventions, often requiring adjustments in terminology and programme framing.

- In **Nepal**, harmful norms are often upheld by families, community leaders, and even institutions responsible for child protection, limiting community buy-in, weakening institutional responses, and slowing progress towards ending child marriage.

- In **Sierra Leone,** persistent harmful social norms and traditional and religious beliefs continue to hinder the adoption and implementation of laws and policies that promote the empowerment of girls and young women.

- In **Bangladesh**, in the lead-up to national elections at the end of 2025, public debate increasingly reflected more conservative perspectives on gender roles and women's participation in leadership, highlighting broader pushback against gender equality. This contributed to growing resistance to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming. Field-level implementers reported increased sensitivity around curriculum content related to SRHR and gender norms, requiring more cautious and context-specific approaches to community engagement.

- In **Uganda**, resistance from some cultural and religious leaders to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), SRHR and gender equality, particularly in remote and hard-to-reach districts, continued to slow progress in norms-change interventions. Addressing these challenges required increased investment in engagement, coordination and dialogue with district authorities and community leaders.

Beyond programme countries, similar pushback has continued in other contexts, where debates and policy shifts affecting gender equality, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), reproductive rights, and sexuality education have had implications both domestically and for international assistance. This has contributed to a more challenging operating environment for efforts to advance girls' rights and end child marriage.

4. Humanitarian crises

In 2025, humanitarian crises, whether driven by natural disasters, climate shocks or conflict, continued to increase worldwide. In these contexts, the drivers of child marriage are often intensified[57], as displacement, poverty, disrupted education and weakened protection systems heighten the vulnerability of adolescent girls and increase the likelihood of child marriage. Yet, despite the heightened risks, efforts to prevent child marriage are often deprioritized in humanitarian responses. In a context of shrinking resources and competing emergency needs, programmes addressing child marriage frequently receive limited attention and funding, leaving girls in crisis settings particularly exposed to the harmful practice.

56 Goko, Colleen, *'African nations now send more money to China than they receive in new loans'*, Reuters, 27 January 2026, https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/african-nations-now-send-more-money-china-than-they-receive-new-loans-2026-01-27/

57 Girls Not Brides, *Child marriage in conflict- and crisis- affected settings: Evidence and practice*, 2024, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/childmarriage-conflict-crisis-affected-settings-evidence-practice/

Here are a few examples of humanitarian crises that affected Global Programme interventions in 2025:

- **Bangladesh** continued to host one of the world's largest protracted refugee situations. By the end of 2025, more than 1.17 million Rohingya refugees lived in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char, with women and girls comprising 51 per cent of the population. Escalating conflict in Myanmar forced over 150,000 additional arrivals during the year. Mid-2025 humanitarian funding cuts led to the closure or scale-down of learning centres and essential services, weakening protective factors against child marriage. A 2025 study found child marriage prevalence among Rohingya adolescents had risen to 28 per cent—nearly three times higher than in 2017—signalling an acute protection crisis[58]. Climate shocks compounded risks: record heatwaves, cyclones, floods and dengue outbreaks disrupted schooling for an estimated 35 million children, increasing reliance on negative coping strategies including child marriage, particularly in climate-vulnerable and urban informal settings.

- **In Burkina Faso,** persistent insecurity and recurrent attacks have displaced more than two million people, mostly women and children. The collapse of social services and weakened protection systems have heightened risks of child marriage, sexual exploitation and unsafe mobility for girls, while limited access to sexual and reproductive health services contributes to early pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Climate shocks, including extreme heat, power outages and water and food shortages, have further strained communities and increased risks of gender-based violence. Insecurity also restricted programme access, limited mobility of teams and disrupted monitoring, requiring partners to suspend or relocate some activities and rely more heavily on remote data collection.

- **Uganda** faced multiple humanitarian pressures in 2025, including outbreaks of Mpox and Ebola Viral Disease, refugee influxes from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan, and climate-related disasters such as flooding and mudslides. These crises disrupted programme delivery and increased vulnerabilities for adolescent girls. Water shortages in Nakivale and other refugee settlements forced girls to travel longer distances to collect water, increasing protection risks. Reductions in humanitarian funding weakened health, education and protection services, leaving fewer frontline workers supporting adolescent girls.

- **In Ethiopia,** conflict and instability in regions such as Amhara, Gambella and Oromia restricted mobility, monitoring and programme implementation, sometimes interrupting interventions and weakening protective systems such as schooling. Climate-induced shocks, including droughts and floods in Somali and other regions, as well as poverty and economic pressures further exacerbated vulnerabilities by reinforcing norms that make child marriage acceptable as a coping mechanism. The Global Programme integrated child marriage prevention into humanitarian responses while promoting peacebuilding, social cohesion and faith-based engagement to support dialogue and conflict-sensitive approaches.

- **In Yemen**, the Global Programme operated in a highly complex humanitarian context shaped by conflict, economic collapse, displacement and climate shocks that has intensified vulnerabilities for adolescent girls. Yemen continues to face high climate vulnerability, with its ranking on the ND-GAIN Index[59] indicating relatively low levels of resilience and adaptive capacity. Floods, droughts and storms continued to displace communities and damage schools and health facilities, while access restrictions and administrative barriers, particularly in northern governorates, along with volatile security conditions and periodic humanitarian pauses limited geographic reach, and constrained partner operations and community engagement.

58 Zimmerman, L. A.; Elnakib, S.; Ali, A.; Akter, R.; Hossain, T.; Traill, T.; Mieth, K.; Hasan, T.; Hasan, T.; and Robinson, W. C., *'Family formation among adolescent Rohingya refugees; trajectories into adolescent marriage and childbearing in Cox's Bazar Bangladesh'*, Conflict and Health, Vol. 19, Article 41, 11 July 2025, https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-025-00683-z

59 The ND-GAIN Index (Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Country Index) measures countries' vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with their readiness to improve resilience through adaptation. It is widely used to compare countries' exposure to climate-related risks and their capacity to respond.

1.4 THE COST OF INACTION

Progress to end child marriage must be sustained and accelerated to meet SDG Target 5.3 by 2030, ensuring that the hard-won gains made in ending child marriage over past decades are not reversed. The cost of inaction on child marriage is too high: analysis from the recently published report *"Accelerating Efforts to End Child Marriage"* by the Institute of Global Politics (IGP) Women's Initiative at Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)[60] estimated **global losses of up to US$175 billion annually, or nearly US$2.5 trillion by 2040**, from lost productivity and increased health risks linked to child marriage:

- Marriage in childhood is associated with substantially greater mortality risk than that experienced by young unmarried mothers or by women who marry in adulthood.
- According to the Center for Global Development, child marriage contributes to an estimated 100,000–190,000 deaths of children under five each year after controlling for other factors, generating global economic costs of up to US$123 billion annually.
- Up to 14,000 maternal deaths each year are linked to child marriage, carrying economic costs estimated at up to US$6 billion annually, in addition to the wider consequences of increased intimate partner violence and miscarriage among girls married in childhood.

The report also highlighted the critical role of the Global Programme, drawing on its data and evidence to show what works to address child marriage[61]. Sustained investments are essential to ensure girls stay in school, have choices about their futures, and are protected from child marriage.



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60 Institute of Global Politics, *Child Marriage Is a Human Rights Crisis — and Costs the World $175 Billion a Year. New Research Provides a Strategy to End It*, 2026, https://igp.sipa.columbia.edu/news/child-marriage-human-rights-crisis-and-costs-world-175-billion-year-new-research-provides

61 UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence- Innocenti, *What works to prevent child marriage?*, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/what-works-prevent-child-marriage

2 Global Programme highlights and thought leadership



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In light of the challenges outlined in the previous chapter, the Global Programme, together with donors, implementing countries, partners, allies, and advocates, has maintained a firm commitment and taken decisive steps to protect girls' rights and futures. 2025 was a year in which the Global Programme needed to rise to the challenge, increase its visibility, and amplify its voice.

The growing evidence base on effective approaches to ending child marriage, which has expanded substantially over the past decade, provides an important guide. This chapter presents the Global Programme's achievements and thought leadership at the global and regional levels.

2.1 LEADING EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

Evidence-based advocacy aimed at engaging the support and commitment of governments to end child marriage is a key Global Programme strategy and pivotal for accelerating action at country level. For example, in 2025, coordinated advocacy by the Global Programme helped to spotlight child-rights protections within ongoing legal reforms in Nepal. Joint UNICEF–UNFPA efforts, supported by regional and headquarters offices, established a unified position, backed by robust legal analysis and targeted engagement with parliamentarians, ministries, and justice actors. As a result, key child-rights concerns and technical recommendations were incorporated into the draft Penal Code amendment. While the revised amendment is currently on hold following the change in government, the Global Programme helped position it to move forward once parliamentary processes resume.

In addition, the Global Programme led and coordinated several high-level advocacy initiatives at the global, continental and regional levels, which included leveraging key international days and moments. These advocacy moments provided an opportunity to influence the ending child marriage agenda, and raise public awareness by engaging influential public figures and policy makers and fostering learning and knowledge exchange.

Additionally, these advocacy events provided a key opportunity to showcase the programme's impact and highlight the significance of the partnership on a global scale.

2.1.1 The influential role of the Global Programme

In 2025, the Global Programme, led several high-level global and continental convenings and advocacy initiatives (including the publication of advocacy material):

- **69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69):** On 11 March 2025, on the margins of CSW69, the Global Programme convened a high-level side event titled *"Bridging the Gap: From Beijing to 2030 – Ending Child Marriage in All Forms"* at the UNICEF Headquarters in New York. Co-organized with the Governments of Canada, the United Kingdom, Zambia, the Dominican Republic, and the Netherlands, alongside the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), Girls Not Brides (GNB), Girls First Fund (GFF), and Zonta International, the event brought together heads of delegations, development partners, United Nations agencies and civil society. The discussions reviewed progress, challenges, and lessons learned since the Beijing Declaration, renewed political commitment to eliminating child, early, and forced marriage by 2030 in line with SDG 5.3, and fostered multi-stakeholder partnerships to strengthen collaboration, innovation, and accountability. Central to the event was the meaningful participation of survivors, with reflections led by Princess Mabel and powerful



testimonies from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nepal, underscoring the importance of survivor leadership in driving advocacy, accountability, and collective action to end child, early, and forced marriage.

- **UN observer paper on the role of justice systems in protecting girls from child marriage:** In preparation for the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), which will be commemorated under the theme of Women's Access to Justice, UNICEF submitted an observer paper on '*The Role of Justice Systems in Protecting Girls from Child Marriage*'[62]. The paper informed discussions at an expert group meeting held from 8–10 September 2025 on ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and addressing structural barriers. The paper also contributed to the United Nations Secretary-General's report for CSW70.

- **A revised Child Marriage Chapter in the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) global case management tool:** The Global Programme collaborated with the Gender Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) team, working with local women's organizations, child protection (CP) and GBV caseworkers, and global partners, to revise the GBV case management tool, by integrating an updated chapter on child marriage[63]. Launched on 9 October 2025, the revised case management tool fills a critical gap by providing clear guidance on how to support girls affected by child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), including those who are married, at risk, separated, divorced or widowed, through GBV case management services. As a result, the scope of the guidance now goes beyond girls at risk or currently married to encompass the full range of experiences of girls affected by CEFM. This collaboration is a strong example of working across the Humanitarian-Development continuum. It recognizes child marriage as a challenge that spans both contexts and ensures that tools remain relevant and applicable across diverse settings.

- **Global Virtual Webinar on Child Marriage Laws: Progress, Challenges and Pathway forward:** On 9 October 2025, the Global Programme organized a global webinar in collaboration with Stellenbosch University Faculty of Law and Equality Now to examine progress and gaps in child marriage laws, chart the way forward, and take a deep dive into how strong legislation can effectively support the prevention of and response to child marriage. The webinar provided an overview of child marriage laws and their importance, drawing on experiences and insights from India, Nepal and Sierra Leone. The discussions also brought together perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders beyond Global Programme partners, highlighting practices that could help strengthen the effectiveness of laws in preventing and responding to child marriage.

- **International Day of the Girl (IDG):** On 11 October 2025, UNICEF, the Global Programme, the Organization of African First Ladies for Development (OAFLAD) and UNAIDS organized a virtual dialogue between First Ladies and adolescent girls during the IDG 2025 commemoration. The key objective was to reinforce the commitments of First Ladies in advancing initiatives on girls' empowerment and an end to child marriage. The platform facilitated conversation with adolescent girls sharing their aspirations and offering innovative ideas on creating a supportive and enabling environment that enables them to thrive and realize their potential within their respective countries in Africa. More importantly, the girls sought commitments from influential First Ladies on ending child marriage. The high-level event mobilized the first ladies of Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Gabon, including the Ambassador from the African Union Commission (AUC). This interaction resulted in a call to action from the adolescent girls, asking decision makers to take bold steps towards ending child marriage.

- **Influencing the child marriage agenda during G20-South Africa Presidency:** In 2025, the Global Programme remained active throughout the G20 meetings and engagements, including through active participation in the G20 Empowerment of Women Working Group. This participation also helped ensure that gender equality and the need to address harmful social norms were reflected in the Ministerial Statement adopted at the conclusion of the G20 Ministerial Meeting on Women's Empowerment on 31 October 2025. During the Ministerial Meeting, UNICEF participated as a panellist under Track B, Education for Change, and anchored the pledges and commitments made at the Bogotá Ministerial Conference to End Violence Against Children, including ending child marriage, as an important mechanism for holding governments accountable. As a result, the Ministers urged all partners to collaborate in advancing gender equality and implementing strategies to build a future where women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities, Indigenous

62 UNICEF, *The role of laws and justice systems in protecting girls from child marriage CSW70 Expert Group Meeting Observer Paper*, 2025, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/csw-70-expert-group-meeting-observer-paper-unicef-en.pdf

63 GBVIMS, *New Resource: Updated Child Marriage Chapter & Module 16 Tools*, 2025, https://www.gbvims.com/new-resource-updated-child-marriage-chapter-module-16-tools/

women, and women from local communities, can thrive equally, equitably, and fully.

- **Development of technical guidance on applying a human-rights based approach to ending child marriage:** Through expert papers and technical consultations at the regional and global levels, the Global Programme has contributed to the development of technical guidance to member states by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), submitted ahead of the global consultation in Geneva on 19 November, 2025. The guidance is aimed at facilitating effective application of a human rights-based approach to the development and implementation of laws, policies and programmes to prevent and eliminate child marriage in line with the Human Rights Council resolution 53/23 on child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM).

- **Launch of an advocacy brief on the global impact of funding cuts on ending child marriage:** In 2025, the Global Programme, Girls Not Brides (GNB), and Girls First Fund (GFF) co-authored an advocacy brief on the impact of the global aid crisis[64]. The brief was first disseminated at the strategic meeting for ECM donors organized by GNB in October and then published online in November 2025. It represented a meaningful collaboration among organizations working to the same end, strengthening advocacy with aligned messaging and shared evidence, and serving as a call to action.

- **African Union (AU) Fourth African Girls Summit in Addis Ababa (December 8-10):** The Global Programme was instrumental in ensuring ending child marriage was a key focus during the AU Girls summit and was featured in its conclusions. During the summit, the Global Programme hosted two side events. On 8 December, in partnership with Equality Now, the Global Programme convened a session titled *"Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Progress, Opportunities and Responding to the Anti-Rights Backlash."* Held under the "Emerging Issues" theme, the event brought together parliamentarians, representatives of AU and regional human rights mechanisms, UN agencies, government officials, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and adolescent girls, including the active participation of the African Youth and Adolescents Network on Population and Development. The session raised awareness of how anti-rights movements undermine progress towards ending child marriage, facilitated cross-learning from country experiences on preparing for, preventing, and responding to backlash, across the African continent. On 9 December, UNICEF also convened a side event with OAFLAD on the theme of strengthening the continental architecture on ending harmful practices as well as on harnessing digital innovations for youth empowerment and social transformation. During the event, government representatives from Somalia, Zambia and Ghana shared the efforts that are in place in their respective countries in translating normative commitments to tangible improvements for girls.

- **Influencing the intergration of ending child marriage into state reporting mechanisms:** in December 2025, the UNICEF Prevention of Harmful Practices (PHP) team contributed an article to the 35th anniversary commemorative publication of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)[65], on how member states translate the Committee's recommendation into action at the national level. The article examined Zambia's experience in periodic reporting on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and implementation of the ACERWC's recommendations into national action to end child marriage.

- **Launch of analysis of pushback against the abandonment of harmful practices:** On 10 December, the Global Programme supported the launch of a new analysis on pushback against the abandonment of harmful practices, with a particular focus on the role of faith actors[66]. The event, attended by donors, governments, and other partners, presented findings from a multi-country scoping study examining emerging resistance to efforts to end child marriage and female genital mutilation. The analysis highlighted evolving trends such as the spread of digital misinformation, cross-border evasion of laws banning harmful practices, and the strategic use of cultural or religious narratives to re-legitimize these practices. The launch also generated follow-up requests from donors for bilateral discussions on how the findings could inform future programming and advocacy.

2.1.2 The influential role of Regional Offices

In 2025, the Global Programme, through its regional offices, also played an influential role in advancing the agenda to end child marriage across different regions.

64 UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, Girls Not Brides, and Girls First *Fund, Protecting Progress: The Global Impact of Funding Cuts on Ending Child Marriage Advocacy brief*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/media/176031/file/ECM%20Advocacy%20Brief_5%20Nov%202025.pdf.pdf

65 ACERWC, *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child at 35: Progress, challenges and the way forward*, 2025, https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2025-11/Commemoration%20Booklet.pdf

66 UNICEF, *Countering Pushbacks to Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage: Synthesis Paper and Country Briefs*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/documents/countering-pushbacks-ending-female-genital-mutilation-and-child-marriage-synthesis-paper

For instance**, the Regional Action Forum to End Child Marriage in Arab States and the MENA Region (RAF)[67] strengthened advocacy and regional mobilization through thematic briefs and joint messaging.** Building on escalating legal and social risks in several countries, and under the leadership of the Global Programme, RAF members jointly developed a set of advocacy briefs, including a fact sheet on Iraq's Personal Status Law, regional messages for IDG 2025, and a follow-up regional consultation meeting from the Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings study[68] (CMiHS) findings. These products helped unify regional messaging, strengthened partner coordination, and supported quiet diplomacy in politically sensitive contexts. In addition, on 22 October 2025 **a dedicated RAF webinar on child marriage in the Occupied Palestinian Territories** brought visibility to the heightened risks children face amid conflict, displacement, and system breakdown in Gaza and Occupied Palestine. The session convened Palestinian national actors, UN agencies, civil society partners, and regional stakeholders to examine legal loopholes, GBV intersections, and practical entry points for CM prevention during emergencies. The webinar also highlighted various assessments and promoted a holistic, crisis-responsive approach to child marriage.

In South Asia, the Global Programme fostered cross-country and cross-regional learning and collaboration by facilitating a knowledge-sharing webinar series aimed at ending child marriage. The webinar series covered topics such as women-led organizations pioneering child marriage prevention and response, leveraging social protection to prevent child marriage, and social and gender norms change programming. One call to action video was produced and disseminated for the IDG campaign 2025, highlighting social and gender norms change. Additionally, during the IDG celebrations in October 2025, UNICEF ROSA facilitated a girl-led, half-day consultation held both in person and online, in partnership with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Plan International. The consultation featured key sessions focused on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. As part of the event, Plan International launched its flagship report, *The State of the World's Girls: Let Me Be a Child, Not a Wife*[69], underscoring the power of partnerships in ending child marriage across the region.

For more details regarding advocacy-related and movement-building work conducted by the regional offices in Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa, refer to section 2.2 on Partnerships.


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67 Co-chaired by UNICEF MENA and UNFPA ASRO, RAF serves as a collaborative regional platform bringing together more than 45 UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs,and academic institutions.
68 UNICEF, *Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon: Barriers and facilitators to programming, 2025*, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/delivering-interventions-address-child-marriage-humanitarian-settings-iraq-jordan-lebanon
69 Plan International, *The State of the World's Girls 2025: Let Me Be a Girl, Not A Wife*, 2025, https://plan-international.org/publications/girls-experiences-child-marriage/

2.2 LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD MOVEMENTS AND SCALE IMPACT

In 2025, the Global Programme established new global and regional partnerships, which were strategic to advance collective advocacy, strengthen coordination and reinforce the broader movement to end child marriage.

2.2.1 Global partnerships

- **Partnership with Girls Not Brides supporting grassroots CSOs in Uganda and Malawi:** Thanks to funding from Norway aimed at strengthening the capacity of grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs) to build movements, influence their communities, and raise their voices at the national level, the Global Programme established a strategic partnership with Girls Not Brides. Through this partnership, around **55 grassroots CSOs in Uganda and Malawi** received direct funding, as well as capacity-building support in advocacy, leadership and collaboration. The year concluded with a reflection and learning meeting held on 4 December, bringing together over 40 participants from the Global Programme and the Girls Not Brides partnership, including colleagues from headquarters, regional offices, and country teams in **Malawi and Uganda**. During the meeting, partners from Malawi and Uganda shared early evidence of how the project is catalysing a new wave of collaboration across the child marriage ecosystem, strengthening connections between **government institutions, UN agencies, and civil society actors through Girls Not Brides member-led coalitions**. By 2027, this strengthened network is expected to contribute to measurable progress in **policy implementation, budget allocation, and social norm change**, supporting Malawi's national goal of reducing child marriage from **38 per cent to 20 per cent by 2030**, and advancing Uganda's efforts to safeguard adolescent girls in **four high-risk districts**.

- **Partnership with Equality Now:** In 2025, the Global Programme established a new partnership with the organization Equality Now to strengthen collective efforts to **counter growing anti-rights pushback and advance legal and policy frameworks** to end child marriage. The partnership has already delivered key milestones, including a **global webinar** held on 13 November 2025, which brought together 54 participants. CSO representatives, experts, UN agencies, and academics from multiple regions, to share good practices in child marriage law reform and strategies to prevent and respond to backlash. This was complemented by an **in-person technical capacity-building training** held in Nairobi from 26–27 November 2025, reaching 35 CSO participants from 16 African countries and strengthening their skills in legal advocacy, early-warning monitoring, strategic communications, and coordinated movement-building. In addition, a joint side event was convened at the **AU Girls' Summit in Addis Ababa** in November 2025, bringing together CSOs, survivors, UN agencies, and parliamentarians to strengthen advocacy with legislators on child marriage laws and address emerging anti-rights pushbacks. Other activities initiated in 2025 will continue into 2026, including the formalization of Regional Model Laws on Child Marriage for Latin America and the Caribbean and for Asia, alongside continued advocacy, documentation of good practices, and learning and knowledge-sharing efforts.

- **Partnership with the Child, Early, Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) and Sexuality Working Group:** Under the Global Programme, UNFPA has been collaborating with the CEFMU and Sexuality Working Group on advancing minimum age frameworks and broader rights-based approaches to end child, early, and forced marriages and unions. In this context, UNFPA, together with the Sexuality Working Group, convened a meeting in Geneva on 17–18 November 2025 to advance dialogue and shared learning on CEFMU. The meeting brought together diverse stakeholders to review available evidence, assess the effectiveness and potential unintended impacts of existing legal frameworks, and examine regional experiences, including studies from Latin America and the Caribbean and South Asia. Through these discussions, participants explored how legal and policy reforms can better prevent and respond to CEFMU while upholding adolescent girls' rights, protection, and agency, and collaboratively developed proposals to strengthen rights-based legal and policy approaches that reflect girls' lived realities and voices and avoid harm.

- **Partnership with the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP):** In 2025, the Global Programme contributed to the development and finalization of a programme document for the second phase of the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP), funded by the European Union, with implementation to begin in 2026 with a total budget of EUR 20 million. SIARP 2.0 is specifically designed to collaborate with the African Union Commission at the continental and sub-continental level and builds on the work of the first phase of Spotlight (2019-2023), with a broad objective to end violence against girls and women across the world. The focus is much more on the direct support to the AUC to establish and implement continent-wide programmes and advocacy. As a result, the Global Programme will not benefit from SIARP 2.0 to the same extent, although some Global Programme activities may still be supported through SIARP, allowing for coverage of a broader range of countries in Africa.

- **Partnership with Stellenbosch University:** UNICEF participated in the Second International Conference on Children's Rights (2025), organized by the Stellenbosch University Faculty of Law from 9–11 September 2025. In line with the conference theme, *"Artificial Intelligence, Online Safety and Children's Rights in the Digital Environment,"* UNICEF delivered a virtual presentation titled *"Empowering Adolescent Girls through Girl-Centered Digital Solutions to End Child Marriage."*

- **CSE Academy (partnership with Rutgers International established in 2023):** In 2025, UNFPA finalized the development of the global, open-source Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Academy, a digital, self-paced learning platform originally launched in 2023 to expand young people's access to quality CSE, particularly those who are out of school. Developed in partnership with Rutgers and co-created with youth organizations using a human-centred design approach, the Academy is youth-responsive, engaging, and adaptable across diverse contexts. It comprises three online courses hosted on the Pathwright platform—*Let's Learn About CSE*, *Sexuality Education Beyond the Basics*, and *CSE for Youth Advocates*—covering foundational knowledge, practical life skills, and peer education and advocacy. The Academy was developed iteratively in collaboration with youth networks in Ghana, Nepal, Zambia and other countries, incorporating structured feedback to strengthen usability, cultural relevance, and impact. The platform was designed to support not only the Global Programme but also broader UNFPA priorities by expanding access to quality, rights-based comprehensive sexuality education. As CSE is a core intervention within the child marriage programme, the Academy will support implementing countries to scale up access to CSE, particularly for adolescents and young people who are out of school, while also creating synergies with UNFPA's work on SRHR, FGM, and gender equality, and strengthening integrated, multi-sectoral programming and cost-effective approaches across multicountry programmes.

2.2.2 Regional partnerships

- **Partnership with FEMNET:** UNICEF ESARO partnered with FEMNET, a regional coalition of women- and girl-led organizations to strengthen the leadership, influence and sustainability of women- and girl-led organizations to drive transformative change in ending harmful practices and gender-based violence (GBV) across Eastern and Southern Africa. The priority countries for this regional initiative are Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, South Sudan and Zambia. Building on UNICEF's commitment to localization, gender equality and community-led change, the partnership leverages UNICEF's convening power, platforms and systems to amplify WLO voices, strengthen their technical and advocacy capacities, and expand their access to national, regional and global policy spaces. The initiative focuses on co-creation, positioning WLOs as agenda-setters and leaders in advocacy, norm change and survivor-centred responses to harmful practices and GBV, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

- As a part of this initiative, a regional capacity assessment survey was conducted which includes responses from 57 organizations across nine African countries. This assessment generated clear evidence on the strengths, capacity gaps, and priority needs of women- and girl-led organizations across countries, laying the foundation for targeted capacity-strengthening interventions. It also established a roadmap toward a regional toolkit and peer-learning network, strengthening leadership, visibility, and solidarity of women- and girl-led organizations to drive change on harmful practices and GBV. As the first of the capacity building series, a webinar was conducted on feminist financing to unpack the current financing landscape and explore bold, sustainable feminist resourcing models across Africa.

- **Partnering with academia for social and behaviour change capacity building:** another partnership with UNICEF ESARO, the Academia 4 Social and Behavioural Change Network was launched with 26 universities from 16 countries articulating key priorities: 1) **Capacity Building:** Strengthen the knowledge and skills of academic institutions and practitioners in SBC through harmonized curricula, training, and certification programs; 2) **Network Building:** Establish a community of practices to enhance collaboration across the region to influence the social and behavioural science field in Africa; 3) **Evidence Generation:** Promote innovative research methodologies and inter-disciplinary collaboration to generate actionable evidence; 4) **Policy Influence:** Leverage research to inform policies' design, implementation and monitoring; 5) **Digital Collaboration:** Contributing to developing a digital platform to support resource sharing, training, and virtual collaboration.

The Network is currently developing a shared research agenda, conducting a skills mapping exercise that identifies social and gender norms as a key pillar, and testing a dedicated digital platform[70] for sharing resources and co-creating multidisciplinary work. The intention is to expand the Network beyond Eastern and Southern Africa in 2026, to cover the whole of Africa.

70 The platform can be accessed here: https://esarsbc.vercel.app/

BUILDING A REGIONAL ADVOCACY MOVEMENT IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

In 2025, **UNFPA WCARO, in partnership with Equality Now**, launched an initiative to counter the anti-rights backlash in West and Central Africa by building a unified regional advocacy movement. The programme strengthened feminist and youth-led civil society to protect gender equality and eliminate harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM, combining regional coalition-building with targeted national learning to create a resilient, evidence-informed network.

The initiative began by **strengthening leadership within the movement**. A four-session virtual capacity-building series trained 40 advocates to deconstruct anti-rights narratives, integrate gender-transformative CSE, and strengthen collective advocacy. Participants applied these skills in a two-day virtual convening of 107 civil society, women's rights and youth representatives from 21 countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

A key outcome was the co-creation of a *Regional Advocacy Action Plan* outlining priorities such as combating cross-border FGM, safeguarding activists' digital security and coordinating resource mobilization. The plan formalized a regional advocacy network with focal points, transforming individual organizations into a more coordinated force for advancing policy and legal protections for women and girls while drawing lessons from national experiences.

National initiatives fed into this coalition. In Guinea, the project *"Young Female Leaders of Guinea Commit to Ending Child Marriage"* trained 29 women civil society leaders in advocacy and communication, leading to validated messaging tools and community sensitization on Tayaki Island in Conakry. In Nigeria, a youth-led national roundtable with policymakers in Abuja during the Day of the African Child secured commitments on girls' rights, while a *'Train the Trainer'* workshop in Kano equipped advocates from nine northern states to promote positive masculinities and culturally sensitive advocacy.

The strength of this model lies in linking evidence and action. The coalition's cross-border reach enables the dissemination of regional research, from climate stressors to humanitarian programming, and translates knowledge into coordinated advocacy, helping strengthen a more protective policy and social environment for women and girls.



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2.3 ADVANCING GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

Gender-transformative programming, together with social and behaviour change (SBC) empower adolescent girls by creating a supportive family and community environment in which they are valued, protected and enabled to enjoy and exercise their rights, contribute meaningfully to society, and lead fulfilled lives. In 2025, these approaches remained fundamental to the Global Programme's vision for ending child marriage.

2.3.1 Gender-transformative approaches

Gender-transformative approaches (GTAs) aim to address the root causes of gender inequality by transforming harmful gender roles, norms, and power dynamics, while working towards redistributing power, resources, and services more equally. Gender-transformative approaches increasingly inform the Global Programme's work in implementing countries, and beyond, and have not only been integrated into community interventions, but also into national policies. At the global level, in 2025 the Global Programme promoted gender-transformative approaches by providing support to countries to implement their GTA roadmaps, alongside conducting a stocktaking exercise to review progress and identify areas for improvement.

The **stocktaking review** documented results from the 17 countries that participated in GTA tool workshops[71] under both the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation. It is an assessment of the countries' GTA roadmaps, aiming to capture positive changes and outcomes in the implementation of gender-transformative approaches, as well as the challenges encountered and lessons learned throughout the process. The review highlighted several key findings:

1. GTA roadmaps are influencing programme design and implementation: Across countries, GTA roadmaps are being actively used to inform **annual workplans, Phase III programme design, and national strategies**, particularly where workshops were held close to planning cycles. Countries such as Bangladesh, Ghana, Uganda, and Zambia reported direct integration of roadmap actions into national and sub-national plans, strengthening continuity beyond the workshops. Examples of the GTA actions include strengthened engagement with men and boys in the JPFGM (Gambia), participation of adolescent girls in Children's Reference Groups that influenced local development plans and budgets (Uganda) and the integration of GTA into in-service training for the social service workforce to deliver gender-responsive, integrated services for adolescent girls (Ghana).

2. Programming is increasingly multi-dimensional and integrated: GTA actions commonly cut across multiple core elements, including **girls' skills and agency, engagement of men and boys, family and community mobilization, and strengthening systems and services**. Rather than siloed interventions, countries are implementing integrated strategies that combine community dialogue, service delivery, policy advocacy and system strengthening.

3. Values clarification is shifting internal practice and mindsets: The inclusion of **values clarification exercises** enabled staff and partners to reflect on personal biases and power dynamics. Country teams reported that this process moved programming beyond gender-aware or gender-responsive approaches toward **addressing root causes of inequality**, despite sometimes challenging conversations.

4. Collaboration and coordination have improved: GTA workshops created safe, structured spaces for **actors from different sectors** to jointly analyse gender norms and co-design actions. This led to stronger alignment across child protection, health, education, GBV and social protection systems, improving coherence and shared accountability.

5. Innovation and capacity building are prominent outcomes: Countries widely used the GTA to **develop new tools**, revise existing curricula and manuals, and cascade training to districts and partners. Examples include gender-transformative parenting manuals, engagement tools for men and boys, and integration of GTA content into curricula of professional training institutions.

6. Engagement of girl and women-led organizations is expanding, but uneven: While outreach to marginalized girls has increased, **meaningful participation of girls and young people in decision-making and accountability** remains limited to a few countries. Partnerships with women-led and feminist organizations have grown, but many require maintaining sustained capacity over time and core funding, to enable the organization to continue its programme and advocacy work, leading to long-term transformative change.

The Global Programme, together with the JPFGM **contributed to the evidence base on gender-transformative approaches through the publication and dissemination of the academic article** "Moving beyond jargon: Oper-

71 The Gender-Transformative Accelerator (also known as GTA tool) is a workshop-based tool developed by the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and adapted for the Joint Programme to Eliminate FGM. Implemented across 17 countries, the GTA tool supports country offices, governments, civil society and implementing partners to operationalise gender-transformative approaches by identifying priority actions, shifting harmful gender norms, and strengthening multisectoral collaboration.

ationalising gender-transformative approaches to end harmful practices against adolescents"[72], published in the Global Public Health journal in August 2025. Developed in collaboration with Collective Impact, the article follows the implementation of the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool in over 15 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East between 2021 and 2023.

The Global Programme also **deepened partnerships with women-led and women's rights organizations and networks to address the gender inequality drivers of child marriage, collectively advocate for girls' rights and advance strategies against the pushback on gender equality**[73].

Together, these achievements further established the Global Programme's role as a thought leader in gender-transformative approaches.

2.3.2 Social and behaviour change

Through people-centered social and behaviour change (SBC), the Global Programme helps unpack what drives behaviour in different contexts, understand what matters to communities, and develop interventions that speak to both the heart and mind, while addressing the root causes of child marriage. As such, SBC is also an important approach for gender transformation and for countering the pushback against gender equality.

In 2025, the Global Programme intensified its SBC work with faith leaders by:

- **Finalizing a review of effective faith engagement strategies[74] for ending harmful practices:** The review highlighted 10 key challenges for faith engagement which have been aggravated by the pushback against gender and child rights and explored ways of addressing those challenges.

- **Conducting a mapping of the trends in pushback[75] against the abandonment of harmful practices across 15 countries:** this exercise revealed how strategies to resist abandonment efforts are evolving, encompassing evasion tactics, increased use of digital spaces to spread misinformation and cultural and religious affirmation.

- **Developing practical, user-friendly tools to enable faith leaders to engage more effectively with their congregations on the abandonment of harmful practices**: Building on the findings from the desk review and trend mapping, tools were developed and finalized in December 2025 to equip faith leaders in select countries to challenge harmful practices more effectively within their communities and advocate for stronger protection of girls. Through the Global Programme's partnership with Religions for Peace and faith-based organizations, faith leaders will be equipped in 2026 with the skills to use these faith engagement tools with their communities and congregations.

- **Bringing faith leaders together to advocate for the abandonment of harmful practices:** In an effort to continue leveraging the influence of faith leaders for ending child marriage, the Global Programme, through it's partnership with Religions for Peace and the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL) organized a high-level advocacy event, bringing together faith leaders from nine countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Somalia and Zimbabwe). The two-day advocacy event, facilitated by the Global Programme, focused on reviewing current challenges that faith partners are facing in ending harmful practices and reaffirming their commitment to the protection of girls. This resulted in a joint declaration calling for coordinated efforts on key priorities. In addition, the ACRL conducted a training of 60 representatives of faith-based organizations on the Heart-Mind Dialogue methodology, a reflective, values clarification approach to support behaviour change by catering to the heart and mind. The training equipped participants with tools and skills to promote a systematic, community-based reflection on gender and social norms.

In addition to working with faith leaders, the Global Programme **empowered young leaders to amplify their voices and advocate effectively for the elimination of harmful practices**. In October 2025, 40 young people from Bangladesh, Ghana, Guinea, India, Niger, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia and The Gambia participated in an 18-hour youth leadership training, which equipped the young leaders with concepts and tools to strengthen youth movements, raise awareness, advocate for change and engage in policy dialogue, with a focus on child marriage and female genital mutilation. After the training, a cohort

72 Luna M., Jose-Roberto; Rock, Amelia; Alem, Ellen; Mabirizi, Joseph; Ricker, Chelsea L.; Das, Madhumita; Akoro, Joseph Sewedo; and Kolundzija, Alana, *'Moving beyond jargon: Operationalising gender-transformative approaches to end harmful practices against adolescents'*, Global Public Health, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1 August 2025, https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2025.2516707

73 For examples, see Section 2.2 on Partnerships

74 UNICEF, *Review of Effective Faith Engagement Strategies for Addressing Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/documents/review-effective-faith-engagement-strategies-addressing-child-marriage-and-female-genital

75 UNICEF, *Countering Pushbacks to Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage: Synthesis Paper and Country Briefs*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/documents/countering-pushbacks-ending-female-genital-mutilation-and-child-marriage-synthesis-paper?auHash=9CwZg5y7aluluwy_q_sn9AaXSK8njJdoiyKWtGl3lms

of young leaders (27 girls) was selected to be part of a **Global Youth Advisory** whose objective is to consolidate and amplify youth voices at the global level. This advisory provides a platform for young people's perspectives, lived experiences and priorities that can inform the Global Programme and country-level programmes. Shortly after the training, one adolescent girl was invited to speak at a global event organized by UNICEF on pushback against the abandonment of FGM.

Finally, following cognitive and field testing of survey questionnaires in six countries (Lebanon, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Yemen, and Zimbabwe), the Global Programme **validated and finalized a Child Marriage Survey**[76] to provide a concise set of questions that country offices can use for programme monitoring and formative research to measure critical social and behavioural determinants of child marriage. This initiative was part of a cross-regional exercise[77] undertaken across 11 countries in three regions to develop validated and reliable tools that can measure and monitor behavioural drivers of complex child protection issues, including child marriage. The Child Marriage Survey is an adaptable tool that can help generate actionable, real-time insights into the social and behavioural dynamics at the heart of child marriage, while also acting as a robust monitoring and data collection tool. Part of these tools have been integrated into a social norms and behavioural drivers study in Uganda aimed at uncovering insights into what drives child marriage and FGM in high prevalence areas. The study revealed that personal attitudes about these practices are in contrast to community norms, with most people privately disagreeing with the practices, but conforming to the norm of engaging in these practices because they believe it is what is expected by the community. This dissonance between personal beliefs and social norms is highly revealing for programming, as it helps identify which interventions now need to be adjusted to expose this dissonance and enable communities to come together to examine misperceived expectations.

By building on the achievements described above, the Global Programme significantly deepened its SBC work in 2025.



76 UNICEF, *Survey Questionnaire: Behavioural Drivers Related to Child Marriage*, 2025, https://www.sbcguidance.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/Social%20and%20Behavioral%20Factors%20Related%20to%20Child%20Marriage%20Programme%20Monitoring%20Questionnaire.pdf

77 UNICEF, *Cross-Regional Initiative on Behavioural Drivers of Violence against Girls, Boys and Women and Harmful Practices*, 2025, https://www.sbcguidance.org/do/behavioral-surveys-and-monitoring-tools-child-protection-and-harmful-practices

2.4 PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT THROUGH REGIONAL OFFICES

While this annual results report has already presented some of the regional offices' highlights related to advocacy, research and partnerships, this section focuses on examples of programme results achieved through technical support provided to country offices and partners from within and outside the Global Programme, catalysing efforts to end child marriage.

2.4.1 Arab States / Middle East and North Africa

- Launch of the Regional Action Forum (RAF) website and resource center

- In 2025, UNICEF launched the new RAF website (www.rafmena.org), establishing the first regional digital hub dedicated to child marriage prevention in the Arab world. The platform hosts over 80 technical and advocacy resources, recorded webinars, factsheets, legal analyses, and research products. It also provides a shared visibility space for United Nations, NGO, CSO, academic, and Women's Rights Organizations (WRO) partners across the region. This has significantly improved access to evidence and cross-country learning.

- **Strengthened evidence-to-action through updated CMiHS consultations and regional launch:** UNICEF MENARO and UNFPA ASRO led an extensive country consultation process to update and validate the Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings (CMiHS) study produced in collaboration with UNICEF Innocenti[78]. Multiple COs provided contextual inputs that significantly strengthened the accuracy, relevance, and policy utility of the final report. The findings were officially launched in July 2025 and have been informing country workplans, regional advocacy, and technical guidance for the 2026–2027 cycle.

2.4.2 Asia Pacific/ South Asia

- **Knowledge sharing and technical support:** UNFPA APRO and UNICEF ROSA jointly engaged with regional fora and diverse partners to advance efforts to end child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. This included sharing data and evidence to inform advocacy and programming, and maintaining active engagement with regional coordination platforms such as SAARC and South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) through regular South Asia CEFM Technical Working Group meetings. The RO teams also participated in the in-person regional meeting in Bangkok on the review of the Regional Action Plan (RAP) on ECM alongside key regional stakeholders, including SAARC, SAIEVAC, Girls Not Brides, Plan International, and World Vision. ROs provided technical support to strengthen the enforcement of laws and policies (e.g., maintaining the legal age of marriage in Nepal). RO also engaged during the 12th Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Summit (APFSD) in Bangkok (Feb 2025) with Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), UN Women, UNFPA and SAARC to redefine SDG 5 priorities and accelerate the closing of gender data gaps, including in child marriage indicators.

- **Contributing to the South Asia Regional Action Plan on Adolescent Pregnancy, which was finalized and disseminated in alignment with the Beijing+30 review process and 12th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD):** To operationalize the Regional Action Plan on Adolescent Pregnancy, a multistakeholder Technical Working Group was established in 2025, chaired by SAARC and co-chaired by UNICEF ROSA, UNFPA APRO, and WHO SEARO. Two meetings were convened during 2025 and a third meeting is planned for Quarter 1, 2026 to advance evidence sharing and support the development of country-level action plans that holistically address the needs of married, pregnant, and parenting adolescent girls. In alignment with this effort, UNICEF ROSA launched a Regional Study on programming with and for married, pregnant, and parenting adolescent girls in South Asia. The study aims to assess the availability, accessibility, and utilization of programmes and services, while examining the challenges and opportunities these girls face in accessing and benefiting from them. The findings will inform evidence-based decision-making to strengthen programme outcomes, including in alignment with the South Asia Regional Action Plan on Adolescent Pregnancy and the Global Programme. The study will also feature case studies of promising programmes and policy initiatives, and identify best practices across the region.

2.4.3 Eastern and Southern Africa

- **Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model Law on Child Marriage- Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Framework:** UNICEF and UNFPA have been part of the core Monitoring and

78 UNICEF, *Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon: Barriers and facilitators to programming*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/delivering-interventions-address-child-marriage-humanitarian-settings-iraq-jordan-lebanon

Evaluation (M&E) team supporting the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) in the development of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) Framework for the SADC Model Law on Ending Child Marriage. Both agencies have provided technical leadership in designing the Results Framework and crafting a robust Theory of Change that clearly maps the pathways through which Member States can advance the elimination of child marriage. The Global Programme has also played a pivotal role in establishing minimum MERL standards to ensure harmonized, credible, and comparable data across the region. Furthermore, the Global Programme has supported the development of a digital MERL dashboard aimed at enhancing real-time monitoring, evidence use, and cross-country learning to strengthen accountability and inform policy decisions. The MERL framework is currently undergoing data validation, during which indicators, data sources, and reporting modalities are being collaboratively refined with the SADC PF, Member States, and partners to ensure accuracy, feasibility, and alignment with regional priorities.

- **Social and Community Listening:** To monitor trends and potential misinformation, social and community listening quarterly reports were produced to inform country offices' programme and advocacy priorities. A dedicated digital monitoring platform was developed to 1) Identify topics and stories trending online, 2) Search more information on how people discuss your issue of interest, 3) Identify people and entities that influence people online on your issue of interest. Key findings from social and community listening can be found here: Q1, Q2, Q3.

2.4.4 West and Central Africa

- **Integrating child marriage data into child protection systems:** In response to the polycrisis facing the region, UNICEF WCARO supported Country Offices in the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) to strengthen child protection systems. Building upon technical support provided in 2024, ongoing assistance for Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+) and case management strengthening continued in 2025. This ensures that tools that integrate child marriage are utilized while reviewing and updating system configurations established in previous years. As a result, child marriage data (amongst other CP risks), has been integrated across the board into the tools in Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Mali; and has been reconfigured in CPIMS+ systems in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria. Simultaneously, four countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali) are piloting climate-resilient child protection systems. Using a dual pathway of institutionalized capacity building and integration into community-based child protection spaces, this work aims to ensure child marriage prevention is embedded in climate adaptation planning.

- **Strengthening national budgets in Africa:** In 2025, regional offices also contributed to strengthening national budgets in West and Central Africa. For instance, to further strengthen transparency and accountability, and building on the 2024 UNFPA-UNICEF rapid data mapping exercise to review publicly available financial information of government programmes that respond to and prevent GBV, child marriage and FGM across West and Central Africa, a partnership with the International Budget Partnership (IBP) supporting Open Budget Surveys in 28 countries in Africa (16 WCAR and 12 ESAR) was established. The objective is to identify analytics that support regional advocacy to strengthen national budgets and provide technical assistance to optimize government spending. Complementing this work, the foundation has been laid to test an innovative AI-powered analysis of public budgets, starting in 2026. This will generate evidence and lessons for accelerating advocacy and ensuring resources for child protection, including the prevention of child marriage, are visible and subject to public accountability.



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2.5 STRENGTHENING THE GLOBAL EVIDENCE FOR ACTION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Strengthening the global evidence base on ending child marriage, and translating that evidence into action at scale, is a key pillar of the Global Programme's added value. This section provides some details on how the Global Programme exercises its function as a global leader in generating actionable knowledge, supporting evidence uptake, and strengthening research capacity across countries and regions.

Through its technical support function, the Strategic Technical Assistance for Research (STAR) Initiative to End Harmful Practices, housed at the UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence - Innocenti, the Global Programme advanced learning on effective interventions, promoted evidence uptake, built country-level research capacity, and contributed to shaping global and regional action. In 2025, evidence messages generated by the Global Programme also achieved global media reach. UNICEF was called upon by CNN World News[79] to speak to *what works* to end child marriage, amplifying key evidence messages to global audiences.

Flagship global research shaping the field

In 2025 Global Programme headquarters, the STAR Initiative and regional offices played a leading role in evidence generation on child marriage, producing a total of 22 regional- and global-level research and evidence products (working papers, journal articles, research briefs, research reports), 34 knowledge products (blogs, think pieces, conference papers, infographics, presentations, videos and interviews), and 3 technical guidance/tools-related products. Annex 2 summarizes the Global Programme's contribution to global and regional level evidence generation in 2025.

Key flagship global research and knowledge products delivered in 2025 included the finalized *Technical Guidance and Practitioner's Toolkit on Reducing Child Marriage through Gender-Responsive Social Protection*. The toolkit provides step-by-step operational guidance to support governments, UNICEF Country Offices, and partners to design and implement social protection programmes that explicitly integrate child marriage prevention objectives. The guidance walks users through setting gender- and age-responsive objectives; designing transfer mechanisms; coordinating multi-sectoral delivery systems; establishing service linkages and accountability measures; and strengthening national systems for long-term sustainability. The Global Programme also produced a high-reach infographic, *Evidence on What Works to Prevent Child Marriage*[80], which distilled robust global evidence into clear and accessible messages to support advocacy, programme design, and decision-making.

The Global Programme continued to generate evidence on addressing child marriage in humanitarian settings. It led the development and regional launch of the report *Delivering Interventions to Address Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings (CMiHS)*[81], covering Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, alongside country workshops to support evidence-informed action planning across the Middle East and North Africa. UNICEF and UNFPA WCARO, together with ESARO offices, also supported a multi-country study led by UNICEF Innocenti on programming to address child marriage and FGM in humanitarian contexts. Covering Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in West and Central Africa, alongside countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, the study applied a systematic Intervention Mapping approach, finalized in 2025, to identify practical recommendations for adapting interventions in fragile settings. Complementary climate change research in Ghana and climate-resilient systems strengthening in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali are further generating lessons on the nexus between humanitarian action, climate adaptation and development programming, with relevance beyond the implementation countries.

Evidence informing policy and programme scale-up

Evidence generated through the Global Programme is increasingly informing national policies and programme scale-up. In Bangladesh, government counterparts cited Innocenti evidence as influencing the decision to scale up the national cash transfer programme targeting families vulnerable to child marriage. In Sierra Leone, findings informed the design of a cash transfer pilot programme that integrates social protection approaches into child marriage prevention efforts.

Building on this momentum, the Global Programme, in partnership with UNICEF Innocenti and the UNICEF Social Policy team, co-launched the *Partnership on Reducing*

79 Sashikala VP; Carlotta Dotto; and Petra Eriksson, *'Exclusive: Report reveals hidden reality of child marriage. Three girls share the impact on their lives'*, CNN, 29 September 2025, https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/29/world/child-marriage-impact-worldwide-as-equals-intl

80 UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, *Evidence on What Works to End Child Marriage Infographic*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/media/168461/file/Infographic_What%20works%20to%20prevent%20CM.pdf.pdf

81 UNICEF, *Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon: Barriers and facilitators to programming*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/delivering-interventions-address-child-marriage-humanitarian-settings-iraq-jordan-lebanon

Child Marriage through Gender-Responsive Social Protection. The partnership provides targeted technical support to UNICEF Country Offices to translate research into practice and accelerate the uptake of evidence-informed approaches at scale.

Advancing a shared global research agenda

A cornerstone of the Global Programme's work was the advancement of a **Shared Global Research Agenda to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage**, developed collaboratively by UNICEF, UNFPA, Girls Not Brides through the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The agenda reflects a shared commitment to aligning research priorities, strengthening coordination across institutions, and ensuring that future investments in evidence generation respond to the most pressing implementation and policy needs to accelerate progress toward ending child marriage.

To operationalize this agenda, UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence with partners, designed a suite of consultation toolkits to support diverse stakeholder groups to systematically identify evidence gaps, formulate priority research questions, and engage in structured dialogue focused on collective action. These toolkits were piloted across multiple platforms, including the Girls Not Brides multi-stakeholder convening in Nairobi (October 2025), the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage Biennial Consultation (November 2025), and the Africa Action Group to End Child Marriage, ensuring relevance across global, regional, and country contexts.

Collective learning and stakeholder engagement through CRANK

The Child Marriage Research to Action Network (CRANK) co-convened by the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and Girls Not Brides, served as a key platform to advance dialogue and collective learning on priority evidence gaps and emerging issues. In 2025, three CRANK sessions were convened to support the roll-out of the Shared Global Research Agenda and to deepen engagement with diverse stakeholders. The first session, *The Interlinkages between Climate Change and Child Marriage – Learning from Emerging Evidence and Practice*[82], was held alongside the Commission on Population and Development and explored how climate change intersects with child marriage through pathways related to food insecurity, displacement, education disruption, social protection, health, and social norms, adopting a holistic wellbeing lens.

The second session formally launched the global consultation phase[83] of the Shared Global Research Agenda, presenting findings from a stocktaking scoping review and highlighting critical gaps in research on child marriage prevention and response. The third, a Global Thematic Consultation on Social Norms and Child Marriage[84], deepened stakeholder engagement by building consensus on priority research questions and strengthening alignment around future evidence needs.

The consultation phase engaged over 150 stakeholders, including policymakers, funders, researchers, practitioners, and civil society representatives, with more than 80 additional participants joining the ongoing process following the launch. Together, the stocktaking analysis, consultation toolkits, and pilot testing represent a critical step toward establishing a shared, demand-driven global research agenda that accelerates evidence uptake across sectors and regions.

Regional evidence influencing change

At the regional level, UNICEF WCARO and ESARO, in collaboration with Country Offices and external researchers, produced *Ending Child Marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa: Country Strategy Notes and Regional Insights*[85]. This synthesis translated evidence into country-specific strategic guidance, supporting more targeted and context-responsive programming across Eastern, Southern, West, and Central Africa. Evidence generated by the Global Programme also strengthened political will and action towards ending child marriage on a continental scale. In 2025, UNICEF supported the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child in establishing a historic mandate on investment and budgeting for children. The Committee's Communiqué from its 46th Ordinary Session called for the establishment of a continental benchmark on financing for children, drawing in part on the UNICEF

82 Girls Not Brides, *CRANK research meeting: The interlinkages between climate change and child marriage – Learning from emerging evidence and practice*, 2025, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-research-action-network/crank-quarterly-research-meetings/interlinkages-climate-change-child-marriage-emerging-evidence-practice/

83 Girls Not Brides, *Join the Journey: Shaping a Global Shared Research Agenda to Prevent and Respond to Child Marriage*, 2025, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-research-action-network/crank-quarterly-research-meetings/shaping-a-global-shared-research-agenda-child-marriage/

84 Girls Not Brides, *Shape Action: A Global Thematic Consultation on Social Norms & Child Marriage to inform our Shared Global Research Agenda*, 2025, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-research-action-network/crank-quarterly-research-meetings/shape-action-join-us-for-the-global-thematic-consultation-on-social-norms-child-marriage-to-inform-our-shared-global-research-agenda/

85 UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa: Country Strategy Notes and Regional Insights*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/esa/reports/ending-child-marriage-sub-saharan-africa-country-strategy-notes-and-regional-insights

joint ESARO–WCARO evidence paper *From Promises to Protection*[86], which documented domestic financing gaps and informed the Committee's deliberations.

Regional offices in Asia and the Pacific also strengthened the evidence base on child marriage through several research and knowledge-generation initiatives. In June 2025, UNICEF ROSA launched the report *Unmasking Vulnerabilities*[87], which examined how the COVID-19 pandemic affected drivers of child marriage in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, including new risks emerging from containment measures and impacts on married girls. The report findings are expected to improve programme delivery. Moreover, a monthly evidence series highlighted themes such as mental health impacts, child marriage and motherhood, feminist prevention approaches and links between child marriage and domestic violence. In parallel, UNFPA APRO launched the study *Empowering Girls, Securing Futures: The Investment Case for Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage in South-East Asia*[88], which calls for greater investment in girls as both a moral imperative and an economic necessity. It also led two flagship initiatives to address key evidence gaps and strengthen regional and national interventions to address child marriage. A multi-country study across five countries examined how digital technologies, including social media, gaming platforms and dating apps, are misused to facilitate child marriage, with findings expected in 2026 to inform programming and strengthen girls' online safety. In parallel, research on GBV case management for married girls in Bangladesh (including Cox's Bazar), India, Pakistan and Nepal informed the development of a regional toolkit aligned with inter-agency GBV case management guidelines. The toolkit will support improved services and advocacy when rolled out in 2026 across Asia and the Pacific, both within and beyond Global Programme countries.

Together, these efforts reinforced the Global Programme's role as a global leader in evidence generation, learning, and technical support, ensuring that research on child marriage advances the field's' knowledge and learning of child marriage and most importantly, actively informs policy, programming, and collective action to end child marriage.


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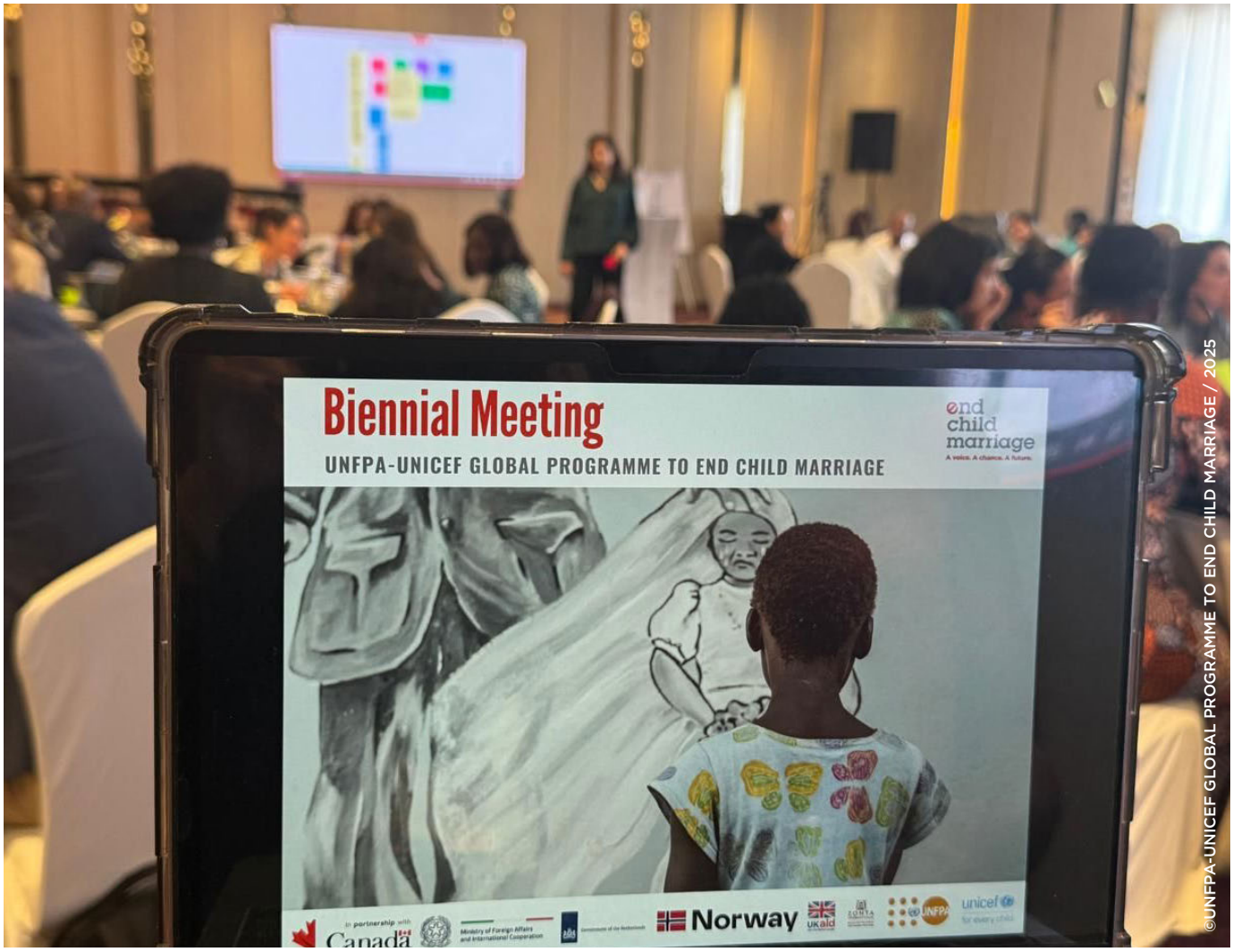
86 UNICEF, *From Promises to Protection: Why sustainable investment for child protection is critical to Africa's human capital agenda*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/wca/reports/promises-protection
87 UNICEF, *Unmasking vulnerabilities: The impact of COVID-19 on the determinants of child marriage in South Asia*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/unmasking-vulnerabilities/
88 UNFPA, *Empowering Girls, Securing Futures: The Investment Case for Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage in South-East Asia*, 2025, https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/empowering-girls-securing-futures-investment-case-preventing-adolescent-pregnancy-and

2.6 CO-CREATING WHAT'S NEXT: THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME BIENNIAL MEETING

One of the highlights for the Global Programme in 2025 was the UNFPA–UNICEF Biennial Meeting on Ending Child Marriage. Held in Nairobi from 14 to 16 October 2025, it brought together participants from the 12 programme countries, regional offices, survivors and advocates, global champions, donors and partners, with participation both in person and online.

Under the theme ***"Scaling Solutions: Leverage what works. Mobilize what's possible. Co-create what's next"***, it was a powerful convergence of actors united in their commitment to end child marriage. Over three days, participants exchanged bold ideas and engaged in deep reflection through strategic dialogues on sustaining progress, scaling impactful solutions, and strengthening systems for lasting change, alongside forward-looking discussions on financing, movement building, and accountability grounded in human rights and gender equality.

The programme also featured a collaborative deep dive into the Shared Global Research Agenda to guide future evidence generation and learning, country-led showcases highlighting data-driven innovations and cross-sectoral collaboration, and a vibrant marketplace and internal workshops to co-create the next phase of collective action.



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3 Global Programme performance



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The Global Programme's overall performance in the 12 target countries is measured against its Phase III Theory of Change[89], based on progress in three intermediate outcome areas that contribute to ending child marriage:

1. Empowering adolescent girls ("Intermediate Outcome 1000")
2. Building resilient and responsive systems ("Intermediate Outcome 2000")
3. Enhancing legal and policy response ("Intermediate Outcome 3000")

Table 1 presents a summary of output indicator performance for the 12 implementing countries in Phase III Year 1 (2024) and Year 2 (2025), providing an initial assessment of progress since the launch of Phase III in 2024. Overall, the results for 2025 reflect strong maintenance of 2024 achievements, with scaling up in several areas despite a challenging year and funding cuts for countries. For instance, many country offices have prioritized allocating more resources to the most effective approaches to preventing child marriage, including keeping girls in school, addressing poverty drivers, and leveraging existing systems, with promising results. For some countries, this has sometimes meant less emphasis on service delivery and dedicated life skills and CSE interventions. On the other hand, an area that has experienced significant growth since the start of Phase III is the engagement of boys and men in positive masculinities interventions, which means COs are focusing on this important gender-transformative approach and addressing the underlying social norms and structural drivers that sustain child marriage. Partnerships for economic empowerment initiatives have also increased this year.

Given that regular household survey data is not available on an annual basis, country offices were also asked for the first time this year to provide a narrative assessment of the performance of their programme at an outcome level, with promising and enriching results. Over the course of the year, UNICEF and UNFPA teams in-country receive or generate multiple insights into whether or not behaviours and attitudes are changing in intervention zones and why, and when they put those insights together they are often able to come up with compelling narrative of progress and of challenges. Summaries of this analysis can be found in the accompanying Country Profiles. Going forward, this will be a more regular way for countries to reassess and adjust course.



89 UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, *Phase III Programme Document (2024-2030)*, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/media/145651/file/Programme%20document%20.pdf

Table 1: Summary of output indicator performance in Phase III Year 1 (2024) and Year 2 (2025)

	Phase III Year	
Indicator	**Year 1: 2024**	**Year 2: 2025**
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (10-19) who actively participated in Life Skills or CSE interventions supported by the Global Programme	7,427,785	7,326,903
Indicator 1121:Number of girls (10-19) supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	8,474,725	9,757,683
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms which are supported by the Global Programme	4,772,254	5,716,639
Indicator 1221: Number of individuals who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	29,570,565	14,158,728
Indicator 1223: Number of local actors (traditional, religious, community) who have been mobilized by the Global Programme to advocate for an end to child marriage	2,984,336	1,156,705
Indicator 1231 (i): Number of women-led or youth-led CSOs supported financially by the Global Programme this year	8,482 (total mobilized)	2,252
Indicator 1231 (ii): Number of women-led or youth-led CSOs the Global Programme convened to support the ECM agenda this year (non-financial contribution)		2,013
Indicator 2111: Number of education institutions which were supported in the reporting year to provide quality gender-responsive education (including CSE)	3,578	121,793
Indicator 2121 (i):Number of health, child protection or GBV service delivery points which were supported in the reporting year to provide quality adolescent-responsive services	7,007	4,914
Indicator 2121 (ii) *(old 2102)*: Number of girls and boys who accessed the services described in 2121 (i)	2,532,021	5,507,860
Indicator 2201: Number of poorest adolescent girls (10-19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes supported by the Global Programme in 2025	3,548,215	3,320,789
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (formal and informal) to deliver adolescent- and gender-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	282	436
Indicator 3101: Total number of national and sub-national Child Marriage Action Plans whose implementation the Global Programme supported this year	301	412
Indicator 3111: Total number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage whose development or adoption the Global Programme supported this year	79	76
Indicator 3122: Total number of budget analysis documents developed by the Global Programme this year	9	12
Indicator 3201: Total number of evidence or knowledge pieces developed this year in programme countries	35	53

Note: Indicators 1231, 2121 and 3101 were modified for 2025

3.1 EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Under Intermediate Outcome 1000, adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage are empowered to use their voice and make informed decisions about their lives, including regarding marriage, sexual and reproductive health and childbearing, education, and livelihoods.

3.1.1 Intensively supporting the most marginalized girls

Table 2 : Number of adolescent girls (10-19) who actively participated in Life Skills or CSE interventions supported by the Global Programme

Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (10-19) who actively participated in Life Skills or CSE interventions supported by the Global Programme

	2024	2025	2025
Country	**Results**	**Targets***	**Results**
Bangladesh	120,646	150,000	134,393
Burkina Faso	123,729	140,000	86,182
Ethiopia	129,354	135,618	118,026
Ghana	15,820	10,931	9,348
India	6,655,438	3,053,000	6,550,478
Mozambique	57,878	50,000	18,347
Nepal	34,967	60,000	18,557
Niger	90,951	19,600	101,149
Sierra Leone	7,942	28,000	44,538
Uganda	33,308	103,140	197,025
Yemen	18,294	40,000	17,067
Zambia	139,458	154,300	31,793
Total	**7,427,785**	**3,944,589**	**7,326,903**

*targets were revised downwards in Q1 2025 following budget reductions

Participation in life skills and CSE programmes (Indicator 1111): In 2025, a total **of 7,326,903 underserved/ marginalized adolescent girls** (aged 10-19) who are at risk of child marriage or who are pregnant, married, divorced or widowed participated in gender-transformative life skills and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programmes that build their knowledge, skills, awareness of their rights, develop their agency, and connect them to services (slightly down from 7,427,785 in 2024).

Life Skills and CSE remain critical pillars of effective child marriage programming, because they equip adolescents with the knowledge, confidence and decision-making skills needed to understand their rights, protect their health, and navigate social pressures related to marriage, relationships and sexuality. By strengthening girls' agency and awareness of their options, including education, health and livelihood pathways, these approaches help delay marriage and support girls to make informed choices about their futures.

While the overall global target for reaching girls was exceeded in 2025 overall (thanks to **India** driving achievements in this area), unfortunately this year half of the implementing countries (6 out of 12) not only were not able to meet their targets, but also decreased their reach for this indicator compared to 2024. Most of these countries (**Burkina Faso**, **Ethiopia**, **Mozambique**, **Yemen**) attributed unmet targets to funding cuts. As for **Ghana**, the target (10,931) was not met because the baseline data collection

for the Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS)[90] Impact Evaluation was completed in mid-August, and a list of communities was finalized and shared with implementing partners for implementation at the end of September. Therefore, there was limited time to mobilize adolescent girls to participate in and complete the safe space sessions within the reporting period.

As in previous years, the majority of the results for this indicator have been achieved in **India**, where the Global Programme scales its impact by strategically leveraging large-scale government platforms and flagship schemes in 15 states, although results in 2025 are slightly down (1.6 per cent decrease) from 2024. By embedding adolescent empowerment into State and District Action Plans (SAPs/DAPs), the Global Programme ensures that the interventions it supports are integrated into official departmental mandates and budgets. This approach utilizes existing social protection schemes, such as conditional cash transfers, and enhances them through a "Cash-Plus" model that provides girls with additional mentorship and life-skills training. An example is West Bengal's Kanyashree Prakalpa, a "cash-plus" programme that provides financial incentives to keep adolescent girls in school and delay marriage, while also supporting empowerment activities through school-based Kanyashree Clubs, where girls develop life skills, leadership, financial literacy and self-defence training. Leveraging the education system to deliver life skills is also an approach already used in countries such as **Ethiopia**, where programmes are delivered through in-school Life Skills Education (LSE) facilitated by trained teachers using Ministry of Education (MoE) and Regional Education Bureau (REB)-approved manuals, while out-of-school girls are reached through modular sessions using the Girls' Power: Comprehensive Capacity Building Manuals. Moreover, in 2025, **Sierra Leone**, expanded the life skills curriculum to senior secondary schools, enabling scaling beyond community-based safe spaces without proportional cost increases. In other countries, the Global Programme delivers life skills and CSE programmes through civil society and decentralised authorities, using safe spaces and other community-based platforms as equity platforms to reach the most marginalized adolescent girls.

Other Global Programme countries have also scaled up their results since the start of Phase III. While **Bangladesh** achieved 90 per cent of its target for 2025, it has increased its reach by 11 per cent compared to 2024. In light of reduced funding, the Global Programme in Bangladesh consolidated its portfolio to prioritize direct prevention and girl-centred interventions with demonstrated impact. Resources were reallocated toward adolescent empowerment, school retention, Life Skills Education, and the Social Protection Plus (SP+) model, which integrates norm-change interventions within government safety net programmes. As a result, direct programme support to the output on strengthening GBV protection and response mechanisms in priority districts was discontinued, with the understanding that limited resources would have greater protective impact when invested in preventing child marriage upstream by strengthening girls' agency, household decision-making, and positive social norms. To maintain scale and quality despite fiscal constraints, the Global Programme adopted a cost-efficient cascading model, particularly within the education sector. Teachers trained in LSE during earlier phases were capacitated as Master Trainers, enabling peer-to-peer dissemination of skills and knowledge. This approach significantly expanded reach, increasing coverage of school-based interventions from 27,880 beneficiaries in 2024 to 121,672 in 2025, while reducing reliance on external technical inputs and strengthening system ownership. In 2025 school-based Life Skills Education (LSE) remained a foundational pathway for strengthening girls' decision-making. Across priority districts, 75,338 adolescent girls in 679 secondary institutions were equipped with competency-based life skills, strengthening knowledge on bodily autonomy, communication, rights, and future planning. Beyond attendance, this scale reflects a critical mass of girls gaining the capacity to negotiate delays in marriage and articulate alternatives related to education and livelihoods. Complementary initiatives such as the *Shombhabonar Uthsob* (Festival of Potential) reinforced these gains by directly exposing girls and caregivers to viable education and employment pathways. Career festivals connected 668 adolescent girls with female professionals as mentors and engaged parents and community stakeholders, helping shift perceptions of girls' futures beyond child marriage.

Niger, Sierra Leone and Uganda have significantly scaled up their results compared to both their 2024 results and their 2025 targets. In 2025 the Global Programme in **Niger** increased its reach by around 10 per cent compared to 2024, and achieved around 5 times the target for 2025, thanks to its focus on strengthening the agency and informed decision-making of adolescent girls and communities through an integrated package of empowerment, education, dialogue, and livelihood interventions, implemented primarily through the Community-Based Child Protection Approach (*ACPE* in French) and the ILLIMIN initiative, two community-led approaches that are adapted to the local context. 101,149 adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 actively participated in more than 31 hours of educa-

90 UNFPA and UNICEF implement the Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS) initiative in partnership with NORSAAC and INGH. Through the initiative, adolescent girls are reached in safe spaces with life skills training, livelihood opportunities and reproductive health education, delivered through a curriculum comprising at least 31 hours of contact time.

tion programmes on human rights, life skills, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and financial capabilities, compared to an annual target of 19,600, which reflects significant progress towards this outcome. These interventions helped to strengthen girls' knowledge of their rights, health, educational pathways, and available support services, and were implemented through structured girls' groups, peer education platforms, and safe spaces. Sierra Leone and Uganda not only significantly exceeded their target for 2025 (both by almost two-fold) for this indicator, but also significantly exceeded their 2024 results (by almost 6 times)

In **Sierra Leone,** significant progress was made in strengthening girls' empowerment, life skills, and access to essential services. A total of 31,443 adolescent girls aged 10–19, including 47 girls with disabilities, were reached through gender-transformative life skills programming delivered through 420 safe spaces across 160 communities. In addition, 23,169 adolescents from secondary schools benefited from school-based life skills sessions, of whom 13,095 were girls. In total, 44,538 girls aged 10–19 were reached through life skills programming across safe spaces and schools. The widespread display of referral information in Safe Spaces and community locations enhanced awareness and uptake of SRH, child protection, psychosocial, and legal services. Pre- and post-test assessments demonstrated measurable improvements in girls' knowledge, self-efficacy, and decision-making skills.

In **Uganda,** strengthened life skills and CSE platforms lead to measurable behaviour change[91]. Throughout 2025, the Global Programme expanded access to life skills and Sexuality Education (CSE) interventions for adolescent girls, through safe spaces, schools, and community structures, with notable improvements in participation and retention across programme districts. District-level data from implementing partners indicated increased self-reported ability among girls to negotiate safer relationships, resist harmful practices, and remain engaged in education[92]. In several programme districts, facilitators observed a shift in girls' confidence levels, including more girls voluntarily reporting cases of violence, seeking counselling, and asserting their interest to remain in school. This outcome marked a significant milestone in Uganda's efforts to promote the agency of adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, particularly in high burden districts where harmful social norms remain deeply entrenched. Additionally, complementary initiatives were leveraged to expand the programme's reach. For instance, the PROSPECTS Programme strengthened protective and empowerment pathways for refugee and host-community adolescents, including digital skills development, while the Life Skills Toolkit, implemented with ILO, UNHCR, and the Ministry of Education, reached nearly 27,000 adolescents across 180 schools, including out-of-school youth and girls at heightened risk of child marriage. Multiple platforms—school-based education, safe spaces, caregiver support, and youth-led initiatives such as Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) and Youth Savings and Loan Associations (YSLAs)—enhanced girls' agency and access to protective services. Integration into district government systems and capacity building for teachers, health workers, and community officers strengthened sustainability and quality delivery.

Similarly to Uganda, Nepal is also leveraging other complementary initiatives to reach and empower more adolescent girls. In 2025, Global Programme and complementary investments reached over 45,000 adolescent girls through life-skills, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), literacy, and empowerment interventions, strengthening national coverage, avoiding duplication, and amplifying the overall impact of efforts to prevent child marriage.

91 Behaviour change was measured through observations and also attendance records across the different platforms that were used to reach out to adolescent girls.

92 Based on the observed increased level of reporting of cases by the girls and feedback from the interaction of the implementing partners with the girls, who testify how they are able to navigate their way out of situations and insist on pushing on with their education. No objective measurement was done.

EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND BOYS THROUGH SPORTS

In several Global Programme countries, the power of sports is being harnessed to create change by empowering adolescent girls and boys.

Sports for Development (S4D) has proven to be a powerful game changer[93] in preventing violence and child marriage in **Bangladesh**. By creating safe spaces where girls can build confidence, resilience, and leadership skills, S4D directly challenges harmful gender norms and empowers adolescents to envision alternatives to early marriage. The programme, offered to girls (70 to 80 per cent of participants) and boys, integrates physical activity with life skills, community engagement, and mental health support, offering a holistic model that strengthens families and transforms attitudes. Evidence shows that structured sports have prevented thousands of child marriages, while simultaneously fostering positive masculinities among boys and allies. As a gender-transformative approach, S4D not only protects children from violence and harmful practices but also lays the foundation for equitable, empowered communities.

In **Zambia,** boys are engaged through sports in a programme called **Coaching Boys into Men (CBIM)**, as part of efforts to promote positive masculinity. Introduced in 2020 within the Global Programme, CBIM is a comprehensive, evidence-based initiative that encourages community coaches to influence their young athletes on gender equality, respect for others, and the understanding that violence is never a sign of strength and that violence against women and girls is unacceptable. This sports-based, life-skills approach was also integrated into the girls' mentorship programme. In total, 6,587 girls participated in mentorship activities led by volunteer female coaches in their communities, while 12,555 boys took part in CBIM sessions. Community- and school-based mentorship sessions have proven effective in building girls' agency and self-expression. This impact was highlighted during a visit by the head of the Canadian delegation to Sesheke, where girls confidently discussed the drivers of child marriage and explained how the skills and knowledge acquired through mentorship clubs have empowered them to avoid early marriage and pregnancy.

In **Mozambique**, girls are healing from violence through capoeira. Jamila is a 13-year girl who was sexually assaulted by her stepfather. Following her assault, International Child Development Programme (ICDP), a Global Programme implementing partner, and the District Services for Health, Women, and Social Action supported her with medical aid, psychosocial support and school reintegration while the police were after her stepfather, who had fled. Jamila didn't yet have the words to name what she had endured. It was only when she joined the Capoeira programme in Muelege that her healing began. Through the rhythm of the music, the strength of the movements, and the stories woven into the songs, she began to understand. *"After I joined, so much changed,"* she says. *"I met people I never imagined I would meet, and I learned things I once thought were impossible."* With the support of Capoeira instructors, Jamila discovered her own strength. She learned to perform movements she had believed were only for boys. But it was the visit of a female capoeira instructor, Mana Simba, that truly transformed her. *"When Mana Simba came, she changed the way I think. I never believed we, as women, could do what men do. She changed our lives."* Today, Jamila is an active and passionate participant in Capoeira and is proud to tell her story. What began as a physical activity became a path to healing, empowerment, and hope — a journey from silence to strength.



93 UNICEF, *Game Changers: How sports empower girls to end child marriage in Bangladesh*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/reports/game-changers

Table 3: Number of girls (10-19) supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school

Indicator 1121: Number of girls (10-19) supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school

	2024	2025	2025
Country	**Results**	**Targets**	**Results**
Bangladesh	129,036	45,581	121,672
Burkina Faso	7,038	5,000	4,625
Ethiopia	61,691	54,503	62,314
Ghana	12,170	15,000	76,267
India	8,215,181	92,200	9,283,846
Mozambique	2,234	2,000	2,942
Nepal	3,042	2,500	1,102
Niger	10,678	4,480	17,890
Sierra Leone	3,395	3,500	4,852
Uganda	18,914	87,885	166,470
Yemen	132	200	72
Zambia	11,214	25,607	15,631
Total	**8,474,725**	**338,456**	**9,757,683**

Keeping girls in school (Indicator 1121): Keeping girls in school, particularly at the secondary level, has significant and lasting benefits, including delaying marriage, sexual debut and pregnancy, while improving health behaviours and strengthening girls' sense of agency. Supporting girls' secondary education through scalable measures such as cash and in-kind transfers can help prevent child marriage. When combined with "cash-plus" services, such as education, health or livelihood support, these programmes can further improve girls' safety, well-being and decision-making power[94].

In 2025, the Global Programme supported a total of **9,757,683 girls to enroll in and/or remain in primary or secondary school.** Once again, the impressive global achievement for this indicator is largely driven by India. In contrast to the previous indicator, most countries exceeded both their targets and their 2024 results, signalling significant progress and the value of investing in this key child marriage prevention strategy.

This year, a few Global Programme countries have significantly scaled up their achievements in this area since the start of Phase III. For instance, in **Niger**, 17,890 adolescent girls were supported to return to school - a 68 per cent increase since 2024, and four times their target. These better-than-expected results can be explained in part by the strengthening of collaboration with municipal education inspectorates, which has facilitated the identification and monitoring of girls who are not in school, have been excluded, or are repeating a year, thereby enabling targeted support for enrollment, reintegration, and retention in school. These results also reflects the combined effect of community engagement, mediation by village child protection committees, and increased parental involvement in girls' schooling, particularly during the transition from primary to secondary school—a period associated with an increased risk of child marriage. In the village of Kwarin Dawa (Maradi region), adolescent girls are staying in school longer and delaying marriage, thanks to community-led child protection and increased support for education. Since the introduction of the *Approche Communautaire de Protection de l'Enfant* (ACPE) approach which includes sustained community gatherings and dialogue, women in Kwarin Dawa have taken a leading role in community sensitisation, going door to door to discuss child marriage, education, and health. Parents now actively monitor their

94 UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence- Innocenti, *What works to prevent child marriage?*, https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/what-works-prevent-child-marriage

children's schooling, especially for girls, to prevent drop-out. This community-led approach has contributed to the near elimination of child marriage in the village. For Halima Kassou, a woman from the village, the strongest sign of progress is the presence of girls in classrooms. *"Girls are staying in school. They are no longer rushed into marriage. That is our biggest success."*

In **Ghana,** the Ministry of Education's *"Guidelines for Prevention of Pregnancy among School Girls and Facilitation of Re-Entry into School after Childbirth"* were implemented at the Senior High Schools (SHS) level for the first time since the guidelines were issued in 2018, with support from the Global Programme, expanding implementation beyond primary and junior high schools. A total of **76,267** girls were supported to enrol and remain in formal and non-formal education at the primary or secondary school level, significantly exceeding the target (15,000) by 5 times and the 2024 result (12,170) by 6 times due to a change in the implementation approach from a circuit-level to a school-based approach. During a district-level engagement, the Ghana Education Service (GES) officers recommended this approach to scale-up reach and increase the number of beneficiaries.

Only four implementing countries (Burkina Faso, Yemen, Nepal and Zambia) did not meet their target for this indicator. However, although **Zambia** did not meet its target for 2025, it did increase its reach by 39 per cent compared to 2024, therefore sustaining progress in this area. Particularly encouraging is the progress achieved in re-enrolling school drop-outs among both girls and boys. For example, a door-to-door outreach by adolescent mentorship groups in Chipata District traced 231 out-of-school girls across 657 households and helped them to return to school. Of the 231 girls who were reached, 111 were re-enrolled back to school. Community outreach and mentorship sessions in health facilities, schools, and communities continued to positively impact adolescents, especially those at risk or already married and/or pregnant. In 2025, a total of **1,714** (1,201 girls and 513 boys) out-of-school adolescents who had previously left school were supported by the Global Programme to re-enrol in school. This was a significant increase from the 531 adolescents who were re-enrolled in 2024. This further demonstrates that strengthening community outreach and building the capacity of community volunteers in case management, continues to deliver tangible benefits for adolescents at risk of child marriage. These promising results are reinforced at the national level, where increased social sector investment by the Government of Zambia, highlighted by a 23.6 per cent rise in the 2024/2025 budget, has contributed to reducing school drop-out rates, a key driver of child marriage. Expanded cash transfer programmes and the Keeping Girls in School (KGS) programme further reflect positive trends in education and health sector funding.

BACK TO SCHOOL: SUPPORTING GIRLS AND BOYS IN ZAMBIA

In **Zambia**, encouraging success stories have emerged around boys returning to school through programme-supported activities. In Mpulungu District, for example, a boy who joined a peer support club resisted family pressure to leave school for farming and instead chose to continue his education. Teachers trained through the programme have also played a critical role in mentoring adolescents, preventing school drop-out and facilitating the re-enrolment of adolescents who had previously left school. Overall, 3,253 teachers (1,683 female and 1,570 male) across 128 schools received training. Across programme implementation areas, trained guidance and counselling teachers have demonstrated strong commitment to supporting both at-risk girls and boys. In Mbala District, Jonathan, a 17-year-old boy who had dropped out of school and married, was supported to return to school by guidance and counselling teachers, with support from the school head teacher. Reflecting on his experience, he noted: *"People always protect girls, but boys also need support. The girl continued school immediately, but I stayed home because I had no encouragement until the teacher found me."*

Burkina Faso had a target of supporting the school enrollment of 5,000 adolescent girls in 2025. With 4,625 girls supported (including 929 internally displaced girls, 53 girls with disabilities, and 108 girls who had returned home), the country nevertheless achieved 93 per cent of its target. This support covered registration fees, school supplies, uniforms, school meals, and other essential needs. To ensure that the most vulnerable girls, particularly those living more than 5 km from their school, remained in school, 726 bicycles were distributed, reducing the risks associated with long distances and improving school attendance. Despite a 34 per cent decrease in reach compared with 2024, the Global Programme in Burkina Faso prioritized support for girls' education as a critical prevention strategy, helping protect adolescent girls from the long-term risks of child marriage. In **Yemen**, only 36 per cent of the target was reached for this indicator in 2025, and the reach was halved compared to 2024, due to damaged infrastructure, insecurity, and humanitarian pauses affecting education services. In **Nepal**, only 44 per cent of the target was reached, and the result reflects a 64 per cent decrease for this indicator compared to 2024, most likely due to funding cuts.

3.1.2 Fostering a supportive family and community environment

For girls' empowerment to be effective, it must be accompanied by efforts to address the harmful social and gender norms that limit their agency. This includes engaging parents, community leaders, and boys and men to raise awareness of the impacts of child marriage and promote more equitable gender attitudes. Challenging harmful masculinities and strengthening collective commitment to gender equality helps build community support to end child marriage. This creates an enabling family and community environment for girls to exercise their rights and realize their potential.

Table 4: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms which are supported by the Global Programme

Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms which are supported by the Global Programme

	2024	2025	2025
Country	**Results**	**Targets**	**Results**
Bangladesh	1,473,175	500,000	555,194
Burkina Faso	67,351	37,000	112,888
Ethiopia	84,583	55,837	92,453
Ghana	16,866	11,200	16,675
India	2,856,806	2,606,900	4,477,051
Mozambique	64,376	64,300	65,031
Nepal	14,595	7,500	6,905
Niger	52,852	23,280	174,432
Sierra Leone	10,463	7,000	13,848
Uganda	91,067	124,425	155,008
Yemen	17,125	15,000	10,224
Zambia	22,995	15,128	36,930
Total	**4,772,254**	**3,467,570**	**5,716,639**

Engaging boys and men in positive masculinities (Indicator 1211): Engaging men and boys through gender-transformative programmes (including CSE for boys) that promote healthy relationships and positive masculinities and gender equality is a vital component to ending child marriage. It challenges harmful norms and creates a supportive environment for girls to pursue education and personal development, breaking the cycle of gender inequality. In 2025 , a total of **5,716,639 men and boys actively participated in group education and dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms**, up from 4,772,254 in 2024, with most results coming from **India** (over 4.4 million) and **Bangladesh** (555,194, down from over 1.4 million in 2024).

Most programme countries (8 out of 12) exceeded both their targets and their 2024 results, reflecting a growing focus on engaging boys and men as allies, as a key gender-transformative strategy.

For instance, in **Niger**, **174,432** boys and men were enrolled in gender-transformative programmes and attended regularly, a 230 per cent increase since 2024. In **Burkina Faso**, community dialogues reached **269,939** people, including 83,490 men and 36,111 boys, fostering collective awareness. Programme monitoring has shown that an increasing number of men now recognize marriage before the age of 18 as a violation of children's rights, citing its negative impacts on health, marital stability, and household finances. A total of 112,888 men and boys (including 27,502 internally displaced persons, 279 living with disabilities and 970 returnees) participated in activities promoting positive masculinity (an increase of 68 per cent since 2024). Among them, 50,265 boys were supported within youth clubs, where the activity guide helped to strengthen their understanding of girls' rights and their role in preventing harmful practices.

In Mozambique, male mentors are actively changing norms and helping stop violence and child marriage. Through the male mentorship programme in 2025, across the three target provinces of the Global Programme, a total of 268 cases of early unions and 6 cases of sexual and physical violence were reported and referred by the male mentors to the Gabinetes de Atendimento à Família e Menores Vítimas de Violência (GAFMVV)[95] and Social Action[96], of which 49 cases of child marriage were successfully closed before the end of the year.

In Ethiopia, 92,453 boys and men were reached—166 per cent of the annual target of 55,837—through dialogue sessions promoting positive masculinities and gender equality, using tools such as the nationally endorsed *"Empowering Allies: A Manual For Male Engagement to Promote Gender Equality, End Child Marriage and FGM"* for age groups 10-14, 15-19, and 20 and above. The high level of engagement reflects the Global Programme's partnerships with organizations with broad memberships and constituencies, enabling outreach to large numbers. Moreover, the Endline Evaluation of **Ethiopia**'s National Costed Roadmap (2020–2024) (MoWSA, 2025) found that engaging men and boys was a critical driver of change, shifting the framing of child marriage from a "women's issue" to a shared societal responsibility. This approach broadened ownership of efforts to end the practice. As boys in the Somali Region explained: *"At first friends laughed when we refused child marriage, but we stood together and told them it harms girls. When boys unite, the group listens."*

Family and community engagement (Indicator 1221): In 2025, a total of **14,158,728 individuals (girls, women, boys and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, girls' rights, and gender equality**, exceeding the global target of 5,360,732.

However, this marks a sharp decline from 29,570,565 in 2024, driven mainly by **India,** where the number of people reached fell from 24.3 million in 2024 to 11.9 million in 2025. In India, the reduction in targets and reach for group education and community dialogue reflects the need to balance declining resources with more strategic prioritization of interventions expected to yield the greatest impact. While these community-based activities have been scaled down, the programme is strengthening other gender-transformative initiatives that reach marginalized adolescent girls at scale, such as girl-centred life skills programmes, efforts to keep girls in school, and the engagement of boys as allies, through schools, existing government systems, and other community platforms. Complementing this approach, the Global Programme in India is adopting a risk-based prevention model, moving away from broad geographic community interventions to a more focused approach based on vulnerability mapping to identify high-risk families, out-of-school adolescents, and migration-prone households. With this approach, the programme aims to provide early, targeted support through social protection services, thereby preventing child marriage before it occurs. For similar reasons linked to the prioritization of girl-centred interventions (as discussed in section 3.1.1), **Bangladesh** also reported a significant decline for this indicator, reaching 315,000 individuals compared with 3,507,848 in 2024.

Some country offices have identified ways to mobilize communities despite funding constraints. For example, in

95 GAFMVV translates to Offices for Assistance to Families and Minor Victims of Violence.
96 In Mozambique, "Social Action" refers to the provincial and district Social Action Services, the local government structures responsible for social protection and welfare programmes under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action (MGCAS).

Burkina Faso, limited resources have reduced the ability to organize dedicated community-level interventions. As a result, community mobilization approaches have been adapted, with Global Programme partners leveraging existing community gatherings, such as traditional festivals, ceremonies and market days, to raise awareness, expanding outreach while reducing mobilization costs. **Niger** witnessed impressive increases in the reach of community mobilization initiatives in 2025. In addition to the previously mentioned increase in the engagement of boys and men, 19,090 traditional and religious leaders, women, and girls in village leadership positions supported initiatives in their communities to promote lasting behavioural change (a 140 per cent increase since 2024); and 374,281 people participated in community sessions and dialogues (a 49 per cent increase since 2024). Community leaders and families reported that child marriage has significantly decreased, and in some cases has nearly been eliminated, in several villages, with the age of marriage rising. These changes were attributed to community-led mechanisms, including Village Child Protection Committees. While this represents a promising outcome, it should be confirmed through independent monitoring. These results were made possible by several key strategic shifts in programming that began in 2024 and gained momentum in 2025. These include promoting a national agenda for adolescent girls, building on the Global Programme co-leadership of the National Platform to End Child Marriage, which mobilizes civil society organizations and the government to implement the National Strategic Plan to End Child Marriage (2024–2028); expanding strategic partnerships, including with community-based women's self-help groups and the education sector; and scaling up village-level child protection committees as a core intervention across all regions, including those affected by humanitarian crises where child marriage rates remain high. In addition, the programme leveraged established community structures and prioritized more cost-effective implementation methods, such as peer education platforms and girls' groups. The strengthened collaboration with municipal education inspectorates and Village Child Protection Committees enabled more targeted and less costly interventions, while alignment with complementary initiatives such as Mata Masu Dubara helped amplify impacts on household economic resilience. Furthermore, the increased engagement of traditional and religious leaders has accelerated and strengthened shifts in social norms. A stronger partnership with the Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger, which recently renewed its leadership, gave new impetus to the work of traditional chiefs across the country. Together, these factors help explain why, despite the constraints, the results achieved this year were significantly higher than expected.

Ghana successfully leveraged a systems-strengthening approach to exceed its targets for the engagement of men and boys (indicator 1211) and communities (indicator 1221), while maintaining results close to 2024 levels for both indicators despite funding constraints**.** With the evidence generated by the gender analysis of social and behaviour change programming for ending child marriage[97], new content for the Child Protection Community Facilitation Toolkits (CP toolkits) was developed to address emerging needs, including strengthening and systematizing the engagement of men and boys to promote positive masculinities and healthy relationships. Complemented by key messages delivered on social and mass media through the Ghanaians Against Social Abuse (GACA) social drive/campaign, the Global Programme engaged a total of 236,719 parents and caregivers and community members (compared to 245,321 in 2024) as well as 16,675 men and boys (compared to 16,866 in 2024) across 210 districts (over 80 per cent of all districts) mainly through interpersonal dialogue using the CP Toolkits. The scale-up was made possible through integration of SBC and community engagement into a system-strengthening approach, namely the Integrated Social Service (ISS), as well as strategic partnerships with the private sector, civil society and development partners trained to expand community engagement in their own geographical areas with their own funding.

In **Uganda**, the Global Programme reached and engaged adolescent girls and boys, cultural and religious leaders, and parents to challenge harmful notions around child marriage through multiple locally owned approaches. For example, in hard-to-reach and high-burden regions such as Karamoja, Elgon and Sebei, the programme engaged community gatekeepers, cultural institutions, and religious leaders to address entrenched gender and social norms. Interventions were adapted to local contexts through human-centred community theatre, male-engagement platforms, and mentorship initiatives led by youth and women's groups. Community-based mentors, influencers and youth volunteers conducted door-to-door household visits to engage with adolescent girls, parents and care givers, identify out-of-school girls, pregnant girls, and girls who had previously dropped out due to marriage. Through early-warning mechanisms involving teachers,

97 The gender analysis of social and behaviour change (SBC) programming for ending child marriage was conducted jointly by UNFPA and UNICEF Ghana with the support from the Global Programme to End Child Marriage, as well as headquarters, WCARO and the Strategic Technical Assistance for Research (STAR) Initiative to End Harmful Practices. The objective was to assess the design and implementation of the existing SBC interventions with the Gender Transformative Accelerator Tool, and generate recommendations that can make these interventions more context-specific and gender transformative for further scale-up. Key findings were validated through consultation with key stakeholders in 2025. The final report will be available in the first quarter of 2026.

parish chiefs, cultural leaders, parasocial workers and Village Health Team (VHTs), several girls at imminent risk of early marriage were identified and supported to return to school or access child protection services, while their parents and caregivers were enrolled in the parenting programme and linked to other government social protection programmes. These locally owned approaches ensured inclusive participation, especially for girls who were out of school, married early, or at risk.

Despite the reduced reach of group-level interventions, **Bangladesh** accelerated shifts in household-level attitudes and behaviours that prevent child marriage through the scale-up of the Social Protection Plus (SP+) model—the first Norm Shift Accelerator of its kind in the Asia-Pacific region— an approach which has shown promising results in 2025. By layering structured norm-change activities onto existing government social protection schemes led by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), the programme reached more than 315,000 marginalized women and girls in 64 districts. Pre- and post-intervention assessments showed substantial shifts in attitudes and behaviours, with 89 per cent of participating caregivers prioritizing girls' education and delaying marriage. Household dynamics also improved, including stronger parent–child communication, increased support for girls' schooling, more equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities, and a rise in women's participation in financial decision-making from 33.8 per cent to 79.5 per cent.

In **Zambia,** the Government approved the Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) Plan, which prioritizes shifting gender norms to prevent child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and other harmful practices. The plan also promotes family-based care and aims to increase demand for birth registration. Developed through the participation of multiple government agencies and non-governmental partners, the SBC Plan was officially endorsed by the Minister for Community Development and Social Services. In addition, a creative agency was recruited to co-create a range of SBC materials and content, including a comic book on the Children's Code Act and community dialogue tools such as posters on ending child marriage, gender-based violence (GBV) and teenage pregnancy, as well as promoting family-based care and birth registration. The behaviour change campaign tagline, "*Mwana Ni Munthu"* ("A Child is a Person"), succinctly conveys the campaign's core message: children have the right to protection and their rights must be respected regardless of age. It also highlights the importance of recognizing children's agency and ensuring their meaningful participation. The co-created content will be rolled out in communities across at least 50 of the country's 116 districts in 2026.



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POSITIVE PARENTING AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Initiatives that engage parents and caregivers in positive parenting practices are a critical and effective strategy for protecting and empowering adolescent girls and preventing child marriage. In **Mozambique** a Training of Trainers (TOT) targeting 27 social workers and psychologists resulted in initial parenting sessions for 1,283 parents and caregivers of children at risk of, and rescued from, child marriage, as well as survivors of violence. These sessions enhanced awareness and promoted active caregiver engagement during the family reintegration process, as well as for the prevention of child marriage through community-based protection mechanisms. Artur Polasse, a participant in the Positive Parenting group and a leader of the Community Child Protection Committee in a village in the Milange district of Zambezia province, reflects on a painful chapter in his life and the profound transformation that followed his participation in Positive Parenting sessions. Artur explains that the sessions gave him new knowledge and fundamentally changed the way he relates to his children. Today, he makes time to be present with them, showing affection, offering hugs, and supporting them with schoolwork.

Recalling the most difficult moment, Artur says, *"When the International Child Development Programme (ICDP)*[98] *came to my house with Social Action, I thought I was going to receive food assistance. Instead, they told me that my daughter was no longer with her grandmother, had stopped studying, and was living in another man's house and suffering. Everything stopped. I could not think. After many meetings and with the involvement of the police, I managed to bring my daughter back. I learned so much about how to protect my children."* Artur became an active agent for change in his community.

He now supports efforts to prevent early unions and promote the protection of children's rights. As an activist, he conducts awareness talks at the local health unit for parents who are not yet part of the Positive Parenting groups, sharing his experience and encouraging more caring and protective parenting practices. Recognized as an influential figure in the community, Artur went a step further by making part of his own land available for the construction of a house where Community Child Protection Committee sessions are now held. This gesture reflects not only his strong commitment to the cause but also his determination to ensure a safer and more hopeful future for the children in his community.

In **Sierra Leone**, Positive Parenting Education (PPE) programmes reached 19,800 parents and caregivers (11,783 mothers and 8,017 fathers), reinforcing non-violent caregiving practices and strengthening protective parenting. Pre- and post-assessment data demonstrate a marked improvement in parents' understanding of positive parenting practices. For example, the proportion of parents who agreed or strongly agreed that "praising a child's good behaviour is an effective way to encourage positive behaviour" increased from 63 per cent at baseline to 96 per cent at endline. Similarly, the proportion of parents demonstrating medium to high levels of understanding of practices that are harmful to adolescents increased from 15 per cent to 65 per cent. Feedback from PPE sessions suggests increased endorsement and use of non-violent discipline, improved parent child communication, and stronger parental support for girls' schooling. Parents reported greater understanding of the risks associated with early marriage and demonstrated increased willingness to delay marriage in favour of education.

These shifts at household level are critical intermediate outcomes, as family decision-making remains a primary determinant of child marriage. Fatmata Kamara, a 34-year-old single mother in Makeni, transformed her parenting approach after attending PPE sessions: "*I used to think discipline meant control. But now I know it's about connection and guidance. My son listens more because he feels seen, not because he's afraid.*" Her story illustrates how positive parenting creates safer, more supportive family environments, reinforcing the changes experienced by adolescent girls.

98 ICDP is a Global Programme implementing partner in Mozambique, delivering case management, capoeira, positive parenting and other programme components.

Mobilizing local actors to end child marriage (Indicator 1223): In 2025, a total of **1,156,705 local actors (traditional, religious, community) were mobilized** by the Global Programme to advocate for an end to child marriage, down from 2,984,336 in 2024. As with some other indicators, this sharp decline was driven mainly by India, where 950,426 local actors were engaged in 2025, compared with 2,868,612 in 2024. The reasons for this decline are likely similar to those affecting Indicator 1221 with countries prioritizing the investments in systems for sustaining progress at scale. By contrast, engagement of local community leaders increased in other implementing countries, in some cases substantially, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger, Sierra Leone and Uganda. This points to differing programmatic choices across country contexts, with some country offices relying more heavily on influential local leaders as a key entry point for shifting social norms and fostering community commitment to ending child marriage.

- ***Faith and traditional leaders:*** In **Zambia**, the Global Programme continued to intensify its engagement with faith leaders, recognizing their unique power to drive change that supports both cultural norms and legal enforcement. For example, the Global Programme collaborated with the Zambia Anglican Council Outreach Programme (ZACOP) which held a capacity-building workshop that brought together over twenty-five leading faith leaders from the country to share experiences and confront the serious reality of child marriage. In **Burkina Faso**, 1,098 Muslim imams and preachers were trained in the use of a preaching guide on female genital mutilation and child marriage. Following this training, all publicly announced that they would no longer perform marriages involving girls under the age of 18, and several have effectively refused to perform at least five child marriages. One of the major achievements for **Yemen** in 2025 was the systematic engagement of influential community and institutional actors to address the root causes of child marriage. A total of 309 religious leaders, teachers, elders, judges, and legal trustees were engaged through structured dialogues and capacity-building initiatives, becoming champions for girls' protection within their communities. Religious leaders played a critical role in reframing child marriage as harmful to girls' health, education, and dignity, grounding prevention messages in religious and cultural values that resonated locally. Teachers and community leaders reinforced these messages through schools and community platforms, contributing to increased acceptance of prevention efforts and stronger community ownership.

- ***The role of the media in ECM:*** In **Bangladesh**, the Global Programme strengthened the role of local media as a system-level norm-shaping institution. District-level training with journalists produced measurable shifts in attitudes toward gender equality and violence, increased readiness to report child marriage from a rights-based perspective, and high professional commitment to challenging harmful norms. Through an apprenticeship programme with Bangladesh's largest Bangla daily, Prothom Alo on ECM Reporting, apprentice journalists were supported to produce high-quality, evidence-based reporting. The apprentices published more than 10 reports focusing on child marriage, violence against children and women, online safety for children and girls, and relevant laws and policies, contributing to increased public awareness and informed public discourse. Similarly in **Mozambique**, AMODEFA (Mozambican Association for Family Development), a women-led NGO established in 1989, partnered with journalists and news outlets to disseminate key messages on ECM, and implemented two trainings for media outlets and journalists. Following the conclusion of the two trainings, AMODEFA created a media network for the prevention of gender-based violence and early unions with all participants. The network is made up of journalists at both the central and provincial levels, committed to the prevention of early unions and the promotion of the rights of children and girls. Through the network, the members can continue receiving technical support from AMODEFA and also serve as a means to share relevant information and published content. Going forward, in 2026, small in-kind/monetary competitions will be launched within the network to incentivize members to draft and publish informative and ethical content relating to the rights of women and girls, gender equality, and SBC communication to end harmful practices, including child marriage and GBV.

Supporting and engaging women-led and youth-led CSOs (Indicator 1231): In 2025, the Global Programme **financially supported 2,252 women-led or youth-led CSOs** (Indicator 1231(i)), 2,100 of them in Ethiopia[99]. It also **convened 2,013 women-led or youth-led CSOs through non-financial support** to advance the end child marriage agenda (Indicator 1231(ii)), including 1,067 in India.

In **Ethiopia**, the Global Programme is partnering with and financially supporting the Network of Ethiopian Women's

99 In Ethiopia, most of these CSOs are local grassroots community structures, such as Women Development Groups, which operate in villages across the country. Global Programme funding was channelled through the regional Bureaus of Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA), which then provided technical and financial support to government-recognized community-led structures, including Women Development Units/Unions and youth groups, across 10 regions and 73 districts.

Associations (NEWA) through a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) agreement established in late 2024, and running until June 2026[100]. This partnership empowers women-led associations and community structures to strengthen grassroots and upstream movements aimed at ending child marriage, FGM, and violence against children. Operating in Amhara, Oromia, and Somali regions and at the federal level, NEWA focuses on capacity-building, advocacy, and social norm change. In parallel, Women Development Groups, Women's Associations, and Youth Associations are mobilized by regional bureaus of women and social affairs (BoWSA) with technical and financial support from UNICEF and UNFPA. These groups led community sensitization and outreach, promoted gender equality and prevented harmful practices through training, gender-transformative dialogues, learning platforms and advocacy campaigns. They also function as reporting and referral mechanisms, linking cases of child marriage to appropriate prevention and response services. Through these coordinated actions, women-led and youth-led organizations are driving systemic change and creating safe, empowering environments for girls. Despite disruptions caused by conflict and infrastructure damage, revitalization efforts include capacity building, provision of materials, and inclusion in program review and planning processes. The programme strengthens women alliances, WDG leaders, women-of-faith groups, youth platforms, and informal networks to identify at-risk girls, facilitate peer education, lead community dialogues, and report planned child marriages. In addition, 446 women-led or youth-led groups were convened, 360 of which were women-led groups established to strengthen community surveillance. They participated in trainings and workshops aimed at ending child marriage, strengthening reporting and community monitoring mechanisms, and building their capacity to support survivors.

In **India**, in Kutch, Gujarat, the Sathvaro programme is a gender-transformative initiative implemented with the feminist organization Institute for Social Action Research (ISAR), with strong grassroots legitimacy and recognition within district systems. Documented as a best practice, Sathvaro adopts a socio-ecological approach to shift harmful gender and social norms through phased community engagement, adolescent empowerment, and girls' leadership platforms such as Balika Panchayat, while actively engaging boys, community leaders, and district institutions. The programme aligns with government priorities and contributes to outcomes across child protection, education, and social policy.

In **Nepal**, the Global Programme has strengthened youth engagement and youth-led action to prevent child marriage. In 2025, the emergence of the Gen Z movement, which has demonstrated young people's growing mobilization capacity and political awareness, has created new opportunities to work more closely with youth-led organizations and channel youth activism toward constructive civic engagement on issues such as child marriage, protection and gender equality. At the national level, UNFPA supported the development of the National Youth Policy 2025 (2082) in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, mobilizing youth-led platforms such as the National CSE Advocacy Coalition to contribute to policy discussions. This ensured that priorities including adolescent rights, youth leadership, gender equality and access to youth-friendly services were reflected in the policy, creating a more enabling environment for youth- and women-led organizations to address harmful practices. At the community level, the programme strengthens youth leadership through the Rupantaran platform by supporting youth-led networks and building skills in leadership, advocacy and social mobilization. For example, the Gaur Youth Network in Madhesh Province has led community campaigns against child marriage through door-to-door outreach, rallies, street dramas and school awareness sessions. In Lumbini Province, Rupantaran facilitators established the Suddodhan Adolescents and Youth Network, which now conducts similar community awareness activities in coordination with the local government. The programme has also expanded access to life skills education through partnerships with youth platforms. Collaboration with Nepal Scouts linked completion of the digital Rupantaran course to scouting achievement points, encouraging volunteer-led promotion and increasing youth participation across communities.

100 This partnership covers both Joint Programmes (the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM).

BRIDGING BELIEFS AND ACTIONS: *WHY STRONG OPPOSITION TO CHILD MARRIAGE IN UGANDA HASN'T BEEN ENOUGH TO REDUCE THE PRACTICE*

A new social norms baseline study on child marriage in **Uganda**, where child marriage persists due to poverty, financial barriers to schooling, and teenage pregnancy, indicates that the Global Programme is contributing to meaningful shifts in attitudes and expectations around child marriage at the individual level. Conducted across 16 of the 19 target districts with 3,129 respondents, the study found strong and widespread opposition to the practice: more than 90 per cent reported that families, peers and communities support its abandonment. However, a persistent gap remains between personal beliefs and the perception of what others do or expect them to do. As a result, people continue to engage in child marriage while personally disagreeing with it, because they think that those who matter to them expect them to do it or they themselves are doing it. This dynamic reflects "pluralistic ignorance", a phenomenon in which many individuals privately oppose a practice but continue to conform because they believe others support or expect it, thereby limiting collective action.This powerful insight will help shape programming to focus on exposing personal beliefs and dismantle the incorrect perception that everyone agrees with, practices and expects others to practice child marriage.

The study also revealed that while girls and women generally oppose child marriage, entrenched gender norms and male-dominated decision-making limit their influence over marriage outcomes, and adolescents, particularly girls, remain the least engaged in community or household discussions on the issue. Systems-level gaps were also identified, including weak awareness of the legal age of marriage and limited understanding of penalties. Although communities rely heavily on local leaders, local government and police to intervene, these actors often lack adequate support, training and integration into referral systems.

Overall, the evidence suggests that while normative change is underway, broader transformation of gender power relations, economic incentives and enforcement systems is still needed for these gains to translate into measurable reductions in child marriage. The findings reinforce the Global Programme in Uganda's dual-track approach, combining sustained engagement with community influencers with stronger governance systems and gender-responsive budgeting to institutionalize change.



3.2 BUILDING RESILIENT AND RESPONSIVE SYSTEMS

Intermediate Outcome 2000 aims to strengthen key systems (such as health, education, GBV prevention and response, social protection, and child protection) to deliver quality services and empower adolescents to access and use them effectively.

3.2.1 Strengthening systems

This immediate outcome area focuses on enhancing the capacity of education, health, GBV prevention and response, social protection, and child protection systems - across both development and humanitarian settings - to deliver gender-responsive services to adolescent girls. To deliver on this outcome, the Global Programme leverages existing government and civil society initiatives, which not only amplifies reach but also leads to more sustainable results through stronger national systems.

Supporting educational institutions to provide quality gender-responsive education (Indicator 2111): In the educational sector, the Global Programme increased the capabilities of **121,793 primary, secondary and non-formal educational** institutions through various measures that enabled them to foster a gender-responsive environment (including life skills and CSE education) in 2025, a significant increase from 3,578 in 2024. The result was driven largely by **India**, which accounted for 118,597 institutions overall. Of these, UNFPA India supported 102,929 schools to roll out gender-responsive life skills education, reaching 6.4 million adolescents. This was made possible through strengthened partnerships with the Adolescent Health Division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which enabled the expansion of adolescent services across multiple states and helped leverage key initiatives such as gender-responsive life skills education. The Global Programme in India is also helping to transform adolescent health education at the national level. Through technical support to the Ministry, flagship programmes, the School Health and Wellness Programme (SHWP) and Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), were updated and expanded to address key and emerging drivers of child marriage. In particular, the national RKSK Peer Education Resource Package was revised in line with global comprehensive sexuality education standards, as set out in the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE), to integrate topics such as consent, respectful relationships, gender equality, prevention of child marriage, supportive male behaviour, mental well-being and safe digital practices. This updated package enabled training of nearly 200 national and state trainers, initiating a cascade that will, in 2026, train 600,000 peer educators, expected to reach 15 million adolescents, including those at heightened risk of child marriage.

In **Sierra Leone**, the delivery of life skills was expanded in 2025 for in-school adolescents at the Senior Secondary School (SSS) level, which led to 23,169 adolescents (of whom 13,095 were girls) from 80 Senior Secondary Schools benefiting from school-based life skills delivered through five core subjects (Mathematics, Entrepreneurship, English, Social Studies, and Environmental Studies) taught by trained classroom teachers. This expansion was made possible through a partnership with the Ministry of Education for case management for school absenteeism, a partnership which also facilitated integration of life skills into school curricula and the rollout of CSE in schools, strengthened referral pathways, and supported community engagement. Prior to this change of strategy, life skills education was limited to safe spaces for girls. This intervention ensured stronger alignment between in-school learning and community-based programmes for out-of-school adolescents. By combining classroom instruction with community safe-space activities, the initiative strengthened adolescents' critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. It expanded girls' aspirations, supported informed decision-making, and reduced vulnerability to child marriage. These efforts also contributed to improved student engagement and learning outcomes, while complementing ongoing Safe Space activities at the community level.

In **Ethiopia**, achievements in strengthening education institutions exceeded targets, with 788 schools capacitated against an annual target of 680 (116 per cent achievement). This result reflects prior investments in training and the distribution of learning materials, benefiting schools serving more than 600,000 students. Capacity-building in the education sector included training 2,312 teachers (1,064 female) on inclusive education and gender-responsive pedagogy, while 765 education professionals (403 female) completed Training of Trainers (ToT) on Life Skills Education, enabling knowledge to cascade at school level. Gender clubs were further strengthened through training and materials, and 36 schools were equipped with mini-media systems that reached 19,000 students (11,400 male and 7,600 female) with messages promoting girls' education and preventing school-related gender-based violence and child marriage. In addition, menstrual health training enabled 35 adolescent girls to produce reusable sanitary pads, helping reduce absenteeism and improve school retention.

Providing adolescent-responsive health, child protection and GBV services (Indicator 2121): In 2025, the Global Programme significantly enhanced the capacities of **4,914 service delivery points** (down from 7,007 in 2024) to improve access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health, child protection and GBV response services (Indicator 2121 (i)). Despite the drop in the number of delivery points compared to the start of Phase III, **a total of 5,507,860 girls**

and boys in programme areas accessed prevention and protection services (Indicator 2121 (ii)), up from 2,532,021 in 2024. This year, this achievement was mainly driven by India (4,322,564 girls and boys reached, compared to 925,825 in 2024), followed by Ghana (606,664, up from 57,600 in 2024), both through a significant scale-up of existing government systems. The overall decline in the number of service delivery points under indicator 2121(i) did not reduce adolescent reach under indicator 2121(ii), because in several Global Programme countries, stronger-performing existing systems, better integration across sectors, and strengthened referral pathways through trained life skills facilitators and school teachers increased awareness, confidence and uptake of services, enabling existing service points to reach far more adolescents, as shown in the examples of India, Ghana and Nepal below. By contrast, in some other countries, funding cuts led to reductions in both targets and reach.

In **India,** the sharp increase in the number of girls and boys reached with protection and prevention services since the start of Phase III was achieved not through a major expansion in service delivery points, which rose only modestly from 1,086 in 2024 to 1,224 in 2025, but through strengthening the functionality, inclusiveness and reach of existing systems. To address persistent vulnerabilities linked to adolescent pregnancy, menstrual hygiene, and SRHR, the Global Programme supported several states to strengthen adolescent health, SRH and menstrual health and hygiene systems through school- and community-based platforms, with a focus on prevention, early action and continuity of care. UNFPA also strengthened adolescent-responsive health systems by upgrading four government Adolescent-Friendly Health Centres (AFHCs) in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha and Rajasthan as disability-inclusive demonstration sites, with accessible infrastructure, assistive devices, inclusive IEC materials, and training for 72 counsellors and frontline staff. At the state level, this translated into broader coverage and higher service uptake. In Madhya Pradesh, more than 300 fully functional AFHCs were supported across all 52 districts, up from 205 in 2024, reaching over 1 million adolescents annually with integrated SRH, mental health, nutrition, sexually transmitted infection (STI)/ reproductive tract infection (RTI) and counselling services. In Odisha, over 562 AFHCs were operational in 2025, up from 488 in 2024, serving 145,296 adolescents, including 89,132 girls. UNICEF also strengthened child protection and community-level systems, including in Uttar Pradesh, where all 75 Hubs for Women Empowerment under Mission Shakti became fully functional, improving coordination and access to GBV response services and helplines.

Similarly, in **Ghana**, the Global Programme achieved important gains in service delivery, reflecting a stronger and more responsive system capable of reaching far more adolescents with critical protection and prevention services. As in India, Ghana significantly expanded its reach to adolescent girls and boys with protection and prevention services despite only a modest increase in the total number of health and GBV/child protection (GBV/CP) service delivery points, from 1,542 in 2024 to 1,670 in 2025. In 2025, the programme supported 1,485 health service delivery points, up from 1,374 in 2024 (exceeding the target of 650 by about 129 per cent), as well as 185 GBV/CP service points, up from 168 in 2024 (exceeding the target of 148 by 25 per cent). As a result, **a total of 593,270 girls accessed health services (over 15 times the target),** while 13,394 girls and boys (including 9,418 girls) received GBV/CP services. This success was possible by leveraging government-led large-scale initiatives, particularly the Safety Net Programme, and strengthening existing health systems. Through the Safety Net Programme, implemented by the Ghana Health Service with support from UNICEF Ghana, 589,093 adolescent girls, including 45,045 pregnant girls, married girls, and girls at risk of child marriage, received adolescent sexual and reproductive health services. The programme expanded from 1,224 service points in 50 districts to 1,285 service points in 60 districts in five target regions (Northern, North East, Upper East, Savannah and Central). Services included antenatal care, skilled delivery, postnatal care, home visits, and referrals to mental health, social welfare and education services. Complementing these efforts, UNFPA supported the implementation of the Ghana Health Service National Guidelines and Standards for Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Health Services across 200 service delivery points in four target regions, reaching 4,177 girls with essential health information and services, including education on bodily autonomy, menstrual hygiene management and contraceptive counselling and services.

In **Nepal**, the number of adolescents reached with prevention and protection services increased sharply to 59,853 in 2025, compared with 17,446 in 2024, even though the number of delivery points remained almost unchanged (294 in 2025 versus 292 in 2024). This reflects not only stronger integration, quality and coordination across existing service platforms, but also rising adolescent uptake of available services, with the 2025 Annual Health Report showing increased use of SRH services across 1,599 adolescent-friendly health facilities nationwide. The Global Programme deepened the integration of child marriage prevention with GBV prevention and response and SRHR services, helping ensure that adolescents, particularly girls, could access a more coherent package of support. It also built the capacity of 745 Rupantaran facilitators to act as youth leaders, mentors and trusted community connectors, with increasing emphasis on mental health support.


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Thanks to enhanced psychosocial first aid skills and stronger coordination with schools, health facilities, One-Stop Crisis Management Centres (OCMCs) and protection services, these mainly young facilitators aged 19–24 helped create safe and inclusive learning spaces, strengthen age- and gender-responsive referral pathways, and improve early identification of concerns and linkages to psychosocial support. This was reinforced by practical efforts to build adolescents' confidence in using available services. A total of 5,192 adolescents participating in the Rupantaran life skills programme undertook exposure visits to OCMCs, Adolescent-Friendly Health Services (AFHS) and Women and Children Service Centres, helping bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real-life service access. By allowing adolescents to interact directly with service providers and better understand referral pathways, these visits helped demystify formal systems, reduce stigma and fear, build trust, and strengthen adolescents' confidence to seek support, report risks and refer peers. In parallel, training in CSE was provided to 112 teachers, contributing to the delivery of age-appropriate information to 3,676 adolescents and reinforcing referral linkages between schools and health facilities. Finally, the Global Programme complemented these efforts by supporting the certification of 10 AFHS in target districts and advocating across federal, provincial and local levels to strengthen implementation of adolescent-friendly health services in line with the National Health and Development Strategy. This certification strengthened service standards and helped ensure confidential, non-judgmental access to counselling, family planning, STI prevention and contraceptive services, demonstrating improved service quality and expanding adolescents' trusted access points within the health system.

In **Yemen**, progress under this outcome area focused on strengthening community-based and local institutional responses rather than national systems, given political fragmentation and weak state capacity. The programme supported 22 health, child protection, and GBV service delivery points, enabling 3,596 girls to access adolescent-responsive services, including health, psychosocial support, legal aid, and cash assistance. A key achievement in 2025 was strengthened access to integrated, survivor-centred services across seven governorates. In total, 21,898 women and adolescent girls were reached through Women's and Girls' Safe Spaces, where they received awareness, psychosocial first-line support, information on available services, and referrals. From this group, 7,293 girls and women were identified as survivors of, or at high risk of, child marriage and other forms of GBV and subsequently received specialized multi-sectoral support. Of these, 3,596 girls accessed comprehensive case management services delivered by trained female caseworkers, including legal, medical, psychosocial, and protection-related cash assistance. In addition, 3,697 girls received focused psychosocial support through safe spaces, shelters, and referrals to specialized MHPSS services, ensuring holistic recovery and protection.

In **Ethiopia**, indicators related to capacity-building for health, protection, and GBV service delivery points fell below the annual target, primarily due to reduced budget allocations. Similarly, funding constraints led to the discontinuation of direct support to strengthening government GBV protection and response mechanisms in priority districts in **Bangladesh**, reinforcing the need to prioritize high-impact prevention and system-embedded interventions.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO SRH AND GBV SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MOZAMBIQUE

In **Mozambique**, the Global Programme developed and piloted the Augmentative and Alternative Communication Album for women and youth with disabilities to access SRH and GBV services[101], a new and innovative approach to facilitate communication between a service provider and a person with communication difficulties. Through a partnership with the disability specialized CSO, AIFO, a picture communication Album was developed (with Global Programme funds) to facilitate the interaction between service providers in the area of SRHR and GBV, and people with communication difficulties, such as persons with hearing impairments, psychosocial disabilities and persons that for other reasons are experiencing difficulties in speaking (for example, due to trauma). The aim is to make services and GBV reporting and referral mechanisms more inclusive and accessible for all persons, with a specific focus on women and youth. Women and girls with disabilities face unique challenges because of the intersection of their gender and disability. This often means that they are denied the right to make decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health. Social and family isolation further increases their risk. They are often hidden at home and lack community support. While underreporting of GBV is common in Mozambique, barriers in mobility, communication, and severe isolation worsen the situation for persons with disabilities, who may also feel shame or self-blame, especially when the perpetrator is a family member or caregiver.

Following government approval of the resource, it was piloted (with funding from the Global Disability Fund-GDF programme Unpaid Care, Disability and Gender Transformative Approach implemented in Mozambique), together with SOPs for inclusive service delivery during a period of four months across three provinces—Maputo, Manica, and Cabo Delgado—in both health facilities and one-stop GBV service centres. During the pilot phase, service providers received intensive training on using the SOPs and Picture Album, and representatives from Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) were hired to actively create demand for the services and monitor implementation progress. The pilot phase demonstrated that the impact is positive and significant, with direct benefits for the population's quality of life and for the strengthening of a fairer and more inclusive system. In 2026, additional copies of the Album will be printed and distributed to other health and GBV centres supported by UNFPA programmes.

Strengthening community-level systems' capacity to detect, prevent and respond to cases of child marriage:

Across several countries, the Global Programme is strengthening community-level systems to detect, prevent and respond to child marriage while shifting social norms that sustain the practice. In **Ethiopia**, 2,898 child marriage cases were identified in target communities, reflecting both ongoing risks and stronger detection mechanisms. Of these, 2,185 planned marriages were cancelled through negotiation and community engagement, while 262 progressed to legal prosecution, reinforcing accountability and access to justice. Progress was supported by integrated interventions including girls' empowerment programmes, training for service providers and broad social mobilization. A further milestone was reached when 778 communities across Amhara, Central Ethiopia, South Ethiopia and Sidama publicly declared the abandonment of child marriage, institutionalizing commitments through monitoring committees and bylaws aligned with national legal frameworks. Similar momentum is visible in India and Mozambique, where community-driven approaches are advancing prevention and norm change. In **India**, UNICEF supported state governments' Child Marriage–Free Village initiatives across several states; in Chhattisgarh, Balod became the first district officially declared child marriage-free, while in Odisha 14,000 villages, about 27 per cent of the total, have made similar declarations through collaboration between communities and local authorities.

In **Mozambique**, 129 communities have committed to remaining free of child marriage and gender-based violence through structured monitoring systems led by local leaders, teachers and community child protection committees. These mechanisms enable communities to identify risks, track cases and respond collectively, strengthening local accountability and creating safer environments for girls.

3.2.2 Addressing poverty drivers

Poverty and limited economic opportunities are key drivers of child marriage. Gender-responsive social protection,(e.g., cash, cash plus, insurance, care policies, health, education opportunities which specifically target girls or their families) can help girls and their families meet basic needs and/or cover education costs, and has consistently proven effective in reducing the risk of child marriage. Addressing poverty drivers can be achieved at scale by leveraging government programmes and establishing formal and informal partnerships to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection and economic empowerment.

101 UNFPA, *Breaking Down Barriers: Equitable SRH and GBV Access for Persons with Disabilities in Mozambique,* 2025, https://mozambique.unfpa.org/en/news/breaking-down-barriers-equitable-srh-and-gbv-access-persons-disabilities-mozambique

Table 5: Number of poorest adolescent girls (10-19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes supported by the Global Programme in 2025

Indicator 2201 : Number of poorest adolescent girls (10-19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes supported by the Global Programme

	2024	2025	2025
Country	**Results**	**Targets**	**Results**
Bangladesh	N/A	101,000	122,672
Burkina Faso	2,804	1,000	1,641
Ethiopia	1,237,268	1,210,000	1,269,333
Ghana	4,216	32,800	27,256
India	2,288,749	2,955,311	1,767,349
Mozambique	9,421	10,300	1,195
Nepal	555	1,626	1,676
Niger	2,480	4,500	101,149
Sierra Leone	N/A	TBD/ N/A	1,350
Uganda	232	N/A	4,152
Yemen	250	200	907
Zambia	2,240	1,500	22,109
Total	**3,548,215**	**4,333,337 (10 countries- without Sierra Leone, Uganda)**	**3,320,789**

Delivering social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment support for adolescent girls (Indicator 2201): In 2025, a total of **3,320,789 adolescent girls (10-19) benefited from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes–** achieving around 77 per cent of the global annual target and also slightly down from 3,548,215 in 2024.

Despite the continued downward trend for the global result for this indicator since 2023 (when social protection peaked with over 6.3 million girls reached), for the second year in Phase III, **India** and **Ethiopia** are still leading in this area. Ethiopia exceeded its target for 2025 and its reach slightly since 2024 (by 2.6 per cent): Social protection platforms were leveraged, reaching 1,267,962 girls through the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and humanitarian cash support, addressing economic vulnerabilities driving child marriage. The target set for the year was 1,210,000 and stood at 105 per cent. This overperformance is linked to the inclusion of beneficiaries receiving both regular PSNP cash transfers and humanitarian cash support, which significantly increased the reported figures.

In contrast, while the total result is mainly driven by India's contribution, it did not meet its own target, and its reach since 2024 has sharply decreased.

Looking more closely at results of countries with smaller targets reveals a more promising picture. Thanks to the dissemination of evidence on what works to end child marriage, there have been programmatic shifts in key implementing countries who have been exploring how social protection schemes can be leveraged to support girls at risk of child marriage. In **Ghana**, significant results were achieved through government-led programmes. In particular, 19,500 girls living in households enrolled in the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) cash transfer programme benefited from more gender-responsive service delivery, following the introduction of the Gender-Responsive Social Protection (GRSP) Roadmap. Additionally, 466 girls (259 aged 16–19 and 207 aged 20–21) in two districts in the North East and Upper East regions were enrolled in the Livelihood Empowerment and Productive Inclusion Programme (LEPIP), gaining access to vocational training, skills development, and livelihood opportunities. The Global Programme played a catalytic role in strengthening these systems and expanding their reach to vulnerable girls. For example, 45 national and district frontline service providers were trained on the design, delivery, and monitoring of gender-responsive social protection services for at-risk adolescent girls. This capacity-building effort supported the operationalization

of the GRSP Roadmap and contributed to making the LEAP programme more responsive to the specific needs of adolescent girls. In addition, 7,497 girls were reached through complementary interventions supported by the Global Programme.

Several other countries also significantly scaled up their reach since 2024, while also exceeding their 2025 target.

In Nepal, technical collaboration with women-led co-operatives enabled 1,676 girls (up from 555 in 2024) to strengthen economic empowerment and financial autonomy. Participation is expected to rise substantially in 2026 as system-wide investments and government-led institutionalization mature.

In **Niger,** the Global Programme strengthened the links between empowerment interventions and household economic resilience mechanisms. In 2025, 101,149 of the poorest adolescent girls benefited from social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment interventions supported by the programme, compared to an annual target of 4,500. The scale of the results achieved reflects strong integration with broader livelihoods and resilience programmes, combining direct investments by the Global Programme with complementary initiatives. Notably, the Mata Masu Dubara (MMD) approach implemented by CARE strengthens women's economic empowerment and indirectly helps reduce economic pressures that can lead to child marriage for girls. In addition, 750 girls received training in various trades, while 12,716 others were introduced to income-generating activities.

Meanwhile in **Sierra Leone**, the Global Programme delivered substantial gains in strengthening the economic resilience of households and reducing economic drivers of child marriage. A total of 2,668 girls in Kambia District benefited from cash transfers and life skills through the Cash Plus Care Model[102] (an intervention that was supported with complimentary funding sources), which eased household financial pressures, enabling families to prioritize girls' education and wellbeing rather than resorting to child marriage as a coping mechanism[103]. Additionally, a new Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) initiative was implemented in the Bombali District with Global Programme funding. It provided the 450 participating women and families with access to small loans and savings for education and livelihood investments, fostering economic empowerment and resilience. These VSLAs directly supported 1,350 girls by improving household financial stability. Based on the Cash Plus Care Model, adolescent girls receiving cash allowance are also enrolled in lifeskills programme while their parents are enrolled in parenting sessions, improving caregiver-child relationships, reducing harsh discipline and increasing emotional support for adolescents. Male engagement and intergenerational dialogues happened simultaneously, helping to build an atmosphere that is supportive of girls' rights. These community-led financial mechanisms contributed to addressing poverty—one of the root causes of teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

Despite the challenging context, one of the Global Programme's most significant achievements in **Yemen** was the expansion of vocational training and economic empowerment interventions for adolescent girls. These initiatives were scaled up through market-informed vocational training targeting the most vulnerable groups, including displaced, married and at-risk adolescent girls. In total, 907 adolescent girls completed vocational skills training aligned with local labour market demands, equipping them with practical, income-generating competencies. From this group, 200 adolescent girls received kits or start-up grants to establish small businesses in areas such as sewing, fragrance production, concrete making, and accessories. Girls consistently reported increased hope for the future, improved coping capacities, and reduced reliance on harmful coping mechanisms such as child marriage. By addressing household-level economic pressures, one of the key drivers of child marriage, the programme helped shift both individual and family perspectives. The impact of these interventions was captured through a UNICEF human-interest story shared on social media, highlighting how vocational training strengthened the resilience, dignity, and economic agency of an adolescent married girl in a crisis-affected setting, amplifying positive narratives around girls' empowerment and choice. Suad, a 17-year-old child bride, became a soap maker after participating in a vocational training programme. Through hands-on workshops, she learned to produce powdered soap, dishwashing liquid, ceramic cleaner and chlorine bleach, strengthening her resilience, dignity and economic agency. "*Now I see soap-making as a source of income for me and my son,*" she says with a smile. "*We will be able to live a decent life.*" Suad's story illustrates how vocational training can help married adolescent girls in crisis-affected settings reshape their futures, transforming them from child brides into entrepreneurs[104].

102 UNICEF, *Empowering families to end child marriage in Sierra Leone*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/stories/empowering-families-end-child-marriage-sierra-leone

103 As the initiative in Kambia District was not funded by the Global Programme, the 2,668 girls are not counted in the total number for this indicator in Sierra Leone.

104 UNICEF, *From a Child Bride to an Entrepreneur*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/yemen/stories/child-bride-entrepreneur

Leveraging partnerships to address poverty drivers (Indicator 2211): **In 2025, the Global Programme established 436 partnerships (both formal and informal)** to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services, up from 282 in 2024. Although slightly below the target of 503, this result is nonetheless a promising indication that Global Programme countries are leveraging partnerships to tackle poverty drivers.

In **Nepal**, 20 women-led cooperatives across Lumbini Province were actively engaged by the Global Programme in 2025, playing a dual role by delivering community-based awareness and prevention activities to end child marriage while also providing economic empowerment opportunities for adolescent girls, particularly those pursuing livelihood pathways. Through skills-building, savings groups, mentorship, and support to establish small enterprises, the cooperatives helped reduce financial vulnerabilities that often push girls into child marriage. Their strong community networks also enabled them to identify at-risk girls early, mobilize families, and support girls' continued education and participation in life-skills programmes. This model has demonstrated the effectiveness of women-led structures in tackling both the drivers and consequences of child marriage.

In **Mozambique**, economic empowerment interventions are implemented by FDC in the province of Nampula and by NAFEZA in the province of Zambezia (both women-led CSOs) and include financial literacy trainings, the creation of saving and loan groups (composed of 10-25 girls/young women per group) and the provision of small-scale business start-up kits for girls and young women. The beneficiaries are selected based on vulnerability criteria, prioritizing girls that are rescued from a child marriage, girls that are already pregnant or mothers, orphaned girls/girls that are heads of households, girls living with disabilities, girls living with HIV or fistula, and those in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions. In 2025, a total of 75 new saving and loan groups were active across the 6 target districts in Nampula (45) and Zambezia (30) provinces, reaching a total of 1,195 girls and young women aged 15-24, of which 675 were in Nampula and 520 in Zambezia. All the girls that are part of the programme were equipped with knowledge, capacity, and skills regarding the methodology of Revolving Credit Savings, financial literacy, enabling them to assess their needs and wants, small business management skills, as well as cross-cutting subjects such as SRHR/family planning, GBV, including child marriage (their consequences and reporting mechanisms). The interventions led to tangible results: for instance, as a result of the discussions on SRH during the savings sessions in Zambezia, 163 girls (out of 437 small business owners that were trained) across the three districts of Zambezia started using a modern method of family planning. Girls that were members of the 45 saving and loan groups across the three target districts of Nampula province saved MZN 278,587 (equivalent to approximately US$4,300). One important lesson learned was that savings groups formed in administrative posts beyond district headquarters, particularly in more remote communities, showed little or no dropout, had higher levels of engagement among girls, and achieved significant results. In addition, several girls described how these interventions have improved their lives.

"As the sessions progressed, and especially the business management, the idea arose that I could do more, and I had the idea of starting a business selling potato samosas with an initial value of MZN (Mozambican metical) 200 that I borrowed from the group savings. I sell at the school and in the neighborhoods. Two months later, I managed to pay back the money and felt some positive change in my income. If I had started saving earlier, I wouldn't have experienced everything I have, and I would like the project to motivate more girls from Pebane to join the groups, not only because of the savings but also because of all the topics we learn about there." - Testimony of Arlete Domingos Ernesto, a 22-year-old single mother from Pebane district, Zambezia Province, and a survivor of child marriage and domestic violence.


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3.3 ADVANCING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND ACTION PLANS

3.3.1 Supporting the implementation of laws, policies and action plans

The Global Programme continues to play an important role in developing and strengthening the policy and legislative environment around the issue of child marriage in multiple settings. Several examples of this work are provided in Chapter 2.

In 2025, the Global Programme supported the implementation of 412 national and sub-national Child Marriage Action Plans, including 217 in India, 99 in Ghana and 46 in Sierra Leone (Indicator 3101)

In **Ghana**, a total of 99 sub-national action plans to address child marriage were supported during the reporting year, exceeding the target (37) by leveraging on the scale-up of the Integrated Social Service (ISS) approach to 210 districts with support from the Global Programme and complementary funding. Financial and technical support was provided to 99 districts, enabling them to develop, implement, and report on sub-national action plans to address child marriage and deliver integrated social services. The support enabled the provision of multisectoral prevention and response services for vulnerable children, adolescents, and their families, including those at risk of or affected by child marriage.

The recent launch of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2025–2030) in Sierra Leone provides a comprehensive framework for integrated adolescent programming and coordination. The strategy was launched alongside an Irish Aid-supported formative research on Adolescent Health and Nutrition (2023), which recommended the development, in collaboration with adolescents and local authorities, of Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Action Plans in all 16 districts. This process is complemented by capacity-building efforts for frontline workers, equipping them with training modules and handbooks designed to facilitate engagement with adolescents.

The Global Programme also supported the development and adoption of 76 policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage (Indicator 3111), slightly down from 79 in 2024. Like in 2024, Nepal (27) and India (25) carry the largest share, likely due to the number of sub-national policies (province, districts, and palikas[105] in Nepal, and states and districts in India).

In **India**, the Global Programme is enabling the institutionalization of child marriage prevention at the grassroots by leveraging institutions of local self-governance. This was achieved within local governance systems by supporting the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR)[106] to adopt a national framework for establishing 770 Women and Girl Friendly Gram Panchayats across all 770 districts of India in 2025. This embeds adolescent priorities and prevention of harmful practices into routine Panchayat planning and action, advancing localisation of SDG 5. Accountability was institutionalized through a national digital dashboard with 41 indicators, including Panchayat-level actions to prevent child marriage, integrated into the MoPR's Panchayat Advancement Index. As part of this initiative, the Global Programme developed and disseminated a Primer on Laws Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices for Panchayat Representatives, which was translated by the Ministry into 22 regional languages, enabling nationwide uptake and reinforcing high-level political commitment to institutionalizing Panchayat-led prevention and response to gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage across all states.

In **Nepal**, the Global Programme enhanced the legal and policy environment to prevent child marriage by advancing a coherent, rights-based response to child marriage across federal, provincial, and local levels, anchored in government ownership and accountability. Nationally, coordinated UNFPA and UNICEF advocacy with other relevant stakeholders has led to the endorsement of the National Ending Child Marriage Strategy, a key development that establishes the first-ever coordinated national framework after federalization, and a critical milestone for prevention efforts across federal, provincial, and local levels. In order to strengthen the evidence base for reform, the programme partnered with the National Human Rights Commission to conduct a National Inquiry on Child and Early Marriage, supported by provincial consultations and community focus group discussions (FGDs), and produced a policy brief on the legal age of marriage grounded in international human rights standards.

In **Zambia**, the Global Programme supported the Government in launching the 2026–2030 National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in November 2025. In 2026, the programme will support the coordination of stakeholders at national, provincial, district and community levels to implement the strategy, with a particular focus on strengthening chiefdoms to review or develop bylaws prohibiting child marriage and to implement an initiation tool for boys and girls. The Government also finalized and approved other key policy documents such as the Child Online Protection Strategy (2025-2029), and the Social Behaviour Change Plan.

105 Palikas are municipalities
106 The Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), established in 2004, is a branch of the Government of India overseeing the development, empowerment, and decentralization of local self-government (Panchayats).

3.3.2 Mobilizing domestic resources

In 2025, the Global Programme developed **12 budget analysis documents** (Indicator 3122), up from 9 in 2024. Domestic resource mobilization to fund efforts to end child marriage has become an increasingly important pillar in the context of significant shifts in the global aid landscape, and the drive to 2030 and the SDGs. Strengthening local financing not only helps sustain interventions but also signals growing government commitment and ownership. In several Global Programme countries, progress has been made in allocating national resources to address child protection, gender-based violence and harmful practices, demonstrating promising models that can inform and inspire similar efforts in other contexts.

For instance, in Ghana, as part of broader efforts to enforce and uphold the Domestic Violence Act (2007), the International Federation of Women Lawyers Ghana (FIDA Ghana), with support from UNFPA, convened key stakeholders including the Ministry of Gender, Social Protection and Children (MoGSCP), the Domestic Violence Secretariat, donors, civil society organizations, community paralegals and youth.Together, they conducted comprehensive budget analyses of the 2024 and 2025 Domestic Violence Fund, which is intended to provide compensation and financial support to survivors of violence, including those affected by child marriage. The activities aimed to identify funding gaps, assess how allocations impact service delivery, and develop actionable recommendations. Policy dialogues with 35 state and civil society actors were held, culminating in a memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Finance, the Accountant and Controller General, the Gender Caucus of Parliament, and MoGSCP to prioritize resources for programs ending violence against women and girls. These efforts also included capacity-building for 30 civil society groups and youth on gender-responsive budget analysis. As a result, the Domestic Violence Fund allocation to MoGSCP doubled, reflecting a positive trend in government prioritization. Analysis of four consecutive years showed funding growth from GHS (Ghanaian cedi) 1,000,000 (US$72,000) in 2021 to GHS 2,735,743 (US$195,000) in 2024, demonstrating strengthened advocacy and improved resource mobilization for ending violence against women and girls.

In **Nepal**, through advocacy and technical support, the Global Programme strengthened local financing mechanisms and decentralized accountability structures, ensuring municipalities have resources and systems to implement ECM strategies effectively. This includes dedicated budget allocations, integration of ECM into local development planning, and institutionalized monitoring mechanisms to track progress. In 2025, a total of 20 municipalities allocated dedicated budgets to embed child marriage prevention within annual plans. By embedding child marriage prevention and gender equality measures into local governance processes, the programme reinforced sustainable structures for continued action beyond individual project interventions.

Other countries have developed investment cases to support future interventions and strengthen the case for increased domestic financing to end child marriage, demonstrating growing national commitment to sustaining prevention efforts over the long term.

For example, the Global Programme in **India** successfully developed and disseminated a state Investment Case on reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in Bihar[107], strengthening the economic and policy rationale for scaled action. Conducted with technical support from Victoria University and the Burnet Institute, the study generated robust evidence on the effectiveness and cost-impact of existing interventions and identified priority areas requiring enhanced investment. The study recommends increased financing for life-skills education, community participation, improved school infrastructure, cash incentive schemes, and extending the age coverage of girls under the Right to Education from 14 to 16 years—interventions with a demonstrated and measurable impact on delaying marriage and preventing early pregnancy. The findings were validated through a multi-stakeholder workshop with 130 participants, including government, civil society, and academic institutions. The study was formally disseminated at the Bihar Legislative Council in the presence of elected representatives and senior bureaucrats. The recommendations were positively acknowledged by policymakers, positioning the study as a key evidence tool to inform future policy decisions and budget allocations for child marriage prevention in Bihar.

Similarly, in 2025, the Global Progamme in **Mozambique** completed the Economic Cost of Child Marriage in Mozambique. This key document describes the total economic cost associated with child marriage in Mozambique by quantifying the economic cost to Mozambique of underinvesting in interventions to prevent child marriage in the country. The study highlights the heavy burdens of child marriage on adolescent girls in Mozambique, affecting both health, through early childbearing, increased maternal and neonatal risks, and exposure to intimate partner violence, and education, through lower educational attainment and earning potential. These impacts translate into significant economic costs: MZN 28.8 billion (2.72 per cent of GDP) via health and MZN 13.6 billion

107 UNFPA in India, Investment Case for Reducing Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy in Bihar, 2025, https://india.unfpa.org/en/publications/investment-case-reducing-child-marriage-and-adolescent-pregnancy-bihar

(1.28 per cent of GDP) via education, totalling MZN 42.4 billion or 4.01 per cent of Mozambique's GDP in 2021[108]. The study also emphasizes the particularly severe consequences of marriage before age 15, with annual costs per case 45 per cent higher than overall child marriage, underscoring the need for targeted interventions for this most vulnerable group.

In **Zambia**, core funding for child protection and gender programs fell by 1.26 per cent in the 2026 budget, risking support for Zambia's 9.7 million children. In response, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, with UNICEF's support, launched a compelling investment case in March 2025, which led to the government's pledge to recruit 5,000 additional social workers.

In **Bangladesh**, a 2025 Investment Case study estimated a benefit–cost ratio of 14.1, projecting that scaling up evidence-based interventions could avert 10.9 million child marriages and generate US$87 billion in economic benefits by 2050. These findings will inform advocacy and programme design in 2026, including engagement with the Ministry of Finance and Planning Commission to position child marriage prevention as both a rights and development priority.

In all of these cases, any additional effective funds for end child marriage programmes have been small, since such funding generally represents well under 1 per cent of government spending. This is an area of opportunity for the Global Programme, which is deepening its engagement with governments in 2026 and beyond. An important area of work will also be to study and understand the effectiveness of spending the resources which are actually available to ECM stakeholders. Studies have shown that even when resources are available, local governments often fail to spend them due to weak administrative and planning capacity, limited transparency, and obscure procedures.

3.3.3 Generating and using evidence to inform policy, programming and advocacy

In 2025, Global Programme implementing countries produced **53 evidence and knowledge products to support policy, programming and advocacy at country level**, up from 35 in 2024 (Indicator 3201). This result reflects the programme's increasing emphasis on evidence generation and growing capacity to produce knowledge that informs global thought leadership, policy decision-making, programme design, standard-setting and advocacy worldwide.

A total of 21 of such evidence and knowledge products were developed by the Global Programme in India alone. For example, in one study, UNFPA India, in partnership with Enfold, identified and documented replicable, rights-based models for care, rehabilitation, and reintegration in shelter homes, aftercare homes, and child care institutions to inform advocacy for scaling up empowering spaces for girls at risk of marriage, or those already married. By strengthening education/skills, mental health support, legal aid, identity documents and linkages to government schemes, and ensuring continued aftercare during the vulnerable transition to adulthood, the studied models build girls' agency and economic resilience—two core buffers against early marriage and re-marriage pressures. Disseminated through a national virtual release and expert panel in October, the findings reached over 200 stakeholders from government, civil society, and service providers across multiple states. The dialogue strengthened consensus on system-level gaps and scalable good practices, informing clearer pathways to improve institutional care standards, service quality, and long-term rehabilitation outcomes for women and children.

In Bangladesh, the *"Evidence of Impact of Child Protection Community Hubs (2022–2025)"*[109] study published in 2025 shows remarkable progress achieved for children in Bangladesh through the hubs (which Global Programme Steering Committee members visited in Bagerhat in 2024): birth registration rose from 47 per cent to 70 per cent, child marriage declined by up to 15 percentage points, violent discipline dropped by 25 points, and trust in social workers surged from 5 per cent to 65 per cent. Girls' participation in sports, once taboo, grew six-fold. More than service points, the hubs are reshaping harmful social norms, and making schools, families, and communities safer for children.

108 Using the 2021 exchange rate of 65.47 (Mozambique Central Bank) because the comparison was done using 2021 GDP, the US$ equivalents are: US$439.9 million (2.72 per cent of GDP) via health and US$207.7 million (1.28 per cent of GDP) via education, totaling US$647.6 million or 4.01 per cent of Mozambique's GDP in 2021.

109 UNICEF, *Integrated Community-Based Child Protection System in Bangladesh: Evidence of Impact of Child Protection Community Hubs (2022–2025)*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/reports/integrated-community-based-child-protection-system-bangladesh

3.4 CHALLENGES TO PROGRAMMING

Global challenges to ending child marriage outlined in Chapter 1, such as the foreign aid crisis, shrinking fiscal space, pushback against gender equality, deeply entrenched social norms, humanitarian crises and climate change, are reflected in different ways across Global Programme countries. These dynamics shape national operating environments and require programmes to adjust their work plans and approaches to maintain the continuity and quality of interventions, sometimes influencing the pace and effectiveness of implementation. In addition, country-specific operational challenges further affect programme delivery. The main challenges reported by the 12 country teams in 2025 include:

- **Funding and human resource constraints:** Funding constraints affected all Global Programme countries in 2025, reducing programme reach and flexibility, weakening medium-term planning, and limiting opportunities to institutionalize and scale promising approaches. In several countries, these pressures also weakened the capacity of service delivery systems and exposed persistent capacity-building needs, particularly where human resource gaps constrained implementation. They also increased pressure on country teams to seek synergies, forge new partnerships while strengthening existing ones, diversify funding sources, and mobilize complementary or domestic resources to sustain essential services and results. For example, in **Nepal**, delayed and uncertain funding, marked by late confirmation of resources, slow fund transfers and shrinking budgets despite rising needs, repeatedly disrupted annual planning cycles and forced continual adjustments to workplans, targets and timelines. These challenges were compounded by very limited domestic financing for the National Ending Child Marriage Strategy, while shifting local priorities, particularly post-Gen Z protest recovery and infrastructure demands, drew attention and resources away from longer-term issues such as child marriage. Human resource constraints also persisted at community level, where uneven capacity among volunteers and extension workers on SRHR and GBV meant that service delivery often depended on intermittently available federal or NGO experts, underscoring the need for more systematic investment in building and resourcing local expertise to ensure sustainability. In **Sierra Leone**, limited and unpredictable public financing, together with insufficient qualified social service personnel and weak sub-national systems for coordination, monitoring and supervision, undermined implementation capacity across districts. Late disbursement of funds delayed planned sessions, slowed progress against workplans and targets, and compressed implementation periods. Human resource limitations further constrained delivery, as a limited pool of qualified female community facilitators, combined with low literacy levels among both facilitators and participants, slowed progression through the life skills curriculum and required additional time to ensure full understanding of the material. Complementary funding was also affected. For instance, World Bank support for the Cash Transfer programme was not secured, and the German-piloted project is due to end by mid-2026. Unless alternative funding is mobilized in 2026, the programme will have to be discontinued in Kambia District, despite promising results.

- **Administrative and procedural constraints:** In **Burkina Faso**, changes in the national administrative framework have led to strengthened requirements for prior authorization for community-level interventions. Although intended to improve coordination and regulation of activities, these procedures, sometimes lengthy and unpredictable, have caused delays in the start-up or continuation of certain activities, frequent revisions of workplans and reduced operational flexibility for partners. They have also increased the administrative burden, to the detriment of time devoted to technical support and close follow-up.

- **Political instability and transitions:** In **Ghana**, the appointment of new government leadership was translated into a number of changes at the technical level, requiring additional extensive engagement. The Global Programme leveraged existing government mechanisms to continue high-level advocacy and accelerate programme implementation, such as the National Coordination Mechanism for Ending Child Marriage, Integrated Social Service (ISS) Technical Working Group, etc. In **Bangladesh**, Global Programme implementation took place in a complex operating environment shaped by political transition, institutional instability, and a more conservative social climate. The establishment of an interim government was accompanied by widespread leadership turnover across national ministries, particularly the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), and sub-national administrations. This reduced institutional continuity, delayed approval of key operational processes, and required repeated orientation and consensus-building with newly appointed counterparts. At the systems level, the discontinuation of sector programme modalities and the transition to a Development Project Proforma (DPP) framework introduced additional operational complexity. Although the DPP system provides stronger long-term institutional anchoring, the transition period disrupted established planning cycles and affected the timely roll-out of some activities. Frequent changes in the leadership of several sectoral ministries in **Niger**, including the ministry re-

sponsible for child protection, slowed decision-making processes and delayed the implementation of planned activities. To mitigate these effects, the Global Programme strengthened collaboration with decentralized government services and local authorities to ensure the continuity of interventions.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), reporting, and data system challenges:** Despite strengthened coordination, partners highlighted gaps in timely reporting, inconsistencies in tools across districts, and limited capacity to document outcome-level change in **Uganda**. Limited use of available data and information management systems has hindered the timely flow of data for reporting. In **Sierra Leone,** implementing partners exhibit limited M&E and knowledge-management capacity, particularly concerning systematic data collection, aggregation, and analysis. While partners are generally able to report on outputs, the Global Programme is prioritizing reinforced guidance, simplified tools, and targeted capacity-building for partners, with a focus on routine participant tracking, basic data management, and the utilisation of feasible qualitative methods to support learning and evidence-based reporting. In **Bangladesh**, while service reporting improved, gaps remain in real-time data availability and disaggregation within Ministry of MoWCA systems, limiting adaptive management and evidence-based targeting. In **Burkina Faso,** although progress has been made in results monitoring, access limitations, the diversity of partners and the multiplicity of funding sources continue to pose challenges for harmonizing monitoring systems and analyzing data in real time. Strengthening local capacities in monitoring and evaluation and aligning tools across partners remain priorities to improve programmatic learning and evidence-based decision-making.

- **Coordination challenges across government institutions**: While **Zambia** benefits from relatively strong multisectoral coordination among government institutions and partners working to end child marriage, some coordination mechanisms remain in transition. The Government has approved the Statutory Instruments for the reconstitution of the National Coordination Committee on Children (NCCC), established under the Children's Code Act (2022), although the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services has not yet formally reconstituted the committee. Once operational—expected in 2026—the NCCC is anticipated to further strengthen coordination and support more efficient allocation of resources for child protection interventions. It will also provide an important platform for the Global Programme to advocate for increased investment in efforts to end child marriage. In **Sierra Leone**, institutional responsibilities for addressing child marriage remain split across ministries: leadership of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage rests with the Ministry of Health, while enforcement of the Child Marriage Law falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs. Through its programming, the Global Programme has supported stronger coordination among government institutions and between government and civil society actors to help align efforts to end child marriage.

- **Sustained engagement with marginalized and hard-to-reach groups, and lack of disaggregated data:** In **India**, engagement with tribal communities, particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs), and other excluded populations requires additional time, trust-building, and customised strategies. Disaggregated data collection for these groups is limited, making it hard to track differential outcomes.

- **Youth engagement and policy influence:** In **India**, opportunities for structured interaction between adolescents and policymakers remain limited, restricting youth input into decision-making and programme design. The Global Programme and its partners hope to further champion youth advocates roles in pushing this agenda forward.

- **Continued high prevalence of adolescent pregnancy, a driver of child marriage in some countries:** In **Zambia**, despite the scale-up of advocacy, increased access to SRH information and services, and improved school enrolment, transition, retention, including re-entry of learners who drop out of school, the prevalence of adolescent pregnancy remains alarmingly high, with a negligible decline of only 1.4 per cent in six years. The Global Programme will assist the government and its partners in thoroughly examining the factors contributing to adolescent pregnancy, ensuring resources are directed towards the most effective strategies for safeguarding girls from adolescent pregnancy. In **Uganda**, high rates of teenage pregnancy remain a major driver of child marriage. The Global Programme has responded by strengthening the evidence base through the study *"The Scale of Teenage Pregnancy in Uganda: Unveiling the Hidden Realities"* and by piloting a Teenage Pregnancy Surveillance and Response Platform in two districts to improve monitoring and prevention efforts.

3.5 LESSONS LEARNED

Empowering adolescent girls

- **Gender-transformative programming is most effective when it is layered and inclusive:** Interventions that build girls' agency, skills and voice are more effective when they are combined with engagement of boys and men, parents and caregivers, and other influential community actors. This helps shift the social norms and power relations that sustain child marriage, rather than placing responsibility for change on girls alone.

- **Community-based interventions are most effective when they are continuous, locally owned and linked to accountability structures:** Safe, inclusive and culturally responsive spaces can strengthen participation and dialogue, but lasting results depend on sustained engagement over time, meaningful community ownership, and clear local roles for prevention, early identification and response. One-off awareness activities are generally less effective than sequenced approaches that are embedded in community systems and supported by trusted local actors.

- **Household engagement is essential for reinforcing change:** Interventions with girls are more likely to translate into sustained change when they are accompanied by work with parents and caregivers, helping create a more enabling environment for girls' education, decision-making and wellbeing.

Service delivery

- **Quality community-based service delivery requires adaptive and sustained investment in frontline capacity:** Simplified tools, continuous mentoring, refresher training, and participatory approaches are critical to support frontline workers and facilitators, especially where literacy levels are low or systems are overstretched.

- **Digital monitoring strengthens accountability for "soft" interventions:** Real-time monitoring systems can improve visibility over the quality and consistency of life skills, CSE and norm-change interventions, enabling faster course correction and stronger oversight than paper-based systems alone.

Cash transfers and economic empowerment

- **Social protection is more effective when combined with norm-change interventions**: Addressing household poverty and economic stress alongside social and behaviour change increases participation, retention and the likelihood of sustained shifts in attitudes and practices related to child marriage.

- **Livelihood programming must be relevant, accessible and targeted**: Economic empowerment interventions are more likely to succeed when they reflect labour-market realities, respond to girls' aspirations, and proactively address the administrative and social barriers that exclude the most marginalized adolescents. Risk-informed approaches can further improve efficiency by prioritizing support to those most vulnerable.

Legal and policy frameworks

- **Policy progress is strongest when supported by coordinated government leadership and joint planning:** Positioning child marriage prevention within central coordination structures and aligning efforts across ministries, partners and donors can reduce fragmentation, improve efficiency and strengthen national ownership.

- **Domestic financing and co-financing are critical for sustainability and scale:** When governments invest their own resources in adolescent girls' empowerment and child marriage prevention, interventions are more likely to be institutionalized, expanded and sustained.

- **Evidence-based advocacy is necessary, but impact depends on follow-through:** Data and analysis can strengthen policy dialogue, but lasting change requires that commitments be translated into planning, budgeting, implementation and accountability mechanisms.

- **Local governance and enforcement mechanisms can strengthen implementation when they are aligned with broader protective systems:** Community-level rules, leadership structures and accountability mechanisms can reinforce national laws and policies, particularly when they are embedded in wider child protection and service-delivery systems.

4 Programme management



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4.1 FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

In 2025, the Global Programme was able to bring in a similar amount of funding compared to 2024 (US$20.9 million received in 2025 compared to US$21.1 million in 2024).

The Global Programme expresses its sincere gratitude to its donors for maintaining their support and dedication throughout the challenging global context in 2025. The contributions received by the Global Programme are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Contributions received by the Global Programme in 2025 (in US$ equivalent)

Donor	Contribution received in 2025 (US$ equivalent)
Canada	4,953,999
Italy	1,168,224
Netherlands	5,263,158
Norway	2,823,719
UK FCDO	5,762,082
Zonta International	950,400
Total	**20,921,582**

The funding pipeline for 2026 currently stands at less than US$14 million. Against this backdrop, the Global Programme undertook a broad range of resource mobilization efforts in 2025, informed by a thorough donor mapping exercise and targeting foundations, the private sector, and bilateral and multilateral development partners and donors. These efforts helped deepen donor engagement and build momentum with several foundations, including CIFF, the Clooney Foundation and Rotary, with support from UNICEF National Committees. Discussions with CIFF Africa on investments in ending child marriage in four countries advanced significantly, leading to the establishment of the CIFF–UNICEF End Child Marriage Investment Initiative in 2026. The Global Programme also convened several virtual donor engagement events, including with members of Zonta International and Rotary International. These efforts resulted in a confirmed allocation from Zonta for 2026–2027 and strengthened engagement with Rotary International in Zambia, Ghana and Nepal for local-level partnerships.

The Global Programme has also been intentional in engaging programme country governments, particularly Ministries of Gender, to prioritize ECM and related adolescent girls' needs in budget allocations. In countries such as Nepal, India, Zambia and Malawi, this advocacy is already yielding tangible results. For example in Malawi, UNICEF advocacy has positively contributed to increases in the size of spending on direct child protection programs since 2021/22, reaching MK 1.7 billion (US$970,000) in 2025/26. Advocacy for enhancing devolution of resources resulted in the number of districts with dedicated child protection budget lines increasing from 7 in 2019/20 to 28 currently. To encourage peer learning, the Global Programme also showcased Malawi's good practice in Financing for Children (F4C) during its biannual gathering, with Malawi's experience presented to inspire other countries.

In addition, the Global Programme supported President Hakainde Hichilema of Zambia in his role as African Union Presidential Champion on Ending Child Marriage to help mobilize other member states to accelerate Africa's collective efforts to end child marriage, including through increased domestic financing. This thought leadership piece was launched at the AU Heads of State Summit in February 2026[110].

In terms of the allocations made to Country Offices to implement the Global Programme (presented in Table 7 below), the available funds allowed the Global Programme to transfer US$16.9 million, which is quite a drop compared to 2024, when US$21.6 million was transferred to Country Offices. Even though income was similar to the previous years, some funds had to be reapportioned in order to mitigate the projected future drops in income. Country Offices were effectively asked to manage with just over half the funds originally planned in the 2023-approved workplans and it is to their great credit that they a) were able to adapt their programmes to fit the available budget, b) still managed to achieve incredible results for girls and c) in some cases, make renewed efforts to identify and mobilize new resources for ending child marriage in their countries. Many countries have already demonstrated this

110 UNICEF, *African Union Presidential Champion Report on Ending Child Marriage Officially Launched*, 2026, https://www.unicef.org/zambia/reports/african-union-presidential-champion-report-ending-child-marriage-officially-launched

flexibility in their 2025 reporting, with less focus on results under outcome 2000 (supporting institutions) in order to prioritize direct support to girls and their communities (outcome 1000) and more focused 'upstream' work under outcome 3000 which tends to have a reduced cost. Nepal was a good example of this adaptability in 2025.

Table 7: Global Programme country office allocations in 2025 (US$)

Country	Allocation in 2025		Funds spent*			
	UNICEF	UNFPA	UNICEF	%	UNFPA	%
Bangladesh	1,300,000	950,274	1,565,221	74	683,766	72
Burkina Faso	600,000	562811	504,079	78	531,100	94
Ethiopia	1,200,000	915,060	996,275	70	899,954	98
Ghana	850,000	666,728	727,016	85	551,617	83
India	1,350,000	872,429	1,030,437	69	617,628	71
Mozambique	600,000	589,435	743,290	87	501,562	85
Nepal	590,000	667,120	336,018	43	542,361	81
Niger	500,000	481,991	465,976	74	468,838	97
Sierra Leone	500,000	541,640	732,587	91	436,636	81
Uganda	450,000	727,860	302,555	45	554,110	76
Yemen	350,000	449,729	109,940	29	449,694	99
Zambia	600,000	596,096	567,847	93	450,994	76
Total	**8,890,000**	**8,021,178**	**8,081,241**	**72**	**6,688,263**	**84**

* Note: Unspent funds from a previous year are often carried forward to a new year, and made available for spending. This explains how the spent amount is sometimes higher for Country Offices than the amount that they were allocated in the calendar year.

In many cases, Country Offices profited from the flexibility of the Global Programme grant to hold some funds over for 2026 and beyond in order to ensure that the programme could continue and key staff could be retained. The Global Programme produced an Options Paper which was critical to guide country offices on options to safeguard interventions that protect girls, including leveraging on large-scale government-led interventions, such as social protection, education and health.

4.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Global Programme results framework (RF) for Phase III is an elaborate reflection of the theory of change. However, it has some weaknesses. Firstly, and most obviously, it is an elaborate framework for which the corresponding funding for monitoring has not materialised. Reporting against that RF requires regular household surveys, which have in fact become less frequent, and harder to justify, in a constrained funding environment, particularly in the case of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which were halted or disrupted in 2025 following cuts to funding from USAID. DHS have long provided nationally representative data on population health, gender equality and social indicators—data widely used to track issues such as maternal and child health and child marriage—and these disruptions have weakened countries' ability to monitor trends and design evidence-based policies and programmes[111]. Secondly, indicators were developed, particularly at outcome level, for which the measurement was always likely to be very challenging. Indicators such as "*proportion of respondents who feel confident in their ability to choose not to marry their daughter off before they turn 18 despite the social pressure*" are not always available in household survey reports, and when they are available, it is only as a national-level figure. This does not provide the needed information, namely, whether a specific data point has changed as a result of interventions by the Global Programme and its partners. As a result, much of the programme's RF creates uncertainty about what is genuinely changing at the national level and how well the programme has performed in specific geographies. Because of this and other reasons, the Global Programme team decided in 2025 to simplify and clarify the Global Programme's RF.

For the 2025 end-of-year results reporting, which was the first step in the reform of the Global Programme RF, a dual method was put into practice: countries were asked to report quantitatively **only** against 16 output indicators which cover all activities under outcomes 1000, 2000, and 3000. These indicators have by and large been reported on with clarity and reliability by implementing countries for many years. Secondly, countries were asked to assess qualitatively the performance of their country programmes using any and all sources which they produced or had access to throughout the year: any available household surveys, field monitoring reports, partner reports, analytical discussions, etc. The rationale for this is that the Global Programme outcome and impact indicators were sourced only from national household surveys (which were rare) or programme-specific surveys (which were even rarer). As a result, countries tended to report against these indicators only on average once every five years. Starting this year, the Global Programme asked countries to develop assessments of progress (or a lack of progress) at outcome level using other sources. This is certainly less objective, but much more reactive, and allows for a regular critical reflection on programme performance that was otherwise unavailable. Such an approach is in line with recent literature on monitoring complex aid programmes. While there is still some work to be done to refine and review the quality of these country office assessments, in 2025 this has unlocked a previously unexplored aspect of programme performance, and the Global Programme is excited about how this can be taken forward and further improved. This will include, of course, increased support to country offices in 2026 to develop the kind of monitoring and analysis which will make this end-of-year assessment more accessible.

In 2025, many countries focused on reviewing and strengthening the monitoring mechanisms used to collect and analyse data for the Global Programme, which serve as good practices for others to explore. Uganda and Ghana are two examples of countries which developed stronger M&E systems in order to improve the quality and reliability of Global Programme data. Mozambique introduced and scaled data collection using digital tools, in this case KoboToolbox[112], a platform which monitors, in real time, implementing partners' data on identified child marriage cases and referrals to services. This system helps prevent overlap between partners, track key trends such as survivors' migration and recurrence of violence linked to weak case follow-up, and better inform programming decisions, including where interventions should be geographically targeted. In 2025, a total of 4,351 child marriage cases were identified by programme partners, reported to services and reflected in the Kobo application. Ethiopia developed a M&E guideline with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) specifically to build capacity on collecting data related to harmful practices programming (Ethiopia is also a recipient of JPFGM funds, so the M&E guideline covers both ECM and FGM). In India, digital governance tools such as the "Track the Girl Child" portal strengthened accountability for girls' education, supporting vulnerable girls to return to school and link with social protection schemes in Parbhani district. Sierra Leone also developed and piloted a new digital tool to identify and monitor vulnerable out-of-school girls throughout their reintegration into formal education. Prior to this intervention, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary

111 Lenharo, Mariana, 'Will Gates and other funders save massive public health database at risk from Trump cuts?', Nature, 23 June 2025, https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-01945-9

112 KoboToolbox is the web-based server and form-builder platform used for designing, managing, and analyzing surveys, while KoboCollect is the Android application used to collect data in the field, often offline. KoboToolbox allows form creation and data visualization, whereas KoboCollect acts as a mobile interface that sends data directly back to KoboToolbox

Education relied on a paper-based system, which caused major inefficiencies and a heightened risk for inaccuracies in data entry. In response to the deterioration of the security situation in several intervention areas in Niger, the Global Programme increased the use of mobile teams and leveraged innovative digital platforms such as UNICEF's RapidPro to maintain community engagement and monitoring in sensitive areas.

EVALUATING CHILD MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL NORMS INTERVENTIONS

The Impact Catalyst Fund is a partnership among the UNICEF Evaluation Office, the Global Programme, and five countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, India, Niger and Türkiye). In 2025, it made substantial progress in advancing the measurement of child marriage and social norms. Rigorous mixed-methods, prospective impact evaluations are underway in all five countries, using gold standard experimental evaluation designs. Evaluations aim to unpack what worked, through which pathways, among which key groups, and at what cost, among other findings. In Burkina Faso and Ghana, the impact evaluations are a collaborative effort between UNICEF and UNFPA. In numerous countries, they include a focus on multiple forms of violence against children.

In 2025, partnerships were formed with national collaborating universities and research firms. Inception periods were completed, and large-scale quantitative baselines were undertaken in Burkina Faso, Ghana and Türkiye (in Niger and India, leaner methods are being used whereby administrative and programme data serve as baselines). Baseline report findings demonstrated the existence of harmful gender attitudes and norms held by target populations, validating the need for targeted intervention across countries. Findings were presented to country partners, including government representatives, and preparation for process and qualitative data collection is ongoing in several countries. In Türkiye, where the intervention is short-term and focuses on proximate outcomes of empowerment, skills and attitudinal change among Syrian refugees, the qualitative process evaluation and endline data collection have already been completed, and data analysis is ongoing to measure final impacts. In 2026, the team will focus on additional analysis of baseline data to inform country-specific and cross-country learning and planning for endline surveys in late 2026 and early 2027, once focal adolescent girls have started transitioning to marriages.

5 Looking ahead



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5.1 GLOBAL PRIORITIES

In 2026, the Global Programme will be approaching the mid-point of Phase III (running from 2024 to 2030), and accelerating global efforts to ending child marriage by 2030 will remain an urgent priority, as outlined in the new UNFPA[113] and UNICEF[114] Strategic Plans for 2026-2029 (approved by the agencies' respective Executive Boards in 2025). These documents reflect the agencies' final drive towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, their renewed commitment to ending harmful practices (SDG 5.3, which includes ending child marriage), and their continued alignment with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

Despite the renewed ambition of these strategic plans, the 2026 funding landscape has prompted a strategic downward revision of country workplans. While overall targets are more conservative, the Global Programme **remains committed to high-impact, evidence-based interventions, particularly reaching adolescent girls at scale with life skills education and comprehensive sexuality education,** alongside intensified efforts to promote school retention. Although school re-enrollment targets will see a significant reduction, the Global Programme continues to view secondary school education as its most effective intervention.

To **prioritize girls' education** in this context, the Global Programme will build on its solid foundation of learning and robust partnerships with Ministries of Education. Particularly, the Global Programme will continue leveraging system integration through proven social protection plus models that have demonstrated both resilience and cost-efficiency. This includes strengthening, and learning from successful delivery frameworks, such as in India, where massive scale was achieved by leveraging national life skills curricula and peer-led cascades; Ghana, where impact was multiplied through school-based enrollment strategies and strategic shifts in delivery; Ethiopia, where the focus remains on enhancing quality through specialized teacher training; Niger, where the integration of municipal education inspectorates with community child protection committees created a robust strategy to identify and reintegrate the most vulnerable out-of-school girls, and other examples provided in this report.

Similarly, the vast knowledge base and multi-sectoral partnerships built by the Global Programme provide a strategic foundation for **optimizing existing systems to reach the most vulnerable adolescent girls with SRHR, GBV, and protection services**. By leveraging government-led initiatives and deepening system integration, the Global Programme will maximize efficiency and scale while maintaining a rigorous focus on those most at risk. As shown in this report, results from Nepal and Ghana among others demonstrate that targeted system strengthening and strategic partnerships can expand access while improving service quality. In Nepal, ongoing investments in adolescent-friendly health services and strengthened referral pathways will continue to expand integrated care to a significantly higher number of adolescents in 2026. In Ghana, the integration of a robust gender component within the national Social Safety Net has enabled significantly more effective targeting of marginalized girls. This success offers a clear opportunity to further scale and institutionalize the model in 2026, ensuring a sustainable, government-led impact that protects the most vulnerable through established national systems.

At the **global level**, the Global Programme will continue to closely monitor shifting dynamics and emerging challenges to ensure that its advocacy and action remain strategically targeted. Some key priorities that will shape the Global Programme's action include:

1. **Intensifying advocacy to address changing financial and geopolitical realities:** In 2026, the Global Programme will continue to lead evidence-based advocacy, responding to the changing global aid landscape to secure the support and commitment of donors, philanthropic organizations, leaders, governments, and other partners to prioritize girls' rights, helping not only to prevent child marriage, but also ensuring that progress achieved over past decades is not reversed. This requires being present and visible at all high level events, and using that platform to reframe the discourse on ending child marriage in global advocacy and policy spaces by explicitly linking it to economic development, stability, and security, using economic arguments, return-on-investment data, and investment cases to encourage resource mobilization. More specifically, it requires:
   - **Advancing girls' agency in international development and humanitarian budgets**: Reducing investments in adolescent girls, including through child marriage prevention and response, is not a saving: it is a long-term cost with significant social and economic consequences. Donors, particularly those for whom gender equality and girls' rights are declared priorities, must focus on how they can protect, prioritize, and where possible increase targeted funding to end child marriage.
   - **Prioritizing girls in government budgets and policies:** Governments must recognize girls' rights as a strategic priority by acknowledging the high social

113 UNFPA, *UNFPA Strategic Plan 2026-2029*, 2025, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/main-document/UNFPA%20Strategic%20Plan%202026-2029%20-%20FINAL%20-%2014Jul25.pdf
114 UNICEF, *Strategic Plan 2026-2029*, 2025, https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/documents/unicef-strategic-plan-2026-2029-srs-2025

and economic costs of maintaining a high prevalence of child marriage. This might require providing technical support and investing in national capacity, by strengthening the ability of national partners to conduct cost-benefit and economic analyses on ECM and related issues. In 2026, the Global Programme is investing in a Human Resource-Public Finance Specialist to support countries in making the right investments in ECM through public financing.

- **Diversifying resource mobilization efforts** by strengthening strategic partnerships between donors and governments, investing in collaboration and coordination for sustained and strategic impact, and mobilizing private philanthropy to fill funding gaps.

2. **Strengthening legal and normative frameworks and engagement with continental institutions:** The Global Programme will continue to engage continental bodies and champions such as the African Union (AU) and SAARC to strengthen Member State accountability, including through the AU Accountability Framework on Harmful Practices, and to accelerate progress toward ending child marriage (ECM). Laws, anchored in human rights and gender equality frameworks, are central to ending child marriage. Priorities include strengthening the capacity of regional and national human rights institutions, using global frameworks to inform national law reform and implementation, and leveraging human rights reporting and review mechanisms for national advocacy on ECM.

3. **Harnessing the power of evidence and data to end child marriage:** To close the evidence-practice gap, co-created, contextually anchored national and regional evidence agendas are essential. Through the Global Programme and its partners, the Shared Global Research Agenda to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage is helping to identify priority evidence needs at global, regional, and national levels, anchoring research in real-world contexts, ensuring relevance for practitioners, and focusing attention on the most urgent unanswered questions. In parallel, the Global Programme is deepening the use of evidence on what works to guide more strategic investments for scale and impact, while also drawing on data and insights from social and behavioural drivers to strengthen efforts to address the root causes of child marriage and accelerate progress for girls and design carefully targeted programmes.

4. **Investing in digital innovation through private and public sector engagement:** Digital tools expand reach and impact, and the private sector can support their development and financing. They can help scale digital CSE and ECM programming, and leverage digital platforms for knowledge exchange on good practices. To ensure that technology supports child protection and reduces risks for girls, these investments must also be matched by efforts to strengthen digital literacy and online safeguarding, in line with the latest UNICEF Strategic Plan's call to address online violence and recent research by the UNFPA APRO on the misuse of technology to facilitate child marriage (see section 2.5). Similarly, UNFPA's Strategic Plan aims to expand the use of accessible and secure digital tools to improve data collection, strengthen decision-making and enhance accountability.

5. **Building partnerships with, intentionally supporting and investing in girl-, youth-, women-, and survivor-led movements, and creating opportunities for them to lead change:** The ECM ecosystem must be strengthened through a more resilient movement with a strong local ownership, capable of sustaining progress despite shrinking civic space and declining funding. Survivors must be supported to heal, grow, and lead. Girls' voices must be intentionally included in decision-making: representation in policy spaces should go beyond visibility to deliver tangible, meaningful results in implementation. This requires designing coordination structures that enable youth leadership.

6. **Building coalitions with influential leaders to catalyse change:** The Global Programme will continue to engage traditional and religious leaders, women leaders, young people and parliamentarians, build strong coalitions to counter pushback on gender equality, and recruit/nurture more local to global champions of ECM.

7. **Continuing the reform of the Global Programme Results Framework (RF) to more effectively monitor impact and outcome-level result of interventions:** This requires further clarifications and updates to the RF, and also includes providing technical support to Country Offices in exploring innovative monitoring and evaluation approaches to measuring the Global Programme's impact in terms of outcome-level changes, including changes in adolescent girls' confidence and agency, community beliefs and social norms.

5.2 COUNTRY OFFICES PRIORITIES

To accelerate results, the Global Programme has adopted an intentional approach to implementing differentiated and localised programming across its focus countries. This strategy is tailored to each country's context and guided by evidence-based prioritization of interventions. The following are some examples of country-specific priorities for 2026:

- In **Bangladesh**, the Global Programme will scale community-led norm change through MoWCA-led Child Protection Community Hubs (CPCHs). Community sessions will be expanded, with more deliberate functional linkages to education, health, social workers, and referral services to ensure adolescent-responsive support. The programme will also engage with parents and key community influencers, shifting the focus from awareness-raising toward collective commitments, accountability mechanisms, and follow-up actions that reinforce girls' mobility, continued schooling, delayed marriage, and protection from violence at community level. Additionally, the Global Programme will collaborate with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board and Plan International in Bangladesh to develop a model CSE curriculum, which will include content on adolescent girls' agency and competence, violence prevention for K-12, and will contribute to the education sector reform process. At the service-delivery level, the Global Programme will pilot-test a training module on providing GBV case management for married adolescent girls, targeting this underserved group. This first-of-its-kind approach will be adaptive, ensuring that both a survivor-centered approach and the child's best interests are respected across the health and protection pillars. In addition, national social protection systems will be further strengthened to function as a primary prevention and response mechanism, with increased capacity to identify, refer, and support at-risk families and adolescents. At the policy level, the Global Programme will engage with the Ministry of Finance, Planning Commission and Cabinet Division to advocate for dedicated budget allocations for child protection and adolescent empowerment, ensuring that legal and policy commitments are matched by sustainable financing. The aim is to embed child marriage prevention within medium-term budgeting and annual budget cycles. To move beyond project-based arrangements and institutionalize coordination and accountability, the Global Programme will provide technical support for the establishment of a dedicated Child Marriage Prevention Department within MoWCA, which will ensure sustainable, government-led oversight of the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage, including coordination across line ministries and sub-national administrations.

- In **Burkina Faso**, In Burkina Faso, the Global Programme will prioritize the expansion of safe spaces and girls' clubs in rural, hard-to-reach, and insecurity-affected areas, alongside more proactive identification of unreached girls, particularly internally displaced girls, girls living with disabilities, out-of-school girls, and girls who are already married. The programme will also further strengthen pathways for economic empowerment and vocational training by linking girls more systematically to existing social protection, non-formal education, and employment mechanisms. Particular emphasis will be placed on strengthening institutional capacity and monitoring and evaluation at the local level to improve the availability and use of data for planning and adapting interventions. The gradual integration of Global Programme approaches into existing national and local systems will help reduce dependence on project-based delivery and strengthen the sustainability of services. The programme will continue to provide strategic support for policy dialogue, advocacy, and dissemination of existing legal frameworks, particularly in relation to the new Personal and Family Code. Priorities will include supporting national and local stakeholders in the gradual and context-specific adoption of legal standards, while also strengthening coordination frameworks that promote coherence across policies and action plans. At the same time, the Global Programme will deepen engagement with community, customary, and religious leaders to prevent child marriage through sustained approaches tailored to local realities. The strategic use of evidence, including findings from the ongoing impact evaluation, will support evidence-based advocacy and help guide medium-term programmatic priorities.

- In **Ethiopia**, the Global Programme will scale up adolescent empowerment interventions for both in-school and out-of-school adolescent girls through the roll-out of standardized manuals and guidelines. This will ensure more systematic coverage, greater sustainability, and measurable progress in transforming gender and social norms. At the service-delivery level, the programme will support the roll-out of the national case management framework to ensure more systematic handling of cases, stronger referral linkages, and comprehensive, survivor-centred services. Capacity-building initiatives across sectors will also be institutionalized and scaled up to strengthen the sustainable delivery of both prevention and care services. In parallel, the programme will strengthen coordination platforms, expand flexible and mobile service delivery models to reach underserved and high-risk areas, and integrate gender-responsive systems into routine operations to promote more equitable, systematic, and scalable impact. At the policy level, the Global Programme will support development of the second National Roadmap to End Child Marriage

and FGM, ensuring alignment with national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals. It will also facilitate the finalization and endorsement of the Family Code in the Afar, Somali, and Southwest regions to strengthen legal protections for girls. In addition, the programme will strengthen the functionality of the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM, while reinforcing coordination platforms at regional, woreda, and kebele levels to support effective multisectoral action. To strengthen accountability, the programme will enhance surveillance and case-tracking systems, including monitoring of reported, cancelled, disrupted, prosecuted, and convicted cases. It will also advocate for gender-responsive budgeting and stronger accountability mechanisms. Finally, the Global Programme will collaborate with the Gates Foundation to develop an economic model and business case for adolescent well-being and empowerment, including the benefits of delaying marriage.

- In **Ghana**, the Global Programme will support the finalization of the National Parenting Strategy to end violence against women and children, including child marriage, together with its theory of change, implementation plan, monitoring framework, curriculum, and training manual. The strategy adopts a blended approach that combines universal prevention with targeted support for vulnerable parents and caregivers, including adolescent parents. It will also be costed to strengthen scalability and sustainability. The Global programme will also support the review and updating of Ghana's National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage for 2027–2036, ensuring that it incorporates evidence-based, high-impact, and sustainable strategies to protect and empower adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage. The framework will be costed to help the Government and partners finance priority interventions and strengthen sustainability and scale. In addition, the Global Programme will support the integration of costed integrated social services, including child marriage interventions, into sector budgets and medium-term expenditure frameworks (MTEFs). This will include budget and expenditure analysis, stronger subnational planning and budget execution in high-prevalence areas, improved cross-sector financing coordination, and enhanced accountability through better expenditure tracking, parliamentary oversight, and transparency tools. Finally, the Global Programme will support completion of the new study on climate change and child protection, which will inform the development of a climate-resilient child protection systems framework in Ghana.

- In **India**, the Global Programme will strengthen adolescent mental health and agency by integrating mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) into peer-led safe spaces. Through continued support to the Government of India, the peer-led School Health and Wellness Programme (SHWP) model will be expanded to improve the quality, consistency, and reach of adolescent engagement in schools. State-specific partnerships will also be strengthened to support the rollout of contextualized life skills education for vulnerable and marginalized groups, including adolescents with disabilities and girls from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Efforts to empower adolescents and prevent child marriage will also focus on equipping girls with the confidence, life skills, and opportunities needed to transition into STEM, vocational training, and meaningful employment, including through partnerships with the private sector. The Global Programme will support marginalized tribal youth through the AdiYuva Fellowship in partnership with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, enabling young people from tribal communities to access leadership, career, and governance opportunities. At the same time, the programme will strengthen the use of digital tools and sub-district platforms to better identify, track, and provide tailored services to the most marginalized adolescents in remote areas. In partnership with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Global Programme will also strengthen the Women- and Girl-Friendly Panchayat initiative to institutionalize and mainstream child marriage prevention and response at the grassroots level. This will include stronger monitoring systems to assess the short-, medium-, and long-term impact of the intervention. In parallel, advocacy will be intensified to embed child marriage prevention within Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs), helping secure greater investments in "child marriage-free," "child-friendly," and "women- and girl-friendly" village resolutions. Additionally, the Global Programme will support faster school-to-work transitions for young people. Building on the child marriage investment case study, it will generate actionable evidence on adolescents' pathways from education to employment, with a particular focus on how economic vulnerability, child marriage, and limited livelihood opportunities intersect to constrain girls' choices.

- In **Mozambique**, the Global Programme will print and roll out the newly developed mentorship manual plug-ins for humanitarian settings, covering both natural disasters and armed conflict, and integrate them into the peer-to-peer mentorship programme for boys and girls across all target provinces. It will also further expand sexual and reproductive health mobile brigades to schools and communities, including in Nampula and Zambezia provinces, as a cost-effective way to reach large numbers of young people with essential services while improving access for hard-to-reach communities and particularly vulnerable groups, including women

and girls with disabilities. The Global Programme will also disseminate the findings of the 2025 Economic Cost of Child Marriage study to government and civil society stakeholders in order to strengthen evidence-based advocacy on the social and financial consequences of child marriage. In addition, it will work to ensure that a joint monitoring visit by the United Nations and the Government, through the Ministry of Labour, Gender and Social Action (MTGAS), takes place in programme implementation areas after having been postponed in recent years. This visit will help strengthen Government ownership and support for the programme by showcasing results and good practices, while also creating an opportunity to jointly identify challenges and priorities for advancing the national child marriage agenda.

- In **Nepal**, the Global Programme will scale up delivery of the revised Rupantaran curriculum, including modules on digital safety, mental health, civic engagement, and gender equality, across schools, Community Learning Centres, and municipal systems. At the same time, outreach to high-risk and out-of-school girls will be intensified through partnerships with women-led cooperatives and youth networks. Digital learning will also be expanded through wider adoption of the digital Rupantaran course in both public and private schools. The programme will further deepen the shift from direct service delivery toward impact at scale through system-strengthening approaches. This will include enhancing the capacities of Child Rights Committees, One-Stop Crisis Management Centres (OCMCs), helplines, and frontline service providers, while embedding joint planning, budgeting, and review processes across the education, health, justice, and social protection sectors. Strengthening multisectoral response systems will also involve fully operationalizing digital referral pathways and reinforcing coordination between justice and social sectors through stronger linkages among legal actors, protection services, OCMCs, and community mechanisms. In parallel, the Global Programme will work closely with federal, provincial, and local government authorities to support endorsement and rollout of the Adolescent Health and Well-Being Strategy through technical assistance, capacity-building, and policy guidance. Support for the certification and quality improvement of Adolescent-Friendly Health Services (AFHS) will also continue, promoting more standardized, accessible, and adolescent-responsive services. Finally, the programme will seek to strengthen political commitment and financing for ending child marriage by advocating for the integration of related priorities into provincial and local plans and budgets, while expanding the evidence base through CPIMS+ data, GBV case monitoring, and province-level reporting.

- In **Niger**, the Global Programme will build on the positive results of the *Approche Communautaire de Protection de l'Enfant* (ACPE) and Illimin model in Maradi and Zinder. The programme will also strengthen monitoring of girls' decision-making outcomes to better assess its impact on delaying marriage, continuing education, and accessing economic opportunities. At the systems level, the Global programme will strengthen local protection systems, particularly the functionality and sustainability of Village Child Protection Committees as mechanisms for early warning, mediation, and referral. Their capacities will be reinforced to identify child marriage risks, mediate before marriages are formalized, and strengthen linkages with education, health, civil registration, and social protection services. In humanitarian and fragile settings, the programme will prioritize more responsive systems so that adolescent girls and their families can access integrated protection, gender-based violence prevention and response, psychosocial support, and health services. Digital and community-based tools, particularly RapidPro, will be used more extensively to improve reporting, case tracking, and accountability. Additionally, Global Programme will continue to support the implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the Elimination of Child Marriage (2024–2028), with an emphasis on translating national commitments into action at decentralized level. Advocacy will prioritize birth and marriage registration as a prevention tool, while also promoting domestic resource mobilization and greater integration of child marriage prevention into budgeting processes. Support to local authorities and continued dialogue with institutional and community actors will help address persistent resistance and strengthen accountability toward adolescent girls. In parallel, the programme will draw on findings from the ongoing ACPE impact evaluation to inform policy dialogue, scale-up, and resource mobilization, while continued engagement with government and partners will help strengthen political commitment, budgetary support, and accountability.

- In **Sierra Leone**, the Global Programme will scale up safe spaces and school-based life skills programmes across target communities and schools, with a stronger focus on consistent delivery and the inclusion of out-of-school and marginalized girls. The programme will also seek funding for cash transfers and expand Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) programmes to additional districts. At the systems level, the Global Programme will strengthen the capacity of district- and community-level service providers, including Local Councils, Family Support Units, One-Stop Centres, and schools, through targeted training and mentorship. It will also enhance linkages among service providers to ensure more timely protection, referral, and support

for pregnant, married, separated, and otherwise vulnerable adolescent girls. At the policy levels, the programme will support development and dissemination of regulations for effective implementation of the Child Marriage Act (2024), while also promoting community ownership and nationwide awareness of the Child Rights Act (2025) to strengthen compliance. In addition, the Global Programme will support the development and implementation of community and district action plans to end child marriage.

- In **Uganda**, the Global Programme will strengthen integrated case management systems and adolescent-responsive social protection so that vulnerable girls at risk of child marriage are identified, tracked, referred, and supported through stronger data systems and inclusive protection mechanisms. It will also deepen linkages between girls' empowerment interventions and social protection and livelihood support for vulnerable families. To strengthen learning and accountability, the programme will pilot the institutionalization of social norms tracking by repeating a light norms pulse in five districts and publishing a learning note on how to close the gap between personal beliefs and collective action. It will also support implementation of national action plans, including monitoring frameworks and resource mobilization, to promote scale-up and sustainability. Additionally, the programme will intentionally engage political and community leaders at the frontline of efforts to end child marriage, using public declarations, amplifying national and district by-laws, and elevating community commitments to make abandonment of child marriage more visible. It will also address persistent confusion around the legal age of marriage and clarify penalties for perpetrators, facilitators, and complicit actors, including parents and village-level local leaders, by working with cultural and religious leaders to better align customary and religious marriage frameworks with the Children Act 2016 in targeted high-risk districts and sub-districts. In parallel, the programme will continue national-level advocacy to support passage of pending bills before Parliament.

- In **Yemen**, the Global Programme will strengthen social and behaviour change communication through a multi-platform approach including five media platforms, and community dialogues and gatherings, to reach around 100,000 people across targeted communities. The programme will also strengthen school-based platforms for adolescent programming by supporting schools with essential supplies and materials, as well as rehabilitating dedicated spaces for the delivery of life skills education and CSE. In parallel, the Global Programme will build the capacity of frontline protection and health service providers to respond more effectively to the needs of adolescent girls and their families. Capacity-building will focus on adolescent-responsive service delivery, referral pathways, survivor-centred approaches, and stronger coordination across the education, health, and protection sectors. In addition, the programme will conduct a structured lessons-learned exercise to document and analyse success stories, good practices, and implementation challenges. The exercise will synthesize experiences from community-based interventions, adolescent empowerment initiatives, and system-level engagement, with particular attention to approaches that have proven effective in highly constrained and fragile settings. It will generate practical insights to strengthen legal and policy engagement, support adaptive programming, and inform both national and global learning under the Global Programme. Findings will be shared with relevant government counterparts, UN partners, and global stakeholders to reinforce evidence-based advocacy and help guide future investments to prevent child marriage and support girls at risk.

- In **Zambia**, The Global Programme will also support wider awareness and use of the child helpline as a way to report child marriage cases, while continuing to work with the National Prosecution Authority, the Judiciary, and the Zambia Police to strengthen access to justice and information for adolescents at risk of child marriage or already married. The Global Programme will also strengthen the capacity of service providers, including guidance and counselling teachers, social welfare officers, and community-based groups such as Community Welfare Assistance Committees (CWACs), to deliver adolescent-friendly services and strengthen child safeguarding. In addition, the programme will support coordination among stakeholders at national, provincial, district, and community levels to strengthen implementation of the newly launched national End Child Marriage Strategy. In particular, support will be provided to the Government's Gender Division to enhance the coordination of the strategy and related laws through the child marriage sub-committee of the National GBV Technical Working Group, which leads coordination and reporting on child marriage. The programme will also support chiefdoms to review or develop by-laws prohibiting child marriage and to implement a revised initiation curriculum for boys and girls with age-appropriate, child-centred and empowering messages. A rapid analysis will be commissioned to identify what works to prevent child marriage and to capture key lessons from Senanga and Katete, where Global Programme interventions were first piloted.

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ANNEX 1: Global Programme Phase III results framework

Indicator		2024	2025	
		Result	Target	Result
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME 1000: Adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage are effectively making their own informed decisions and choices regarding marriage, education, sexual and reproductive health				
Immediate Outcome 1100: Enhanced knowledge, education and life skills, and attitudes of marginalized adolescent girls on matters such as their rights, relationships, sexual and reproductive health, and financial literacy, including in humanitarian contexts				
Output 1110: Underserved/ marginalized adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who are at risk of child marriage or who are pregnant, married, divorced or widowed are engaged in gender-transformative life skills and CSE programmes that build their knowledge, skills, awareness of their rights, and connect them to services.				
1111	Number of adolescent girls (10-19) who actively participated in Life Skills or CSE interventions supported by the Global Programme	7,427,785	3,944,589	7,326,903
Output 1120: Underserved/marginalized adolescent girls supported to enrol and remain in formal and non-formal education, including through the transition from primary to secondary school				
1121	Number of girls (10-19) supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	8,474,725	338,456	9,757,683
Immediate Outcome 1200: Adolescent boys, families, traditional and religious leaders, community groups, and other influencers demonstrate more gender-equitable attitudes and support for girls' rights				
Output 1210: Boys and men are engaged in gender transformative programmes (including CSE for boys) that promote healthy relationships and positive masculinities and gender equality				
1211	Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms which are supported by the Global Programme	4,772,254	3,467,570	5,716,639
Output 1220: Families, traditional and religious leaders, community members (girls, women, boys and men), community groups, and other influencers (e.g., youth, women, and feminist advocates) are engaged in gender-transformative dialogues, advocacy and consensus-building on alternatives to child marriage (including education), the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality				
1221	Number of individuals who participate in group education/ dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	29,570,565	5,360,732	14,158,728
1223	Number of **local** actors (traditional, religious, community) who have been mobilized by the Global Programme to advocate for an end to child marriage	2,984,336	1,047,339	1,156,705

Note: Indicators 1231, 2121 and 3101 were modified for 2025

Indicator		2024	2025	
		Result	Target	Result
Output 1230: Women's organizations and youth-led organizations are included and supported to mobilize the voices of the marginalized (particularly girls), challenge harmful social norms, and promote gender equality				
1231 (i)	Number of women-led or youth-led CSOs **supported financially** by the Global Programme this year	8,482 (total mobilized)	3,945	2,252
1231 (ii)	Number of women-led or youth-led CSOs the Global Programme **convened** to support the ECM agenda this year (non-financial contribution)		1,145	2,013
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME 2000: Increased 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				
Immediate Outcome 2100: Relevant sectoral systems and institutions effectively respond to the needs of adolescent girls and their families in targeted Global Programme areas				
Output 2110: Formal (primary and secondary) and non-formal schools supported to provide quality, gender-responsive education for adolescent girls, including comprehensive sexuality education				
2111	Number of education institutions which were supported in the reporting year to provide quality gender-responsive education (including CSE)	3,578	4,636	121,793
Output 2120: Health (including sexual and reproductive health), GBV and child protection systems supported to implement guidelines, protocols and standards for adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive coordinated, quality services for unmarried, married, divorced and widowed adolescent girls, adolescent girls who are pregnant or already have children				
2121 (i)	Number of health, child protection or GBV service delivery points which were supported in the reporting year to provide quality adolescent-responsive services	7,007	3,041	4,914
2121 (ii)	Number of girls and boys who accessed the services described in 2121 (i)	2,532,021	483,108	5,507,860
Immediate Outcome 2200: Increased capacity of national and sub-national social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programs and services to respond to the needs of the poorest adolescent girls and their families, including in humanitarian contexts				
2201	Number of poorest adolescent girls (10-19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes supported by the Global Programme in the reporting year	3,548,215	4,318,237	3,320,789
Output 2210: Partnerships with governments, civil society organizations and other implementers supported to ensure that social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programs and services are adolescent-friendly, gender-responsive and reaching the poorest adolescent girls and their families.				
2211	Number of partnerships (formal and informal) to deliver adolescent- and gender-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	282	1,198	436

Indicator		2024	2025	
		Result	Target	Result
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME 3000: Enhanced legal and political response to prevent child marriage and to support pregnant, married, divorced or widowed adolescent girls				
Immediate Outcome 3100: Enhanced capacity of governments to fund, coordinate and implement national, and sub-national action plans and systems to end child marriage				
3101	Total number of national and sub-national Child Marriage Action Plans whose implementation the Global Programme supported this year	301	287	412
Output 3110: Capacity building and technical support provided to government to enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies, in line with international human rights standards, aimed at preventing child marriage, protecting those at risk and addressing the needs of those affected				
3111	Total number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage whose development or adoption the Global Programme supported this year	79	69	76
Output 3120: Capacity building and technical support provided to government to implement a budgeted multi-sectoral gender-transformative plan on ending child marriage across ministries and departments at sub-national levels				
3122	Total number of budget analysis documents developed by the Global Programme this year	9	18	12
Immediate Outcome 3200: Increased capacity of governments and non-government organizations, to generate, disseminate and use quality and timely evidence to inform policy and programme design, track progress and document lessons				
3201	Total number of evidence or knowledge pieces developed this year in programme countries	35	26	53

ANNEX 2: Global Programme contribution to global and regional level evidence generation in 2025

Type	Description	2025 Global Programme Products	Total No.
Research/ evidence products	Research products - working papers, journal articles, research briefs, research reports	Child Marriage Data Portal, routine updates (D&A) Unmasking vulnerabilities: The impact of COVID-19 on the determinants of child marriage in South Asia (Unmasking Vulnerabilities - Impact of COVID-19 on Child Marriage in South Asia.pdf.pdf) Review of effective faith engagement strategies for addressing child marriage and female genital mutilation Countering Pushback to Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage: Synthesis paper and 15 country briefs. Behavioural Monitoring Surveys and Monitoring Tools for Child Protection and Harmful Practices Including 6 evidence briefs for: Sierra Leone; Lebanon; Mozambique; Sudan; Yemen; Zimbabwe Inception reports for the following: Impact Evaluation of Türkiye's Adolescent Girls' and Boys' Empowerment for Elimination of Child Marriage Programme (UNICEF EO, UNICEF Türkiye & RMTeam) Impact Evaluation of Community Engagement and Promoting Positive Masculinities in Burkina Faso (UNICEF EO, UNICEF Burkina Faso, UNFPA Burkina Faso & Innovations for Poverty Action Burkina Faso) Impact Evaluation of Ghana's Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS) Program (UNICEF EO, UNICEF Ghana, UNFPA Ghana & University of Ghana) Report: Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen: Regional Launch of Report and Country Workshops to guide action plans across the MENA region (LINK) Technical Guidance and Practitioner's Toolkit on Reducing Child Marriage through Gender-Responsive Social Protection Evidence Brief: Child Marriage Evidence Profile: Bangladesh (LINK) Exploring the Impact of Climate Shocks on Child Protection | UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Moving beyond jargon: Operationalising gender-transformative approaches to end harmful practices against adolescents", article in the Global Public Health journal in August 2025. UNFPA Asia and the Pacific, Empowering Girls, Securing Futures: The Investment Case for Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage in South-East Asia	22

Type	Description	2025 Global Programme Products	Total No.
Knowledge products/ events	Knowledge products - Blogs, think pieces, conference papers, infographics, presentations, videos and interviews	Report Launch of Unmasking Vulnerabilities The impact of COVID-19 on the determinants of child marriage in South Asia_Recording_19 June 2025.mp4 UNFPA-UNICEF GPECM Regional Webinar Series Leveraging Social Protection to Prevent Child Marriage_recording_22 July 2025.mp4 UNFPA-UNICEF GPECM Regional Webinar Series Leveraging Social Protection to Prevent Child Marriage_presentations_22 July 2025.pptx Recap_Meta-synthesis and Meta-analysis on Social Norms Change programming_28 May 2025.pptx CM SA Evidence Series #55_Feminist Approaches to Ending Child Marriage CM SA Evidence Series #56_Child Marriage and Early Motherhood CM SA Evidence Series #57_Mental Health (3) CM SA Evidence Series #58_India Case Studies CM SA Evidence Series #59_Child Marriage and Domestic Violence Afghanistan CM SA Evidence Series #60_Child Marriage and COVID-19(3) CM SA Evidence Series #61_Married Adolescents (#2) CM SA Evidence Series #62_GPECM Annual Results Report 2024 CM SA Evidence Series #63_Perceptions of Child Marriage in Rural Bangladesh CM SA Evidence Series #64_Disability Inclusion in the Prevention of Harmful Practices CM SA Evidence Series #65_Mental Health (4) CM SA Evidence Series #66_Climate Change (2) Countering pushbacks to ending female genital mutilation and child marriage: Synthesis paper and 15 country briefs Evaluation: Presented a poster of the ICF on child marriage & social norms at the Africa Evidence Summit 2025 in Nairobi Multi-day inception workshops for the above evaluations in Turkiye, Burkina Faso, Ghana, India and Niger CRANK convening – Child Marriage and Social Norms change Innocenti What Works Series Blog Webinar on Risks and Likelihood of Pushback against the Abandonment of Harmful Practices and the Role of Faith Actors. Webinar was attended by over 100 people, including external partners and donors.	34

Type	Description	2025 Global Programme Products	Total No.
Knowledge products/events **(continued)**	Knowledge products - Blogs, think pieces, conference papers, infographics, presentations, videos and interviews	Launch Webinar of the Behavioural Surveys and Monitoring Tools for Child Protection and Harmful Practices: Over 100 people attended within and outside the organization. **Webinar: Digital Innovation to End Harmful Practices, November 2025.** The session highlighted how UNICEF and select partners are leveraging digital solutions to address harmful practices, specifically child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). From girl-centered apps like Oky to inclusive platforms and initiatives such as Laaha, Bebbo, U-Report, and Internet of Good Things (IoGT), the session explored how technology, when co-designed with girls and embedded in supportive ecosystems, can drive scalable and sustainable change. **Webinar: Good Practices in child marriage laws and their implementation, November 2025**. The webinar focussed on good practices in child marriage laws and strategies to prevent anti-rights backlash. **Webinar: Child Marriage Laws in Focus: Progress, Challenges, and Paths Forward, June 2025** The webinar provided an overview of child marriage laws and their importance. It featured experiences and insights from countries that have successfully adopted and implemented laws to prevent child marriage, as well as brought out challenges in implementing these laws, including pushback against the laws, unintended effects, and strategies to mitigate these issues. Research Digest: Issue 46, February 2025 Research Digest: Issue 47, April 2025 Research Digest: Issue 48, June 2025 Research Digest: Issue 49, August 2025 Research Digest: Issue 50, November 2025 Delivering interventions to address child marriage in humanitarian settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen Regional Action Forum to End Child Marriage (RAF ASRO-MENA) Newsletters and Annual Report	
Methodologies/ Guidance/Tools and other global public goods	Technical Guidance (translating evidence into programmatic and policy guidance), Toolkits	E-learning course on interpretation and use of data on harmful practices (D&A) Infographic: Evidence on What Works to Prevent Child Marriage – high-reach visual product distilling key evidence messages on effective interventions (LINK) UNFPA-Equality Now Training on Movement Building to End Harmful Practices (LINK)	3

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2025 ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT

Protecting Progress: Adapting to a Changing Aid Landscape



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Global Programme to End Child Marriage

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Government of the Netherlands
Norway
UKaid from the British people
ZONTA INTERNATIONAL BUILD A BETTER WORLD FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS
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