

TEN REASONS TO INVEST IN THE UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE



© UNICEF/UN0851938/Himu

The international community is committed to eliminating child marriage by 2030, as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN).¹ To keep this goal on global, regional and national agendas and to accelerate large-scale, lasting and gender-transformative change, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the Global Programme) in 2016. Over a long-term, 15-year period, in 12 countries² across four regions, the Global Programme is working with multiple partners to achieve key milestones and ultimately to end child marriage – while its full reach and impact goes well beyond.

The lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of conflicts, crises and climate change have set us back in the effort to end child marriage and created new challenges for girls and their families around the world. But this will not prevent us from accelerating our efforts. The Global Programme continues with a renewed ambition to – once and for all – make child marriage a thing of the past.

There are many reasons for governments, foundations and organizations to invest in the Global Programme. Here are the top ten:

Reason 01 The Global Programme is the largest evidence-based programme addressing child marriage, meaningfully engaging millions of girls and community members.

A robust external evaluation has confirmed the impact of the Global Programme.³ Since the inception of the programme in 2016, it has provided information, skills and services to 21 million girls and 58 million community members in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia (see Figure 1). As the programme targets countries with a high burden and/or prevalence of child marriage, results achieved in these countries have an impact on the global situation and hence the programme plays a major role in the achievement of the SDGs.

FIGURE 1. Some results achieved by the Global Programme since its inception in 2016⁴



21 MILLION

Girls reached with life skills or comprehensive sexuality education

1.2 MILLION

Girls supported to enroll and/or remain in school



58 MILLION

Community members engaged in dialogues on gender equality and child marriage

700,000

Prevention and care service delivery points supported to provide quality services for girls



455

Partnerships established to support social protection and girls' economic empowerment

1. SDG 5.3 states an international commitment 'to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation'. Child marriage is defined by the UN as any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child. This includes both formal (i.e., marriages) and informal unions defined as those in which a couple live together as if married, but for which there has been no formal civil or religious ceremony (i.e., cohabitation).

2. Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

3. Cazottes, Isobel, Coupal, Francoise and Esser, Andrea Lee, 'Phase I Evaluation Summary: UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage', 2019, <<https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/GP-2019-Evaluation-Summary-English.pdf>>.

4. Data as of end 2022, UNFPA and UNICEF, 'Global Programme Annual Report 2022', 2023.

Reason 02 **The Global Programme uses the convening power of the UN to position the issue of child marriage on global, regional and national stages.**

The unique convening power of the UN enables the Global Programme to access decision makers at the highest level and to ensure that child marriage is addressed seriously by world leaders.

The Global Programme has generated political momentum and provided technical input into UN resolutions which recognize child, early and forced marriage as a harmful practice that violates human rights and disproportionately affects girls and women. The last General Assembly resolution, adopted by consensus in 2022, was co-sponsored by 125 countries globally, including seven countries which co-sponsored for the first time⁵ – demonstrating a global political commitment to end this harmful practice.

The programme further, through the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism, has supported the pledge of four countries⁶ with some of the highest burden of child marriage globally, contributing largely to the global burden of the practice, to accelerate investments in evidence-based interventions to address child marriage and support already married girls, as well as the creation of a movement to take this pledge forward and wider.⁷

Reason 03 **The dual-agency Global Programme is a successful example of UN reform.**

The Global Programme clearly demonstrates that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’, with UNFPA and UNICEF working together to have

an integrated advocacy strategy, policy approaches and monitoring through joint workplans, as well as promoting the convergence of services and interventions for adolescent girls and their families and communities in the prevention of and response to child marriage.

Joint programming in common geographic areas is facilitating the delivery of an integrated package of services and interventions, in line with the evidence on the success of multisectoral solutions. It is also helping countries address national priorities and any obstacles in their path towards meeting the SDGs.

Reason 04 **The Global Programme is well positioned to use multisectoral approaches to end child marriage, due to the unique and complementary strengths of UNFPA and UNICEF.**

Using their comparative advantages and building on their well-established presence at country and regional levels, UNFPA and UNICEF have developed



5. Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritius, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

6. Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Nigeria.

7. Read the commitment in The Lancet here: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)00109-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)00109-5/fulltext).



multisectoral approaches to the complex set of interrelated issues that lead to child marriage.

For example, in Ethiopia, the Global Programme has supported the development and implementation of the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation – a multisectoral plan which contributes to improved investments and accountability to end harmful practices across different sectors and actors, including within education, health, justice and child protection.

Reason 05 The Global Programme plays a catalytic role in leveraging domestic financing and official development assistance to end child marriage.

The Global Programme provides technical assistance to help national governments meet their political commitments through leveraging and influencing all available financial flows and instruments in support of the SDGs, and to end child marriage by 2030.

Since the inception of the Global Programme, the number of countries globally implementing a costed national plan or strategy to end child marriage has increased from 7 in 2018 to 41 in 2022, and 15 countries in 2022 allocated public financial resources for implementation of interventions specifically targeted to ending child marriage. Of the 11 Global Programme focus countries with costed action plans to ending child marriage (all but Yemen), 8 have allocated public financial resources for their implementation.

Reason 06 By investing in quality data, research and knowledge management, as well as technical guidance and capacity-building, the Global Programme helps build a strong evidence base for advocacy, policymaking and programming to end child marriage, benefiting countries beyond the main targeted twelve.

The Global Programme supports evidence generation and synthesis, including systematic reviews, impact evaluations, and innovative research efforts engaging youth- and girl-led organizations, focusing on previously neglected research areas, as outlined in the global research strategy developed by the programme. To ensure the production of high-quality evidence which is used by practitioners and policymakers, the Strategic Technical Assistance for Research (STAR) initiative to end harmful practices⁸ builds the capacity of and supports country teams and partners in research efforts, and the Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK)⁹, in partnership with Girls Not Brides, allows for better research coordination and dissemination globally.

With UNICEF being the custodian agency for monitoring of SDG 5.3, the programme ensures wide dissemination of the latest available child marriage data as a

8. Read more about the STAR here: <<https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/harmful-practices/>>.

9. Read more about the CRANK here: <<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-research-action-network/>>.

global good, through the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism, and promotes capacity-building to ensure data informs targeting of interventions and investments.

Reason 07 **An investment in the Global Programme is good value for money.**

Consolidated proposals and reporting, pooled funding and lower management costs allow for a larger proportion of donor contributions to be used for programme delivery and the achievement of results. Eighty-six per cent of Global Programme spending in 2022 was for programme activities, while the remaining expenditures covered human resources, monitoring and administrative costs. Some other notable data showing value for money include 72 per cent of programme partnership agreements signed with local non-governmental organizations, 98 per cent of UNICEF-procured services under the programme are through competitive contracts and 46 per cent of programme goods and services are procured through long-term agreements.¹⁰ The use of competitive contracts and long-term agreements, which are available to both agencies, helps drive down prices and ensures efficiencies.



© UNICEF/UN0847029/Dejongh

Further, while the Global Programme is the UN flagship programme for achieving SDG target 5.3 on ending child marriage, it contributes to several other interdependent SDG targets, such as to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care (target 3.7), to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture (target 16.2), to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (target 4.1), and to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all (target 1.3), among others. Hence, an investment in the Global Programme is an investment in the achievement of the SDGs as a whole.

Reason 08 **The gender-transformative change agenda of the Global Programme aims to empower adolescent girls, redistribute power and resources and change discriminatory gender norms, for impact beyond ending child marriage.**

The Global Programme focuses interventions on empowering adolescent girls by supporting their different needs and building their knowledge and skills, challenging harmful gender norms and power relations within the community at large, and addressing social risk factors. With this approach, the Global Programme helps to ensure adolescent girls are empowered to access sexual and reproductive health and protection services and choices and opportunities beyond marriage, including contributing to a reduction in adolescent childbearing and associated health risks, while simultaneously engaging boys and men, families and communities to create an enabling environment for gender-transformative change.

Gender-transformative approaches are integrated across all the Global Programme does: to achieve scale and

¹⁰. UNFPA and UNICEF, 'Global Programme Annual Report 2022', 2023.

enable the leveraging of resources (both public and private) for sustainable, transformative results which redistribute power and resources for women, girls and marginalized groups. To date, the programme has developed and supported the roll-out of the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool¹¹, an assessment and action planning tool for country programmes, in seven¹² of the Global Programme targeted countries, as well as an additional three¹³ countries beyond the programme.

Reason 09 **The Global Programme's interventions are accelerating the progress to end child marriage as they go to scale, amplifying change and being adaptable to the local context.**

The Global Programme has scaled up¹⁴ by expanding its interventions, covering larger geographic areas and reaching greater numbers of adolescent girls, their families and communities. It has also impacted on wider systemic change. For example, in India, scaling up of the adolescent empowerment work has led to the government allocating 178 million Indian rupees (INR) in 2022, compared to 60 million in 2020, in response to the Global Programme providing technical support and streamlining convergence of investments through key national and state flagship programmes.

The programme is also highly adaptable to the context where it is implemented, and during COVID-19 it quickly pivoted approaches to ensure continued outreach

and engagement despite the pandemic. An independent assessment of the adaptations during the pandemic¹⁵ found e.g. that programme advocacy efforts kept child marriage on national agendas and that adoption of digital approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement with adolescent girls at scale.

Reason 10 **The Global Programme successfully partners with many stakeholders to drive transformative change, including supporting girls- and women-led organizations and movements.**

The Global Programme embodies the spirit of partnerships that are at the core of accelerating progress towards achieving the SDGs; this includes working with host governments, parliaments, civil society organizations, academia, the private sector, girls themselves and their families.

In 2022, the programme worked with 276 implementing partners at regional and national level, of which 145 are civil society organizations or partnerships, 27 are youth-led and 46 are women's rights organizations.¹⁶ An assessment of the programme's civil society partners in 2021 shows that over half of them are already implementing gender-transformative or gender-responsive interventions,¹⁷ and the programme continues to build the capacity of youth-, girls- and women-led organizations, supporting platforms for civil society to lead change and demand accountability.

11. Read more about the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool here: <<https://www.unicef.org/documents/gender-transformative-accelerator-tool>>.

12. Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique and Niger.

13. Jordan, Nigeria and Palestine.

14. For the Global Programme, going to scale means contributing significantly to a decline in the national prevalence of child marriage.

15. UNFPA and UNICEF, 'Joint Assessment of Adaptations to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in Light of COVID-19', 2020, <<https://www.unicef.org/documents/joint-assessment-adaptations-unfpa-unicef-global-programme-end-child-marriage-light-covid>>.

16. UNFPA and UNICEF, 'Global Programme Annual Report 2022', 2023.

17. UNFPA and UNICEF, 'Assessment of feminist-focused CSOs under the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage', 2023.