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Child Marriage: Situation and Impacts

Globally, nearly 650 million girls and women alive today were married as children—before they were 18 years old. Though child marriage affects some boys, girls are disproportionately impacted. An estimated 12 million girls are married in childhood each year. Child marriage violates girls’ rights to health, education and safety. With its social, cultural and economic ramifications, child marriage must be seen as a major obstacle to sustainable development and a fairer future for all children.

The Situation

In the last decade, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted thanks to the decline in the prevalence of child marriage globally from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls being married before their 18th birthday. However, this remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. COVID-19 has upended the lives of children, adolescents and families across the globe, and adversely affected programs to end child marriage. An additional 10 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides before the end of the decade, child marriages that otherwise might have been averted. One year into the pandemic, urgent action is needed to prevent and mitigate the toll of COVID-19 on children, adolescents and their families.

Most child marriages due to COVID-19 are expected to occur among older girls in the near term. However, the impact of the pandemic is likely to be felt for at least another decade, also raising the risk of child marriage for girls who are now young. Effective programming measures such as getting girls back to school and ensuring access to social protection programs and to health and protection services, applied at scale, could delay the age at first marriage and lower the risk of marrying in childhood. Such measures could reduce the additional number of child brides by half, bringing the total impact of COVID-19 down to 5 million additional child brides.

Threatening Progress, Altering the Lives of a Generation of Adolescent Girls

The risk of child marriage increases through various pathways, including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services. Economic insecurity can lead to child marriage as a way to relieve financial pressure on a family. This is consistent with the notion of child marriage as a coping mechanism in humanitarian settings in times of economic fragility and uncertainty, including conflicts, food crises and disasters.

The evidence is also clear that education is a protective factor against child marriage. Families tend to make decisions about a girl’s education and marriage in parallel. Thus, school closures triggered by COVID-19 may, in effect, increase vulnerability to discontinuing education and promoting marriage. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted school systems globally and widened educational inequalities by shrinking opportunities for many vulnerable children and adolescents—such as those living in poor or remote rural areas, girls, refugees, those with disabilities, and those who are forcibly displaced—to continue their education.
Finally, as health care workers struggle to keep ahead of the pandemic, other ‘nonessential’ services have been disrupted in many countries. These include sexual and reproductive health services, which have a direct impact on adolescent pregnancy and subsequent marriage. Awareness campaigns and community dialogue on the harmful effects of child marriage have also been curtailed, creating a dangerous vacuum.

Impact of COVID-19 on Adolescent Girls and Gender Equality

School closures due to COVID-19 have left over a billion students out of school, disrupting daily life, educational attainment and learning outcomes. Girls may drop out of school entirely or be less likely to re-enrol when schools reopen. Even before the pandemic struck, nearly 1 in 5 girls aged 15-19 globally were not in school, employment or training, compared with 1 in 10 boys.3

School closures due to COVID-19 can also affect how children use their time. Girls may spend more time at home and unsupervised, which could increase their exposure to sexual activity, sexual violence and unwanted pregnancy. Less time in school may also cause families to perceive lower returns on girls’ education.

Crises such as COVID-19 heighten and compound gender norms that constrain girls’ school attendance; risk of child marriage, early pregnancy, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and child labor. No matter where a girl lives, she is at risk of encountering violence in every space, including in the classroom.

Worsening household income may also cause some adolescents living in especially difficult circumstances to view child marriage as the best option available to them. In half of child marriage cases reviewed in a West Bengal case study, families cited economic hardships due to the lockdown as reasons for marrying off their underage daughters. In worst-case scenarios, poverty could force girls to resort to transactional sex as a risk-coping mechanism, which could lead to increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation, unplanned pregnancy and arranged marriage.

Causes and Impact on Adolescent Girls

Changing laws alone will not end child marriage; conditions, attitudes and behaviors must also change. For many and often complex reasons, child marriage continues despite legal prohibitions. At times, national secular laws are ignored as traditional and customary laws have precedence. Often, the challenge is not legal; it is economic, social and cultural.
Poverty is among the most common causes of persistent child marriage. For many families, sending an adolescent girl to be married is considered a way to reduce an immediate economic burden.

Gender discrimination and expectations that restrict a girl’s potential also play a fundamental role in the continuation of child marriage. Weak protection, education and health systems for girls and a lack of economic opportunity all limit girls’ options, perpetuating child marriage.

Other prevalent causes include social and religious expectations and beliefs about the necessity of protecting girls – that a girl is ‘safer’ if she is married as marriage will protect her against physical and sexual assault. The very opposite is true.

Regardless of the reasons, child marriage leads to significant social, emotional and physical harm for many adolescent girls. For example, girls who marry as children tend to have little education, which limits their vocational and economic opportunities. They are also more likely to give birth at a young age. And they are less likely to receive medical care during pregnancy than women who marry when they are older. Indeed, complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second biggest cause of death for girls age 15 to 19.

**How Can We Break the Cycle?**

Significant evidence links girls’ empowerment to a reduction in child marriage. Specific interventions have focused on improving girls’ access to services, education, information and opportunities.

But empowered girls are not enough to end child marriage alone. Governments, civil society and private sector partners need to work with leaders in education and health to improve services and strengthen systems that assist girls. Social inclusion interventions, including cash transfer incentives, scholarships or stipends, can also help reduce a family’s financial difficulties and empower girls to continue their education or seek health care.

Attempts to end child marriage have usually used a combination of these approaches:

- Empower girls with information, skills and support networks.
- Educate and engage family and community members to create an enabling environment for adolescent girls and to promote gender equitable norms.
- Provide economic support to girls and their families.
- Ensure quality education and health care is accessible for each and every adolescent girl.
- Foster legal and policy frameworks that protect adolescent girls.
- Collect robust data that allows for evidence-based programming and monitoring.
A Programme to Accelerate Global Action

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) joined forces in March 2016 and launched a joint Global Programme to End Child Marriage (unicef.org/protection/unfpa-unicef-global-programme-end-child-marriage). The multi-country effort is focusing on bolstering the systems that provide alternatives to child marriage, including protection, education and health care. It is working to address root causes such as poverty and harmful cultural norms and practices. The ultimate goals are to reduce child marriage rates, increase education levels and decrease the number of girls who give birth as adolescents.

Program Overview

The Global Programme to End Child Marriage is tackling the core economic, social and cultural causes of child marriage, and is targeting girls who are at risk of child marriage or who are already in a union (ages 10-19) in 12 countries that have high rates of child marriage: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia. These countries were selected because they have a high prevalence of child marriage, large projected burden of government engagement and potential for regional distribution of the program. Progress in these countries, indeed, means progress for the entire world.

The Global Programme will be implemented over three phases. In Phase I (2016–2019), it aimed to strengthen critical institutions and systems in selected locations and countries to deliver quality services and opportunities for a significant number of adolescent girls. It aimed to lay the foundations of attitudes, behaviors and norms against child marriage among a critical mass of families and communities.

In Phase II (2020–2023), it will accelerate actions to end child marriage by enhancing investments in and support for both unmarried and married adolescent girls; engaging key actors (including young people as agents of change) in catalyzing shifts toward positive gender norms, including the right to choose when and whom to marry; increasing political support, resources, gender-responsive policies and frameworks; engendering respect for laws, including international humanitarian law; and improving data and evidence on what works.

In Phase III (2024–2030), the longer-term, gender-transformative goal is to ensure significantly larger proportions of adolescent girls fully enjoy a childhood free from the risk of marriage. Girls should experience healthier, safer and more empowered life transitions, including making choices about their education, career, sexuality, relationships, marriage and childbearing.
The Global Programme is overseen by the following agencies:

**The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)** promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

**The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** is the lead UN agency for delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.

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

**Results to Date**
To date, nearly 8 million adolescent girls have been reached through life skills and school attendance support and 39 million individuals have been engaged in community-based behavior change and sensitization activities, including community dialogues, media, interactive folk theater, and partnerships and advocacy with faith-based organizations and traditional leaders.

Below is a selection of programmatic success highlights from Phase I (2016-2019).

- **5.3 million individuals** reached through community dialogue
- **11 of the 12 countries** developed national action plans to end child marriage
- **240 million individuals** across the selected countries reached through media campaigns
- **24,000 facilities** implemented adolescent girl-friendly health and protection services
- **26,000 schools** strengthened adolescent girl-friendly education

### PHASE I OUTPUT INDICATOR PERFORMANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTPUT INDICATORS</th>
<th>TARGETS</th>
<th>RESULTS</th>
<th>PERCENT ACHIEVED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Life Skills</strong> Adolescent girls are actively participating in a targeted program</td>
<td>6,426,102</td>
<td>7,971,937</td>
<td>124%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.2 Education</strong> Adolescent girls are supported to enroll and remain in formal and nonformal education</td>
<td>703,899</td>
<td>744,812</td>
<td>106%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.1 Community Dialogue</strong> Households are increasingly aware of the benefits of investing in adolescent girls and ending child marriage</td>
<td>25,869,434</td>
<td>39,483,656</td>
<td>153%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.1 Health and Protection Systems</strong> Supported to implement guidelines, protocols and standards for adolescent girl-friendly health and protection services</td>
<td>18,544</td>
<td>24,287</td>
<td>131%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.2 Education System</strong> Nonformal/primary/secondary schools supported to improve quality of education for adolescent girls</td>
<td>16,229</td>
<td>26,380</td>
<td>163%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.1 National Plan of Action</strong> The country has a costed national action plan or development plan on ending child marriage across more than one ministry</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.1 Evidence on Scale Models</strong> Country-specific, high-quality data and evidence are generated and shared on what works at scale to accelerate ending child marriage</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Global Programme will engage with men and boys in gender equality work, challenging toxic masculinities and instead empowering them to become agents of positive change on gendered norms, attitudes and behavior. Boys and men will be reached through gender-transformative programs that promote healthy relationships, positive masculinities and gender equality.

Meanwhile, families, communities, traditional and religious leaders and other influencers will be engaged in dialogue and consensus-building programs on alternatives to child marriage (including education), the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality. Finally, women’s organizations and youth-led organizations will be supported to mobilize the voices of the marginalized girls, challenge harmful social norms, and promote gender equality.

Outcome 3: Increased capacity of education, health, child protection, and gender-based violence (GBV) systems to deliver coordinated, quality programs and services that meet the needs of adolescent girls and their families, including in humanitarian contexts.
Phase II places greater emphasis on preventing child marriage through stronger links between approaches to child marriage and gender-based violence and child-protection systems. This entails working with key ministries responsible for the implementation of the national child-protection system as well as key ministries working on ending violence against women and girls, including strengthening services and response mechanisms for victims of gender-based violence, especially girls. It also means strengthening case management and referral systems, and the social service workforce to better respond to cases of child marriage, plus multisectoral services to respond to violence against women and girls.

The Global Programme will provide technical support to governments in order to help them enact, enforce, and uphold laws and policies that are in line with international human rights standards aimed at preventing child marriage, protecting those at risk, and addressing the needs of those already affected. It will also work at the sub-national level to build the capacity of local authorities to implement budgeted, multisectoral, gender-transformative plans for ending child marriage.

Outcome 6: Increased capacity of governments and non-government organizations to generate, disseminate and use quality and timely evidence to inform policy and program design, track progress, and document lessons.

Having the right data and evidence is critical in the fight to end the practice of child marriage. The Programme seeks to increase the generation, sharing and use of robust data and evidence on adolescent girls for advocacy, programming, learning, and tracking progress. This will improve the quality and quantity of evidence around ending child marriage and support governments in being more effective in ending child marriage.

Through building the capacity of governments and civil society organizations to generate and use quality data and evidence, the Global Programme will help accelerate the work that has already been done toward ending child marriage and support married girls. Regional and global coordination and support will be provided to facilitate South-to-South collaboration and cross-learning across Global Programme countries.
Girls who marry in childhood are at greater risk for forced first marital sex and intimate partner violence than same-age peers who marry later, according to research in Ethiopia.

Married adolescent girls are at risk of HIV transmission due to spousal age difference and limited negotiation capacity to practice safe sex.

Girls with no education are three times as likely to marry or enter into union by 18 as those with a secondary or higher education.

The vast majority of child brides are expected to give up school to assume adult roles including housework, childcare and attending to a husband’s needs.

While it is not clear if child marriage causes school dropout or vice versa, it is clear that child marriage often means the end to a girl’s formal education and limits her vocational and economic opportunities.

Key Messages

The world must take urgent action to end child marriage! These key messages and sound bites can help you be an advocate for girls and raise awareness about the issue of child marriage and our partnership.

Child marriage is a violation of girls’ rights and a danger to girls’ health, safety, education and futures.

- Girls who marry as children are less likely to receive medical care during pregnancy than women who marry as adults, which puts their own as well as their children’s health and lives at risk. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death among adolescent girls.

- The pressure to become pregnant once married can be intense, and child brides end up having many children to care for while still young themselves.
Child marriage disproportionately affects girls who are poor and from rural areas.

- Boys are far less likely than girls in the same region to marry before age 18.

- The girls most likely to marry before the age of 18 live in rural areas, have little or no education, and reside in the poorest households.

- Rates of child marriage among the poorest girls have persisted, but rates have declined among the richest.

Changing laws alone will not end child marriage; conditions, attitudes and behavior must also change.

- Despite laws in many countries around the world, child marriage persists because of multiple and often complex reasons.

- In times of conflict or other emergencies, child marriage is a danger for adolescent girls.

- In some contexts, child marriage is considered the best of bad options. During conflict or forced migration, adolescent girls are often married off early as a form of protection in a desperate situation. Other times, it is viewed as a path that financially unburdens the family, preserves its honor and protects an adolescent girl.

Empowering girls with access to quality education, health care, justice, information and tailored services to the individual child and families is key to ending child marriage.

- Enhancing health and education systems so they can reach more girls – especially girls from poor families and rural areas – is fundamental if efforts to end child marriage are to keep pace with population growth. Enhancing these systems also ensures that the needs of married girls can be addressed.

- Life skill-building and empowerment interventions for adolescent girls, when complemented with education, have proven effective at reducing child marriage but are specific to certain contexts, recent research in rural Bangladesh showed.

- Cash transfers have shown results in relieving families’ economic burdens and reducing child marriage.

- Adolescent girls are more likely to control their own destinies and effect change in their communities when they have higher levels of education, according to recent research in rural Bangladesh.

- Girls need to be fully informed of their rights and need to be able to seek protection and confidential advice, redress and remedies that are tailored to the individual child and family. When girls are allowed to be girls, everybody wins.

- To change the social and cultural causes of child marriage, and to change attitudes and behaviors, it is essential to engage with families and communities in conjunction with investments in systems that reach girls.

General Facts

- More than 650 million women alive today were married as children – before they were 18 years old. About 250 million were married before age 15.

- Globally, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased 15 percent in the last decade, from 1 in 4 to about 1 in 5.

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 10 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides before the end of the decade, child marriages that otherwise might have been averted.

- Most child marriages due to COVID-19 are expected to occur in the near term among older girls.

- Without further acceleration in the reduction of child marriage, more than 150 million additional girls under 18 will marry by 2030.

- The poorest girls are 2.5 times more likely to marry as children than the wealthiest.
About the Global Programme

- The Global Programme is in 12 countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

- The Global Programme brings together governments, civil society, families and young people in a collective effort to prevent girls from marrying too young and to support those already married as girls.

- There are three phases:
  - Phase I (4 years) — Strengthened the critical institutions and systems in select countries to deliver quality services and opportunities for a significant number of girls.
  - Phase II (5–10 years) — Accelerate actions to end child marriage by enhancing investments in and support for both unmarried and married adolescent girls.
  - Phase III (10–15 years) — Reach larger numbers of girls to ensure that they fully enjoy childhood free from the risk of marriage, and that they experience healthier, safer and more empowered life transitions.

UNICEF USA and Zonta International Partnership

- Zonta International is supporting the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage for the 2020-2022 Biennium.

- Zonta International has committed to donating US$1,500,000, in addition to the US$2,000,000 donated during the 2018-2020 Biennium and is the first private partner to support this program.

- Zonta International has supported UNICEF since 1972, and through its partnership with UNICEF USA (unicefusa.org/zontainternational) has reached millions of women and girls with access to clean water, health care, violence prevention and services, education and more.
**Key Moments**
Below are key global moments that can be used to activate people around ending child marriage. These are great times to mobilize your club, community, family and friends to raise awareness around the issue and fundraise for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

Use the Social Media Guide and Best Practices for Fundraising in the following sections to help you get started.

**Stay up-to-date on the latest information and news through the UNFPA-UNICEF monthly newsletter.**
Sign up today: [mailchi.mp/48b3b36758c4/gpchildmarriagesignup](mailto:mailchi.mp/48b3b36758c4/gpchildmarriagesignup)

**August**
(or Other Comparable Months Around the World)

**Congressional Recess**
In the U.S., during the month of August, the U.S. Congress typically takes a break (recess!) from their business on Capitol Hill to return to their home districts and/or states. Does your country have a similar month when elected officials return from their capitals? This period of time is a perfect opportunity to make connections with your local representatives. Throughout a recess, Zonta members are encouraged to coordinate with one another to set up in-district meetings. Check out the Global Advocacy section to learn more about how you can advocate to your local officials.

**October**

**International Day of the Girl Child** (October 11)
The day aims to highlight and address the needs and challenges girls face while promoting girls’ empowerment and the fulfillment of their human rights.

**November**

**Universal Children’s Day** (November 20)
The day aims to promote international togetherness, awareness among children worldwide, and improving children’s welfare. November 20 is an important date as it is the date in 1959 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. It is also the date in 1989 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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**16 Days of Activism and Zonta Says NO to Violence Against Women (November 25–December 10)**

From November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10, Human Rights Day, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign is a time to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world.

**Zonta Says NO to Violence Against Women** is a Zonta International campaign to raise awareness of and increase actions to end violence against women and girls around the world. The campaign, which began in November 2012, features the service and advocacy actions of Zonta clubs and districts to prevent and end violence against women and girls in their local communities.

**March**

**International Women’s Day** (March 8)
It is a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political.
UNICEF USA Best Practices for Fundraising
UNICEF USA has developed some best practices for fundraising that Zonta International members can use when fundraising for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage. Best when used alongside the Key Moments and Social Media Guide, this section provides further information on planning and executing a successful fundraiser.

Setting and Achieving Fundraiser and Event Goals
Now that you’ve decided to host a fundraiser/event, you may be wondering: How do I measure my success? The answer is to set realistic and attainable goals.

Check out the steps below for some guidance on how to set yourself up for success:

Step 1: Set your goals.
First and foremost, clearly establish your goals. Ask yourself: what do you want the fundraiser/event to accomplish? Then work to establish a revenue goal and budget accordingly. You can set a realistic revenue goal by calculating an average dollar amount you hope to raise per attendee, or a total amount you’d like to contribute to the Zonta Foundation for Women in support of UNICEF USA. If you are organizing a bake sale, for example, you might average US$1 per baked good and set a goal to sell 200 items, for a total revenue of US$200 minus expenses.

Step 2: Keep expenses low.
Expenses should not exceed 25% of revenue for your event. For example, if your revenue projection is US$4,000, expenses should not total more than US$1,000. It is critical that fundraisers/events benefitting Zonta and UNICEF be cost-effective and seen as socially responsible within your community.

Step 3: Think outside the dollar.
Consider alternate types of donations – such as party supplies, food, equipment, practice space or meals – that could help you reduce expenses of your fundraiser/event and increase your revenue. Offer these as options to attendees in lieu of cash donations.

Step 4: Donate online.
If you do not have the capacity to set up an in-person fundraiser/event, learn about other ways you can donate online or through the mail here: zonta.org/Web/My_Zonta/Tools/Foundation_Tools

FUNDRAISER AND EVENT IDEAS
Below is a list of fundraiser/event ideas that can help your club get started!

- Homemade Craft or Baked Goods Sale
- Cinema Showing
- Fashion Show
- Music Event
- Panel Discussion
- Seminars
- Silent Auctions and Raffles
- Speaker Series
- Virtual meeting or viewing party — check out the app House Party and watch the film Sitara on Netflix

Additional Fundraising Guidance
Budgeting and Social Responsibility
With any UNICEF USA event, our goal is to ensure that the return on investment (ROI) fits within a 4 to 1 ratio, which means that for every US$1 spent, US$3 will benefit UNICEF. This helps ensure that your fundraiser/event is seen as socially responsible within your community.

How do you ensure that your fundraiser/event fits within these guidelines as a host? Here are a few tips:

- Create your budget ASAP! Identify a point person to manage the event budget, and work together to map out projected revenue and anticipated costs.
- Use your resources. If you plan to reach out to supporters for financial support, map out what costs you anticipate being donated vs. what you will need to pay for out of pocket (i.e. xx cases of wines valued at XXX donated, venue rental = US$5,000, etc.).
- Please note that in-kind and/or monetary support that goes directly to the execution of the fundraiser/event is not recognized as tax deductible in the United States.

Price Points
Use the Price Points one-pager on the following page as a guide and resource when advocating and fundraising for the Global Programme. Feel free to print it out and share with other members, your community, family and friends to show the impact they can make with a donation.
THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT

We hope you will consider a gift to support The Global Programme to End Child Marriage. Below are examples of the impact* your gift could provide:

$50 could provide antenatal care kits to 4 pregnant adolescent girls in Niger, promoting better health, including preventing anemia and low birth weight of newborns, frequent health threats for girls who are married at a young age and their children.

$500 could mobilize 500 community members in Mozambique around prevention of child marriage.

$5,000 could support a Girls Club for a year within a school in Ethiopia. Girls Clubs are making a difference in reducing child marriage by empowering girls through life skills training.

$10,000 could reach over 360 people in India through an awareness campaign on social issues, including child marriage.

$25,000 could support the transition of 500 girls in Burkina Faso from primary to post primary support through scholarship, school kits and tutoring support. Increasing girls’ transition to secondary school is a key strategy for reducing rates of child marriage.

*These figures are exemplary
Global Advocacy
Tackling core economic, social and cultural causes is central to ending child marriage. Specifically, the Global Programme focuses on the conditions that allow child marriage to take place and provides support to girls (age 10 to 19) who are already married or in a union.

The first four years of the Programme targeted institutions and systems that provide services and opportunities to adolescent girls in an effort to improve quality of the services. System strengthening has been a core strategy in working with national education, health, child protection and social protection systems with scale and sustainability as key principles. Working to change attitudes in families and communities has helped promote positive attitudes toward investing in and supporting adolescent girls. It has improved adolescent girls’ access to fair and equitable quality services. It has strengthened their voice when seeking fair, just solutions and remedies when their rights are violated.

Over Phase II and Phase III, the Programme will encourage political and civil society support for adolescent girls and focus on actions that empower each and every single one of them seeking to live a healthy, safe and fulfilling life.

The social and political will to end child marriage is stronger than ever. The UNFPA – UNICEF Global Programme is turning commitment into tangible action for girls.

UNICEF’s Stance
UNICEF’s stance on child marriage is that marriage before the age of 18 is a fundamental violation of human rights. Many factors interact to place a girl at risk of marriage, including poverty, the perception that marriage will provide "protection," family honor, social norms, customary or religious laws that condone the practice, an inadequate legislative framework and the state of a country’s civil registration system. Child marriage often compromises a girl’s development by resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupting her schooling, limiting her opportunities for career and vocational advancement and placing her at increased risk of domestic violence. Child marriage also affects boys, but to a lesser degree than girls.

What is Your Role? A Call to Action
If we redouble our efforts, millions of girls will be saved from becoming child brides. Ending child marriage is within our reach — the time to act is now.

- Learn more about child marriage laws in your country.
- Meet with local officials to speak up about outdated child marriage laws that put your local youth at risk.
- Develop a plan to work with Zontians in your country to advocate for adequate child marriage laws, including through letter writing, meetings or petitions.
- Invite local leaders to events focused on child marriage.

Talking Points
- Across the globe, the burden of child marriage has shifted from South Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, where rates of progress need to be scaled up dramatically to offset population growth. Levels of child marriage are highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where 35% of young women were married before age 18, followed by South Asia (30%). Lower levels of child marriage are found in Latin America and the Caribbean (25%), the Middle East and North Africa (16%), and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (11%).
- COVID-19 has and will continue to heighten the risk of child marriage, compounding gender norms that constrain girls’ school attendance; early pregnancy, gender-based violence, exploitation and child labor.
- The total number of girls married in childhood stands at 12 million per year. At this rate more than 120 million girls will marry before their 18th birthday by 2030.
- Girls remain disproportionately affected, with 1 in 5 young women aged 20 to 24 years old married before their 18th birthday, compared to 1 in 30 young men.
- Often young girls are not physically mature enough to give birth but are expected to have multiple children. This forced decision can immediately place mothers and babies at risk of serious health concerns such as death during childbirth or premature death in infants.
• Globally, nearly one in three adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 (84 million) in formal unions have been the victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands or partners at some point in their lives.

• Early marriage doubles a teenager’s chances of living in poverty and triples the likelihood she will be beaten by her spouse, compared to married adults.

Social Media Guide
Want to raise awareness about child marriage on social media? Use the social media guide below for examples, hashtags and accounts to tag. Make your voice heard!

Hashtag: #EndChildMarriage

UNICEF Twitter Account: @UNICEF
UNICEF Facebook Page: @UNICEF
UNICEF Instagram Account: @UNICEF

UNICEF USA Twitter Account: @UNICEF USA
UNICEF USA Facebook Page: @UNICEF-USA
UNICEF USA Instagram Account: @UNICEFUSA

Zonta International Twitter Account: @ZontaIntl
Zonta International Facebook Page: @ZontaInternational
Zonta International Instagram Account: @ZontaIntl

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme
Twitter Account: @GPChildMarriage
UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme
Instagram Account: @GPChildMarriage

UNFPA Twitter Account: @UNFPA
UNFPA Facebook Page: @UNFPA
UNFPA Instagram: @UNFPA

Support Countries Twitter Accounts:
BelgiumMFA, @CanadaDev @DutchMFA, @ItalyMFA,
@NorwayMFA, @FCDOInclusive, @EuropeAid

SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Post 1
Child marriage is an appalling human rights violation that robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects. That’s why @ZontaIntl, @UNFPA and @UNICEF are working together to #EndChildMarriage @GPChildMarriage: bit.ly/30zfOQY

Post 2
10 million additional girls are at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19. This threatens years of progress in reducing the practice. We must do more to protect girls and give them hope for the future. I’m proud to support @ZontaIntl and @UNICEF and @UNFPA’s fight to #EndChildMarriage @GPChildMarriage: bit.ly/3DEAwPQ

Post 3
Today, one in five girls will be married. This must change. Learn more about @ZontaIntl’s support of @GPChildMarriage, and our combined efforts to accelerate global action to #EndChildMarriage: bit.ly/2XcrhXM

Post 4
Child marriage is unacceptable in all cases. @ZontaIntl is supporting The Global Programme to End Child Marriage @ GPChildMarriage. #EndChildMarriage
Partner Resources
Along with the information and resources provided throughout this toolkit, we encourage you to use information and resources from our partner organizations Girls Not Brides and Unchained At Last. Both organizations provide a breadth of resources on child marriage that can be useful when advocating.

Girls Not Brides
Zonta International and UNICEF USA are both members of Girls Not Brides, which is a global partnership of more than 1,000 civil society organizations from over 95 countries committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential. Members are based throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas. Members share the conviction that every girl has the right to lead the life that she chooses and that, by ending child marriage, we can achieve a safer, healthier and more prosperous future for all.

Stronger together, Girls Not Brides members bring child marriage to global attention, build an understanding of what it will take to end child marriage and call for the laws, policies and programs that will make a difference in the lives of millions of girls.

Through the Girls Not Brides Resource Center (girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/) you can find reports, policy briefs and factsheets about child marriage, as well as capacity-building tools for organizations and individuals working to end child marriage.

Unchained At Last
Unchained At Last, a Zonta and UNICEF USA coalition partner, is the only nonprofit in the United States dedicated to helping women and girls leave or avoid arranged/forced marriages and rebuild their lives. Unchained is also the only nonprofit in the U.S. dedicated to creating social, policy and legal change to end forced and child marriage in America.

UNICEF USA and Zonta work closely with Unchained At Last on child marriage. Visit their website, unchainedatlast.org, for further information and statistics on child marriage (unchainedatlast.org/child-marriage-shocking-statistics/).

UNFPA-UNICEF Webpage
Learn more about the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme and get the latest information, reports and stories about the progress being made to end child marriage (unicef.org/protection/unfpa-unicef-global-programme-accelerate-action-end-child-marriage).

The following pages that make up the Appendix may be printed and shared at club meetings.
Ending Child Marriage
A Program to Accelerate Global Action: Phase II

2020-2022 Funding:
US$1,500,000 to UNFPA and UNICEF via UNICEF USA

Child marriage is globally recognized as a harmful practice and a human rights violation. Despite laws against it, the practice remains widespread and can be found in cultures, religions, ethnicities and countries around the world. Globally, 21% of girls are married before they turn 18, robbing them of their childhood.

Ending child marriage requires addressing, over a period of time, the complex sociocultural and structural factors underpinning the practice. As a result, the Global Programme to End Child Marriage was designed to cover 15 years through 2030. During this time, the priority remains on engaging adolescent girls as key agents of change in the following 12 countries with high prevalence of child marriage: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.


Overall goals of Phase II:
1. Elevate the voice and agency of adolescent girls by:
   - Empowering marginalized adolescent girls through life skills and knowledge building.
   - Promoting gender equality in girls' families and communities.

2. Increase resources and opportunities for adolescent girls and their families by:
   - Strengthening education, health and child protection systems.
   - Addressing the ways that poverty drives the practice of child marriage.

3. Enhance legal and political action to prevent child marriage and to support married, divorced or widowed adolescent girls by:
   - Helping governments strengthen their plans to end child marriage.
   - Building the capacity of governments to make data-driven decisions and implement evidence-driven programs.
**Results to date**

During Phase I, the Global Programme surpassed its targets, reaching millions of people in the 12 program countries with interventions designed to end child marriage. The following progress was made during Phase I:

- **8.7 million girls** were reached through 2019.
- **46,000 service delivery points** have improved services for adolescent girls.
- **5.3 million community members** were reached with community dialogue on ending child marriage.
- **8,000 schools** improved quality of girls’ education.
- **11 of the 12 countries** have national strategies addressing child marriage, out of which six are budgeted and implemented.
- **More than 125 studies** have been conducted to inform programming and policy making.

**Strategies**

1. **Create and expand opportunities for the empowerment of adolescent girls.**
   - Improve literacy and provide girls with information about sexual reproductive health, financial competencies, gender equality and building healthy relationships.
   - Provide support to adolescent girls to help them enroll and remain in school.

2. **Promote a supportive and gender equal environment.**
   - Engage men and boys in gender equality work, challenging toxic masculinities and empowering them to become agents of positive change.
   - Engage families, communities, traditional and religious leaders, and other influencers in dialogue and consensus-building programs on alternatives to child marriage (including education), the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

3. **Strengthen governance to prevent child marriage.**
   - Provide technical support to governments in order to help them enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies that are in line with international human rights standards aimed at preventing child marriage.
   - Work with key ministries responsible for the implementation of the national child-protection system.

4. **Enhance sustainability and impact of child marriage programs.**
   - Increase the generation, sharing and use of robust data and evidence on adolescent girls for advocacy, programming, learning and tracking progress.

5. **Build partnerships.**
   - Partner with governments and organizations to ensure that social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programs and services are adolescent-friendly, gender-responsive, and reaching the most vulnerable adolescent girls and their families.
   - Support women’s organizations and youth-led organizations to mobilize the voices of marginalized girls, challenge harmful social norms, and promote gender equality.

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**Expected Outcomes**

Marginalized adolescent girls improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes on their rights, relationships, sexual and reproductive health, and financial literacy, including in humanitarian contexts.

Adolescent boys, families, traditional and religious leaders, community groups and other influencers demonstrate more gender-equitable attitudes and support for girls’ rights.

Education, health, child protection and gender-based violence systems increase capacity to deliver coordinated, quality programs and services that meet the needs of adolescent girls and their families, including in humanitarian contexts.

National and sub-national social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programs and services increase capacity to respond to the needs of the poorest adolescent girls and their families, including in humanitarian contexts.

Governments increase capacity to coordinate and implement national and sub-national action plans and systems to end child marriage.

Governments and NGOs increase capacity to generate, disseminate and use quality and timely evidence to inform policy and program design, track progress and document lessons.
COUNTRY RESULTS

Accelerating and Amplifying Change — Phase I Results

During Phase I (2016-2019), nearly 8 million adolescent girls and close to 39.4 million households in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia were reached with information, skills and services related to ending child marriage. 11 of the 12 countries developed national strategies to end child marriage.

For further information specific to each country, please refer to the Global Programme to End Child Marriage Phase I Report.*

Sierra Leone:
To ensure that girls had access to remote learning during the pandemic, the programme supported the distribution of 2,000 radios to vulnerable adolescent girls to allow them to continue with schooling and life-skills training during the pandemic.

Niger:
5,592 adolescent girls in the 97 new target villages acquired knowledge and skills through their participation in educational discussion activities on themes relating to social mobilization, human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene/sanitation and traditional practices harmful to women and girls.

India:
Gender transformative approaches to engaging with duty bearers, community and adolescents have been initiated in all 12 States implementing the programme using available platforms, leveraging government programmes and introducing special components of engagement with men and boys.

Yemen:
8,049 adolescent girls, either survivors of or at risk of child marriage, were reached with life-skills and literacy courses delivered in schools and safe spaces.

Bangladesh:
A high-level consultation was held with the Minister of Women and Children Affairs in which the minister endorsed the newly developed Standardized Adolescent Empowerment Package for pretesting in all zones, with more than 2,000 adolescents providing feedback.

Zambia:
Through the Global Programme, facilitated mentorships took place for adolescent girls through the safe space model, with 108 safe spaces established during the year (45 for girls and 63 for boys).

Uganda:
Following school closures due to COVID-19, the approach to empower adolescents with skills shifted from in-school to out-of-school club engagement allowing 16,706 adolescents that are especially vulnerable to continue receiving mentorship support and life-skills sessions.

Mozambique:
Psychosocial support was provided at an individual level to 1,226 girls, including peer mentors within the Rapariga Biz programme, through a total of 3,194 consultations.

Nepal:
23,582 girls and 19,915 boys in 19 districts were engaged through the Rupantaran programme. Despite the COVID-19-induced lockdown, radio programming where sessions were aired across multiple community radio stations was possible to remain in contact with all of the girls enrolled in the programme.

Ghana:
Through the Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS) program, adolescent-parenting sessions have facilitated an increasing interaction and open discussions on some of the most difficult and culturally sensitive topics in the implementing communities.

Ethiopia:
3,749 child marriage arrangements were identified, 2,051 (55 percent) of which were cancelled by law enforcement bodies and/or community structures.

Niger:
5,592 adolescent girls in the 97 new target villages acquired knowledge and skills through their participation in educational discussion activities on themes relating to social mobilization, human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene/sanitation and traditional practices harmful to women and girls.

Girls Intervening to Stop Their Peers’ Marriages

Education around life-skills, human rights and communication carried out in the regions of Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder in Niger has increased the capacity of adolescent girls to protect themselves and their peers against child marriage.

Thanks to the education, the girls are increasingly able to influence decision-making processes in their communities and they sensitize their peers through door-to-door visits and participatory community workshops where they share their knowledge. Supervised by qualified community facilitators, they also represent adolescent girls in the local child protection committees, to ensure that their interests are taken into account. Safiya Ibrahim from Maradi Region is one of these girls. Safiya is 15 years old and a member of the child protection committee in her village. “I feel very useful in the community because I intervene a lot with the committee to raise awareness about child marriage. Things have really changed since becoming a ‘protection correspondent.’ I feel proud to be able to help my friends and sisters, and all my friends respect me and want to chat with me to benefit from the messages I am sharing.” Thanks to the actions and interventions of the girls, more than 700 cases of child marriage were annulled or postponed in 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
During the conflict, women’s and girls’ welfare has deteriorated in every sense. Judicial and social institutions have broken down, and 1.83 million children have lost access to school, including over 830,000 girls. Without an education or social protection, many child brides have nowhere to turn.

However, this time Maram’s mother decided not to let it happen. She could not bear to see her daughter getting abused for the sake of money. So, she escaped to the local authority with her two daughters to report about her husband and the planned illegal marriage of her daughter.

Upon her report, the local authority transferred them to the Yemen Women Union, and the mother and her daughters were safely moved to one of the Yemen Women Union shelters, supported by UNFPA, to ensure they are protected from the father and the planned marriage.
Endnotes


3 The International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), ‘GirlForce’


