

INDIA

end child marriage  
A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE  
2022



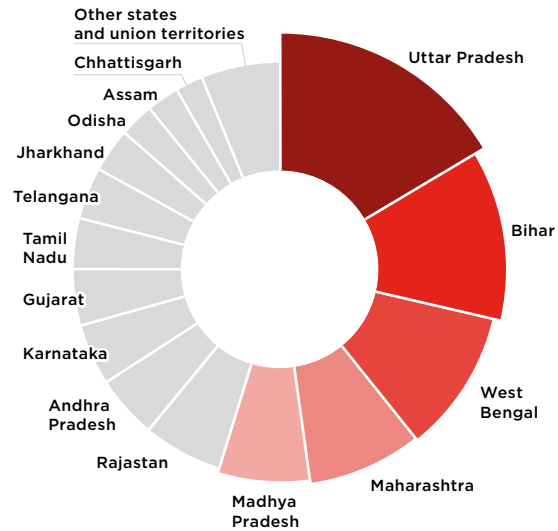
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# INDIA

**FIGURE 1: Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.**

**Five states** account for **over half of the girls and women** in India who married in childhood: **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra** and **Madhya Pradesh.**

**Note:** This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers.



## The global context

Child marriage threatens the lives, the well-being and the futures of girls around the world. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage has declined by around 15 per cent since 2010. Nevertheless, COVID-19, climate change and conflict have had lasting effects on poverty, school dropout and inequality, triggering increases in child marriage. UNICEF estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic alone will have put more than 10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage by 2030.

Ending child marriage is a global priority: 93 governments have signed up to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3 to end child, early and forced marriage, and 43 countries either have, or are working on, national action plans to end child marriage. Girls' education is a consistent protective factor against child marriage, with child marriage rates among girls who complete secondary school 66 per cent lower than among girls with no education, and 80 per cent lower among those who complete higher education. COVID-19 increased the number of school dropouts, thereby increasing the risk that girls who are out of school will not return. Girls who drop out of school are significantly more likely marry early, and 87 per cent of married adolescent girls are out of school.

## Global advocacy and dialogue

In 2022, the international community made key commitments to end child marriage at global and regional forums. On 15 November 2022, the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee resolution on child, early and forced marriage,<sup>1</sup> led by Zambia and Canada, was adopted by consensus. A total of 125 Member States sponsored the resolution (compared to 114 co-sponsors the last time the resolution was put forward in 2020). Countries which sponsored the resolution for the first time included: Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Several of the countries have a high prevalence of child marriage — and, by sponsoring, demonstrated their political commitment to ending it. The resolution highlights the urgent need to reach the poorest and most marginalized girls and women—while calling upon the international community to increase its efforts to end child, early and forced marriage. It recognizes how global health threats, climate change, conflicts and forced displacement can have a particularly negative impact on women and girls and which, by extension, can also increase child, early and forced marriage. The resolution appreciates the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and other

1 See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-seventh Session, Third Committee agenda item 64(a) (A/C.3/77/L.19/Rev.1)*

similar global, regional, and national initiatives, encouraging coordinated and comprehensive approaches across sectors and at all levels.

In March 2022, the Global Programme and partners led a high-level side-event at the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a session which culminated in the CSW66 Agreed Conclusions, calling for action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of policies and programmes on climate change, and environmental and disaster-risk reduction. This session, “No Time to Lose: Child Marriage and the Triple Crisis”, enabled United Nations Member States and other stakeholders to improve their collective understanding of the effects of the triple crisis on child marriage, and what could be done in response.



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 **Key highlights in 2022**

Nearly **6 MILLION** girls actively participated in **life-skills and comprehensive sexuality education** (CSE) interventions.

More than **84,000** adolescent girls at risk of child marriage were supported to **enrol and/or remain in school** through the programme’s intensive outreach **mobilization of out-of-school adolescents**.

Nearly **80 MILLION** community members have been equipped with **information** and galvanized **to act against child marriage** and promote adolescent empowerment.

More than **3.7 MILLION** boys and men were engaged in **dialogues** that address harmful masculinities and **promote positive gender norms**.

**476** service delivery points were strengthened to provide rights-based **adolescent-friendly health services** (including sexual and reproductive health), **1,200 medical officers** were trained to provide adolescent-friendly health services and **317 policewomen** were **trained on child rights** and child protection, including information on addressing child marriage.

**384** new partnerships (287 formal and 97 informal) were established to **deliver adolescent-responsive social protection**, and poverty reduction and economic **empowerment programmes** and services.

**181** district action plans to **end child marriage** are approved for implementation in 10 states.

## Child marriage country context

Nearly one in four young women (23 per cent) in India were married or in union before their eighteenth birthday. Child marriage is becoming less common, but the country still accounts for one in three of the world's child brides, due to its population size. The prevalence of child marriage varies across states and union territories in India. At least 40 per cent of young women were married before turning 18 in West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura, compared to 1 per cent in Lakshadweep. Girls who live in rural areas or come from poorer households are at greater risk of getting married in childhood, and a higher proportion of child brides are found among those with little or no education.

## Overall programme performance

**TABLE 1:** Summary of output indicator performance (2022)

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Overall, more than 5.6 million adolescent girls were reached by UNFPA and UNICEF in 2022 with comprehensive programmes on life-skills, gender and child protection. The increase in uptake of life-skills education, compared to previous years, is attributed to the schools reopening after COVID-19 restrictions

Indicator	Target	Result
<b>Indicator 1111:</b> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or CSE interventions in programme areas	<b>4,746,395</b>	<b>5,603,377</b>
<b>Indicator 1121:</b> Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	<b>375,000</b>	<b>84,090</b>
<b>Indicator 1211:</b> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	<b>1,000,000</b>	<b>3,735,249</b>
<b>Indicator 1221:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	<b>9,993,000</b>	<b>13,320,308</b>
<b>Indicator 1222:</b> Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	<b>28,320,000</b>	<b>79,385,255</b>
<b>Indicator 1223:</b> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	<b>117,745</b>	<b>776,580</b>
<b>Indicator 1231:</b> Number of CSOs newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme (cumulative)	<b>95</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Indicator 2121:</b> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>
<b>Indicator 2131:</b> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	<b>460</b>	<b>476</b>
<b>Indicator 2211:</b> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	<b>66</b>	<b>384</b>
<b>Indicator 3111:</b> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support (cumulative)	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Indicator 3121:</b> Number of subnational plans with evidence informed interventions to address child marriage	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Indicator 3211:</b> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage (cumulative)	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Indicator 3212:</b> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis (cumulative)	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Indicator 3221:</b> Number of south-to-south cooperation events (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

were lifted and the multisectoral adolescent empowerment approaches implemented through Government flagship schemes and platforms. These include training, employment-related opportunities and referral mechanisms via youth platforms and forums like Advika Udaan. The programme also helped 84,090 out-of-school adolescent girls to continue their education. However, this is below the set target due to increased school dropouts, especially in hard-to-reach communities where adolescent girls are forced to drop out of school due to lack of transportation and safe routes to school.

The programme in India used contextualized approaches to reach adolescents and their families in hard-to-reach areas and marginalized communities through the use of innovative platforms and methods to offer programmes on life-skills, child protection, and other services. It works with self-help groups, women's organizations, and grass roots groups like Aanganwadi Workers (AWWs), which helped reach these communities, identify adolescents and children at risk, and linked them with social protection schemes. Adolescent empowerment programming has strengthened convergence across sectors and links with schemes resulting in an effective response. UNICEF supported the integration of life-skills into the school curriculum framework in five states, in addition to developing life-skills measurement

tools for the elementary and secondary school levels in Hindi, Gujarati and Assamese languages. UNFPA and UNICEF particularly wanted to reach vulnerable adolescent girls in remote and tribal districts with poor Internet penetration and where teachers and students have no smart phones. Consequently, they supported Odisha State to integrate life-skills into outreach programmes and to contact more girls from remote communities through innovative strategies such as 'call a student' and 'alternate learning platforms'. Short films and multimedia digital packages in local languages were developed and disseminated for wider reach among parents, teachers and community leaders.

UNICEF continued to support 10 state governments to implement a comprehensive school safety programme to provide safe and protective learning environments for adolescent girls. In states like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, girls who have been absent for 10 days or more are contacted by the School Education Departments which have identified those who are married, likely to be married or who have migrated and are at risk of child marriage or other forms of exploitation. Schools which were initially resistant to report dropouts are now documenting this information to prevent child marriage as part of the district action plans. In Uttar Pradesh, through attendance monitoring of adolescent girls



by school management committees and community influencers and counsellors, 27,618 adolescent girls who were either out of school or going irregularly were given support to enrol, or stay, at school.

In Odisha, more than 1 million adolescents across 25 districts have been reached through ADVIKA, a state initiative supported by UNICEF and UNFPA. This provides life-skills training and information on child rights, child marriage, violence against children, gender, sexual and reproductive health, and on how to access the child helpline. Sessions are held every Saturday in more than 72,000 Anganwadi Centres (community-based childcare institutions) across Odisha. UNICEF and UNFPA, in partnership with Yuwaah, also launched the Advika App with the Odisha Government to link adolescents to life-skills and career readiness information. Some 5 million girls at risk of child marriage have also been linked to social protection schemes preventing such marriages and to support their education. The Advika App also helps front-line workers provide targeted life-skills education for adolescents.

UNFPA, in partnership with the Department for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Odisha, also supported 1,150 tribal residential schools across 30 districts to reach 146,498 marginalized adolescent girls, building their knowledge, skills and attitudes for leading healthy lives and addressing vulnerabilities such as child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Principals of all the schools, in addition to nearly 600 officials from districts and smaller administrative units (blocks), were also trained on reviewing the implementation of life-skills education programmes and the availability of life-skills education teaching and learning materials in schools. UNFPA supported the review of a curriculum for special schools, including training 124 heads of special schools of Odisha on the importance of life-skills education for adolescents with disabilities, particularly on issues involving their sexual and reproductive health. UNICEF also provided educational assistance to 60,686 vulnerable adolescent girls in Odisha to enrol, and stay, in school.

In Andhra Pradesh, UNICEF conducted surveys to identify out-of-school adolescent girls in all districts. The most vulnerable were supported to establish weekly peer groups at village level to raise awareness on their rights and to provide life-skills education, protection and empowerment. In total, 150,000 out-of-school adolescent girls were reached with training and services through panchayats (village and small-town councils), women's groups and front-line workers. School-based programmes reached a further 200,000 adolescent girls with gender-

transformative life-skills. The state's School Education Department, as part of the child marriage reduction programme, exempted admission and examination fees for adolescent girls to enrol into open school programmes. The Women and Child Welfare Department women groups and panchayats are supporting adolescent girls with enrolment into second-chance education programmes alongside enrolling younger girls directly into formal education.

In Gujarat, a package on financial and digital literacy was integrated in the cash plus scheme, enhancing the life-skills and knowledge of 254,136 adolescent girls. In Kutch district the re-enrolment and retention of 965 adolescent girls, who had dropped out of school, were supported through collaboration with the Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation, ensuring the girls' safety on the way to and from school.

In Madhya Pradesh, a pool of 313 master trainers on life-skills education was created and six life-skills education comic books were developed with a focus on self-esteem and positive body image. As a result, 357,782 girls' knowledge and skills were enhanced through sessions on child rights and protection risks, gender and life-skills education. The master trainers also trained teachers who then conducted sessions in schools on gender stereotyping, appearance ideals and being a champion, reaching 81,000 girls. In addition, 12,919 out-of-school children were identified and re-enrolled in schools as part of the 'School Chalo Abhiyan' partnership campaign led by the Education Department.

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The lingering effects of COVID-19 continued to disrupt programme implementation. In 2022, UNFPA had planned to initiate life-skills education sessions in special schools supported by the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Odisha. However, reopening schools took much longer than anticipated, and Government approvals to roll out the curriculum were delayed.

UNICEF has developed a contextualized curriculum and interventions for adolescent girls and their families in remote tribal districts in states such as Jharkhand and Odisha. However, lack of Internet access, and poor transport, plus fears for the safety of the girls enroute to schools pose a challenge. Several front-line workers (including Anganwadi workers and teachers) in these remote areas cannot access online materials and therefore lack the necessary skills to interact with adolescents in a



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sensitive and informative manner. Second-chance education programmes are also affected by the increased absenteeism of adolescent girls. Use of volunteers from, and in, the hard-to-reach tribal communities has shown good results of engagement with adolescents and their families. However, these approaches need to be strengthened, using both physical and digital methods, to reach the most marginalized girls. The content of life-skills lessons should not only be age-appropriate and girl-sensitive but should also be supplemented with materials tailored to the specific needs, and sociocultural context of tribal adolescents and adolescents with disabilities.

Government-funded programmes related to adolescents and youth empowerment, such as Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and the National Social Service (NSS), are vital in reaching adolescents, but these are often planned and implemented in isolation. A cohesive approach with proportionate funding is necessary. This would require advocacy and support to state governments from the Global Programme.

Women self-help groups and youth groups play a critical role in monitoring their communities for cases of child marriage that have resulted from economic distress because of COVID-19, and after extreme weather events. Financial loan systems and other social protection services, offered through the self-help groups, help to ensure that girls do not drop out of school and college.

The Global Programme and partners will prioritize:

- greater use of approaches which recognize gender identities, disability status and caste
- scaling up strengthened, targeted interventions to better support married girls
- introducing a life-skills education lab allowing adolescents to experience different settings in replicated environments, led and managed by adolescents from tribal and caste areas
- providing technical assistance to state governments to roll out life-skills education for young people with disabilities in government-supported special schools in Odisha
- connecting with the Rajasthan state government to scale up virtual demonstration and learning sites to reach the most vulnerable girls through Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas
- integrating state schemes for adolescent empowerment programmes under the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme so that they are implemented in all 33 districts across the state
- implementing a robust management information system to track life-skills education programmes in Rajasthan
- developing and implementing a tool to measure the impact of these, including documenting best practices, innovations, baseline findings and case studies for sharing with stakeholders to ensure the system can be scaled up
- strengthening links with women's empowerment initiatives to help girls to transition from school to employment.

## Enhancing the family and community environment

UNFPA and UNICEF supported the integration of interventions to end child marriage in the work with panchayats to scale up community engagement and awareness-raising to ensure villages are child-friendly and promote women's rights. More than 3.7 million boys and men took part in dialogues addressing harmful masculinities and promoting positive gender norms. This was almost four times the target due to blended approaches to achieving this, including the use of digital platforms and adolescent clubs. The use of multiple community platforms, including digital platforms, enabled the programme to engage more than 13 million parents, front-line workers,

community and faith-based leaders, adolescents and local governance representatives on ending child marriage and promoting girls' rights. Close to 80 million people were reached through traditional and social media platforms, including television and radio shows, mobile van campaigns, the 'Mere Sapane' (My Dreams) national essay competition, the #EqualRightsEqualValue social media campaign and the International Day of Girl Child campaign. In 2022, a total of 65 women-led and youth-led organizations were mobilized to help challenge social norms and promote gender equality. The programme also mobilized a total of 865 self-help groups (financial intermediary community committees comprising of 12 to 25 local women between the ages of 18 and 50), some through social media outreach.

UNFPA and UNICEF also supported community groups, women-led and youth-led organizations, including feminist organizations and those working with men and boys such as Breakthrough, Point of View, CHSJ and Partners for Law in Development, to engage adolescents and community members in marginalized communities in dialogues and raise their awareness on preventing child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV). UNICEF support for Breakthrough led to the development and roll out of a gender-transformative toolkit for adolescents and communities, designed and contextualized for tribal and marginalized communities in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. In Madhya Pradesh, UNFPA led the design and development of a module ('Ujjwal') to engage with boys and girls in schools to promote positive masculinity - it clarifies key concepts and provides practical suggestions to motivate non-discriminatory behaviours and practices at home, in society and at school.

UNFPA and UNICEF enabled diverse voices to contribute to a nuanced strengthening of media and public discourse on child marriage, focusing on causes such as poverty, and related issues of consent, adolescent autonomy. UNICEF's partnerships with the media, such as community radio stations, local newspapers and TV stations, has enabled it to reach millions of people through the production and broadcast of key messages, plays and community engagement programmes. In Madhya Pradesh, UNFPA launched a unique 'Digital Sathi' initiative to help girls become digital storytellers and empower them to use social media to voice their needs and aspirations, while simultaneously ensuring their safety, security and privacy online - so far 80 girls have participated in the initiative.

Lastly, the programme supported the analysis of the programmatic approaches related to gender-transformative change using the GTA tool. In addition to analysing the level of ownership of strategies and their contributions to accelerate change, the gender-transformative assessment made it possible to develop a road map to accelerate progress.

### Strengthening gender-transformative harmful practices programming in India

The India programme carried out the GTA over three days with the full engagement of sectoral experts and staff from selected states. Prior to the actual GTA process, the lead focal points from the UNICEF country office participated in two pre-call meetings to clarify the methodology of the tool and expectations; and to discuss themes to be prioritized.





The workshop focused on identifying opportunities for shared action among coalition members nationally. Because the GTA process is meant to incorporate gender-transformative elements into existing workplans, the gender advocates and other key stakeholders were asked to identify crucial areas within their existing workplan where gender-transformative approaches can have an immediate, and potentially amplified, impact.

Based on the discussion around current strategies and programme content in India using the 'gender equity continuum' and the contextualized theory of change across the socioecological framework, several priority actions emerged. These action areas are broadly categorized under three groups:

- programme approach, content and messaging
- programme strategies and design
- measurement and learning.

Five action priority areas that have greater potential to address and dismantle power and resource hierarchy structures that subjugate girls in most contexts were identified for the gender-transformative process:

- to review (with partners) capacity-building curriculum content, methodologies and measurements for gender-transformative elements (content, methodology and approach)
- strategy and action plan development for integrating work on masculinities and engaging men and boys (programme strategies and design)
- adolescent groups for life-skills and employment opportunities (programme strategies and design)
- carry out a gender analysis of institutional partners working with men and develop a plan for moving them along the continuum to gender-transformative (measurement and learning)
- gender-transformative results framework – Quality assurance and tracking issues, support for measurement strategies (measurement and learning).

### Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Working on positive masculinities requires technical expertise, is resource intensive and is not easily replicable without initial investments in capacity-building; hence, scaling-up is a challenge.



Sociocultural contexts also influence strategies for engagement with men and boys in different regions. Many stakeholders, especially men, hold deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs. In addition, working with traditional and faith-based leaders is highly sensitive in nature and requires intensive engagement with organizations that are expert in working with these groups. These influential community leaders are often gatekeepers of traditional norms and it therefore requires consistent engagement to ensure they do not encourage child marriages or restrict the development of adolescent girls.

Mobilizing adolescent boys and men and enabling them to become change-makers is a powerful move towards girls' empowerment. However, platforms and programmes to reach men and boys are not yet adequate to support this. Engaging with boys and men requires continuous activities, monitoring and adaptation due to cultural norms. Also, adopting good quality gender-transformative approaches require intensive and concentrated work with feminist organizations and youth-led organizations.

Competing priorities with Government departments delayed the implementation of capacity-building and the roll out of dedicated modules on positive masculinities. At community level, seasonal labour migration and agricultural work in some states resulted in fewer men participating in activities. School dropouts on account of migration also poses challenges in sustaining engagement with youth leaders.

Social and behaviour change interventions targeting community members should cover the links across different harmful practices including child marriage, sex-selective abortion and GBV to provide more holistic and comprehensive protection for girls. There needs to be a balance between large-scale and community-led interventions. Challenging social norms and influencing the public discourse needs sustained work with communities. The introduction of tools for audience-friendly communication such as storytelling have been seen to be effective in making social and behaviour changes.

The Global Programme and partners will prioritize:

- interventions at community level in priority districts with adolescent girls and boys, families and community members, to address GBV and challenge gender norms
- creating awareness with police of schemes and helpline numbers for adolescents and community members and on 'The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act' (this has already been effective and can be scaled up)
- engaging with collectives among the adivasi (tribal) and dalit (scheduled castes) for self-determined approaches to elimination of child marriage, GBV and harmful practices in Odisha state
- dialogues with faith-based leaders and the participatory development of culturally appropriate information on gender equality and the rights of adolescent girls
- strengthening and leveraging existing structures, led by women and young people, activated under various government programmes and schemes.

## Strengthening systems

“I see every day, with my own eyes, how bad the practice of child marriage is. It is still very difficult in districts like Hingoli to go to people and talk about child marriage. I enrolled as soon as I heard the news of an opportunity to conduct sessions in schools. All of us volunteers were trained very well. I joined the parents' session and, while talking to the parents, I realized that many problems that lead to child marriage can be reduced if basic facilities reach the villages.”

— Ms. Vaishali Dhage, an accredited social health activist (ASHA) front-line worker and parent session volunteer, Audha Taluka, Hingoli

UNFPA and UNICEF support for girls' welfare encouraged Government-led action and communication on ending child marriage, addressing school dropout and promoting access to gender-friendly services. This has also led to a more cohesive approach between ministries towards delivering truly gender-transformative

services. UNFPA support in providing rights-based adolescent-friendly health services (including sexual and reproductive health), led to the improvement of a total of 476 service delivery points.

UNFPA also supported the training of 1,200 medical officers in the provision of adolescent-friendly health services and information – and this led to the creation of a group of state level master trainers to improve the abilities of district and block level medical officers in providing adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive services. The medical officers were also trained on issues such as mental health, cybersecurity and given a deeper understanding of disabilities. In Rajasthan, UNFPA supported the development and roll out of a comprehensive resource package to conduct Health and Wellness Days in school and community settings. This incorporates 11 themes of the two national flagship programmes (RKSK and SHWP) promoting adolescent health under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The resource pack equips front-line service providers to advocate for adolescents' health and well-being. Around 370,000 adolescents accessed adolescent health services at Ujala Clinics (adolescent-friendly health clinics) in 12 RKSK-targeted districts.

UNICEF supported the Government in the implementation and adaptation of the flagship programme of 'Save the girl child, educate the girl child'. In Maharashtra, 317 women police trainees were trained on child rights and child protection, including child marriage. CHILDLINE representatives of 36 districts were oriented on child marriage and their role in enhancing prevention and response to GBV by UNICEF. Some 195 Child Welfare Committee members were trained on the Juvenile Justice Act and procedures under the Act for children in need of care and protection, including girls whose marriages have been stopped. Further, 1,121 health department workers including ASHA workers, block coordinators, LHVs and medical officers were trained to respond to GBV, including child marriage. This has resulted in initiating outreach programmes with adolescent girls.

## Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

UNICEF and UNFPA have led the support to develop, design and disseminate national guidelines for strengthening national flagship schemes aimed at addressing child marriage and promoting girls' rights, including capacity-building initiatives for service providers at all levels. The advocacy efforts by both agencies have resulted in a state-

wide scale-up of promising initiatives that support girls' empowerment and improves their access to services. However, there are still not enough service providers to deliver adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive services, and there is also a lack of these services for adolescent girls who are pregnant or who already have children.

Implementation of the School Health Programme has been uneven across districts and schools, stemming from a lack of coordination among involved Government departments. Where the programme has been implemented, it has been difficult to track its progress as management information systems are still under development.

UNICEF and UNFPA will prioritize:

- supporting evidence generation at state-level and district-level on the prevailing rates of child marriage to influence Government directives and policies
- development training tools and modules on gender-responsive service provision, including support for the training of service providers
- helping to strengthen the RKSK programme by improving ministries' intra-sectoral and interdepartmental planning on interdepartmental adolescent health, women's empowerment and family planning.

## Building partnerships

Different Government departments and agencies, such as the Department of Women and Child Development, the Education Department and the Social Welfare Department at state and district levels have remained crucial partners to the Global Programme. These partnerships have led to the roll out of interventions for the prevention of child marriage and child abuse and for adolescent empowerment. Institutional partnerships with key ministries, such as the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, were of critical importance in laying the foundation for making SDGs local goals, especially Goal 5 (to achieve gender equality and end harmful practices against women and girls, including child, early and forced marriage).

In 2022, 354 new partnerships (287 formal and 97 informal) were established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services. Partnerships with CSOs and their networks helped reach adolescents and community members in marginalized communities to raise their awareness issues such as girls' empowerment and child protection, including GBV, child marriage and violence against children. Overall, 5 million girls at risk were identified and linked to social protection schemes for mental health and psychosocial support, and help with education, plus the prevention of child marriage, through partnerships established by the programme.



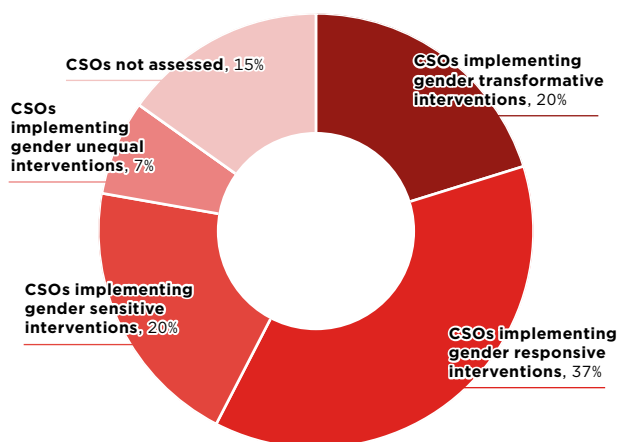
In Odisha, UNFPA began a strategic partnership with the Department of Mission Shakti to empower women. This three-year intervention is aimed at using large-scale platforms to reach nearly 600,000 girls with digital and financial literacy training, and to more than 270,000 girls with information on sexual and reproductive rights and addressing harmful practices.

UNFPA’s collaboration with youth organizations and platforms such as NYKS, National Cadet Corps and NSS helped develop strategies for youth engagement and strengthened adolescent and youth empowerment. Youth groups have been instrumental in amplifying key messages on breaking gender-based stereotypes, the prevention of violence against girls, and other child protection priorities.

### Investment in and support to youth-led, women-led and feminist CSOs

Partnerships are important in advancing gender-transformative programming and the Global Programme, recognizing this, assessed the extent to which the CSOs were implementing gender-transformative approaches. This was based on the partners identified as focusing on promoting girls’ and women’s rights in 2021 (54 in India). The assessment aimed to help guide UNFPA and UNICEF on how to better identify and support opportunities to advance these gender-transformative approaches.

**FIGURE 2:** Assessment of interventions of partner organizations, on the gender equality continuum



The assessment was conducted by building on information from online resources, including the CSOs’ websites, reviews of available annual reports, analysis of strategy documents, social media pages, descriptions and commentary about the CSOs from external parties (for example funders, coalitions, or networks), and news articles.

Although few partner organizations completed the survey, the desk review showed that the CSOs in India are mostly gender-responsive or gender-transformative. Many of the organizations that ranked highly in their approach to gender equality make men and boys partners in initiatives for social justice. Many of the organizations incorporate the empowerment of women and girls into their programming and aim to change power dynamics, norms and institutions, rather than merely focusing on the passive delivery of support services to women and girls. Safetip is a good illustration of a gender-transformative organization seeking to improve safety in urban spaces and enable data-collection. This organization works to ensure that people, women in particular, can make informed choices about their mobility. Its She Rises project is particularly gender-transformative. It acknowledges that patriarchy places the burden of care primarily upon women. This includes the care of vulnerable and excluded groups like children, the elderly and people with disabilities. It is are working towards a framework for gender-transformative change in cities, to ensure that public spaces are responsive, inclusive, safe and equitable. This organization is strong both in terms of structural and substantive efforts to enable gender-transformative results.

Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Manda is another interesting example. Structurally the organization is strong. It has two committees:

- sexual harassment of women in the workplace committee
- the grievance resolution committee.

From a networking perspective, the organization works with different community-based organizations and structures. All its programmes are based on empowering women and young girls and fighting for human rights. One focuses on empowering young women by teaching them negotiation skills to stall early-marriage, among other things.

## Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The programme's work with self-help groups, women- and youth-led organizations, and grass roots level workers provided opportunities to reach adolescents and families in remote areas and marginalized communities, identifying adolescents and children at risk, and linking them with social protection schemes.

UNICEF and UNFPA mobilized people and resource centres that assist communities in accessing social protection programmes. The links created with self-help groups and federations under the Government missions also ensure sustainability and scalability of the programme. However, lack of financial literacy is a major challenge for people in accessing social protection schemes, since most of scheme benefits are paid through direct bank transfers. Many recipients are reluctant, or do not have the right documentation, to open and manage an account. In some states such as Assam, Bihar, Gujarat and West Bengal, self-help groups for adolescents and women are enhancing their financial literacy and assisting people to open bank accounts. Most social protection schemes for girls are conditional cash transfer schemes linked with education, and access to these schemes is restricted for adolescent girls from vulnerable communities who are unable to attend school.

There were only a handful of CSOs that ranked as gender-blind. In general, their strategic programming does not appear to be informed by a gender analysis, and they do not have, at their core, the mission of advancing the rights of women and girls through a gender-transformative lens. There are no indications that these organizations incorporate the empowerment of women and girls into their programming and target structural change to power dynamics, norms and institutions. They do not speak to the rights of women and children. These organizations fall short both at the structural and substantive level when it comes to gender-transformative change, being unaccountable for gender. Meanwhile, those that are ranked as gender-sensitive will likely only require minor recalibrations, particularly at the structural level to become gender-positive or gender-transformative.

Some of the more progressive CSOs could benefit from a refresher course on gender-transformative approaches, and they could also share positive impact stories in order to assist other organizations with practical suggestions for improvements. Accordingly, it is recommended that a workshop, or series of workshops, be conducted



in India, focusing on structural changes, as well as support on generating the systemic change from a gender-transformative perspective.

## Facilitating supportive laws and policies

In 2022, nine new policies and legal instruments were drafted with the support of UNFPA and UNICEF. The Government proposed a bill to increase the minimum legal age of marriage of girls to 21 years. UNFPA and UNICEF will continue to reiterate the need for comprehensive and multi-pronged approaches to address child marriage that focus on empowerment, and which goes beyond legal amendment. For example, UNFPA provided technical inputs to the draft of the National Youth Policy to advance adolescents' rights and empowerment and to address harmful practices such as child marriage.

In Odisha, through UNICEF advocacy, the state department of law issued a circular to all temple authorities for the mandatory verification of the age of both parties before marriage. Following this, district administrations issued similar circulars which were displayed in more than 1,000 villages in 25 districts. State criteria for declaring villages child-marriage-free were also developed.

In West Bengal, with technical support from UNICEF, the West Bengal Commission for Protection of Child Rights issued two memos for Kolkata and West Bengal police with the request to treat child marriage cases on an urgent basis and for filing of First Information Reports against all adults involved. A district-level training on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection)

Act 2015, trained 265 participants including CWC members, DCPU staff, and child welfare police officers from local police stations in order to improve their ability to ensure justice for survivors and help them to access legal services. Some 96 village police and civic volunteers were also trained on child protection issues with special emphasis on child marriage and trafficking and their role in reporting, preventing and generating awareness at community level. Capacity of service providers to follow protocols on child marriage prevention and reporting was also enhanced through the training of:

- 30,707 ICDS Supervisors and AWW
- 20,515 ASHA, Anvesha Clinic Counsellors and Block Public Health Nurses
- 3,100 teachers
- 1,397 paralegal volunteers, CWC members, police
- 1967 block and district officials in 12 intervention districts.

In Rajasthan, UNFPA supported the launch of the State Policy for Women in partnership with the Directorate of Women Empowerment (DWE) in 2021. In 2022, UNFPA supported the implementation of the policy by developing a multisectoral integrated action plan outlining strategies, activities and targets relating to health, survival, safety and protection (including child marriage, economic empowerment and the impact of climate change). Comprehensive resource packages (posters and videos) were also developed to raise awareness about harmful practices against women and girls (such as GBV, dowries, child marriage, gender biased sex selection, etc.). UNFPA also supported DWE in designing and implementing flagship programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Chirali (community-based model to address GBV) and Udaan (on menstrual health and hygiene management).

In Assam, UNICEF provided technical support for the development of the Child Protection Policy and an analysis to identify gaps in the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006. In Maharashtra, in response to the Bill that seeks to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, UNICEF provided high-level technical support for the Department of Women and Child Development, including an analysis of NFHS data trends on child marriage and related gender indicators and a review of international and national human rights treaties and standards and facilitating consultations with key gender and human rights experts.

District action plans on ending child marriage or child protection were developed, revised, and implemented by UNICEF in 181 districts in 10 states (increasing from 175 districts in 2021), through multisectoral convergence and consultations. Under the district action plans, District Task Forces were formed or sustained to monitor progress and address limitations and way forward.

In Assam, UNICEF extended technical support to the state action plan on child marriage and district action plans on women and children in 17 districts. At a district level, 368 stakeholders were supported in developing action plans and capacity-building resulting in key interventions and messages on ending child marriage and GBV and in support of adolescent empowerment being incorporated into line departmental exercises and processes, standard project meetings and religious celebrations.

In Bihar, UNICEF provided sustained technical assistance to the Women and Child Development Corporation, Social Welfare Department and other departments for the development of a costed ending child marriage state-wide campaign, along with several other measures to prevent child marriage, including a monitoring framework. Task forces which aim to end child marriage have been formed in all 22 districts. In most districts, they meet four times a year. Some 33 trainings of Task Force members were organized, and 1,028 officials (835 men and 193 women) were trained.

In Madhya Pradesh, under the Adolescent Empowerment Programme (AEP), multisectoral district action plans have been developed on child marriage and violence against children in 16 districts. The AEP also facilitated training for more than 82,000 child protection workers and stakeholders (46 per cent female and 54 per cent male) on:

- child rights
- protection
- gender
- legislation related to children and their application
- alternative care
- family strengthening
- prevention of child labour and rehabilitation of child labourers
- child marriage
- skills on engaging with children
- social and behaviour change communication.

In Maharashtra, multi-departmental district task forces (DTF) were established with the help of the Global Programme in all 12 districts with a high prevalence of child marriage. The task forces cover five key areas:

- women and child development
- education
- health
- rural development
- Panchayati Raj.

District action plans with gender-transformative indicators have been formulated in seven districts and are being drawn up in the remaining five districts. The DTFs have been effective in implementing the district action plans for ending child marriage and establishing a functional system at district level for preventing, and responding to, child marriage. The Child Marriage Eradication Programme 'Saksham' is being implemented in Jalgaon district with the support of Women and Child Development and UNICEF. All Government and non-government stakeholders of the district have been trained and, by creating master trainers among them, awareness is being created at different Government levels and among the general public in urban and rural areas. Some 100 Child Protection Committees were formed in 1,485 villages in Jalgaon and the Chair and members were trained on the issue of child marriage. District child protection units of 24 districts (outside the Global Programme) were further trained and have begun developing district action plans for ending child marriage in their districts with their District Collectors, taking into account geographical and sociocultural factors. In addition, a tab on gender

and child budget has been introduced in the Finance Department's website, BEAMS, capturing budgets for social protection schemes such as Nirbhaya fund and Fast Track Special Courts. It also indicates the number of beneficiaries for such interventions.

In Rajasthan, to further address gender inequities and violence and promote adolescent empowerment, the five-year-perspective plan and annual performance improvement plan (PIP) of the Department of Education were influenced to consolidate a gender-transformative approach in school-based adolescent collectives. As a result, for the first time, components of engaging with boys on positive masculinities were included in state capacity-building programmes.

In West Bengal, 'Guidelines for District Action Plan (DAP) for Ending Child Marriage' were finalized and rolled out state-wide with technical support from UNICEF. The guidelines provide a blueprint of activities to assist each district in assessing the situation of its adolescents, formulating its own plan to end child marriage and promotes collaboration and convergence between different line departments. Direct support was provided towards DAP planning, preparation and reporting in 12 districts. Moreover, DAP monitoring and reporting through a standardized system has also been put in place.

### The public policy maturity model

Elimination of harmful practices such as child marriage requires the integration of strategic approaches, processes, systems and information. UNFPA and UNICEF recognize the role national action plans play in strengthening policy coherence





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to achieve this. Lessons from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development peer review process emphasize that the plans need:

- political commitment and policy statements
- policy coordination mechanisms
- systems for monitoring, analysis and reporting.

UNICEF has developed and tested a policy maturity model and tools for assessing public policies to end harmful practices and achieve SDG 5.3 by 2030 in 12 countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia).

The maturity model provides a framework for key national stakeholders to review and assess national policy approaches and systems for

- eliminating and preventing female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage
- identifying priorities or critical investments
- building consensus around the interventions.

The model is structured around six intermediate outcomes and different subdomains that are defined by distinct levels of maturity i.e., weak-building; average-enhancing; good-integrating; and excellent-mature (see Figure 4).

**TABLE 2:** Snippet of the policy maturity model

Intermediate Outcome	Sub-Domains	Score
<b>Governance and Coordination</b>	<b>A1:</b> Political Commitment	✓
	<b>A2:</b> Coordination structures	✓
	<b>A3:</b> National Action Plans	✓
<b>Policy and Legislation</b>	<b>B.1:</b> Legislation, policies and implementation mechanisms	✓
<b>Engagement and Participation</b>	<b>C1:</b> Independent complaint mechanism exists for children and women	✗
	<b>C2:</b> Civil Society Engagement, including women and children	✓
	<b>C3:</b> Community based mechanisms for Harmful practices prevention	—
<b>Financing &amp; HR</b>	<b>D1:</b> Financing of harmful practices services	✓
	<b>D2:</b> National budget establishment	—
	<b>D3:</b> National Budget execution	—
	<b>D4:</b> National Budget amount	✗
	<b>D5:</b> National Budget monitoring and review	✗
	<b>D6:</b> Human Resources	✓
<b>Access to Services</b>	<b>E1:</b> Availability of Standard Operating Procedures and/or Protocols for harmful practices services	—
	<b>E2:</b> Understanding and articulation of harmful practices system	✓
	<b>E3:</b> Modelling testing and scaling of harmful practices services	—
	<b>E4:</b> Availability of harmful practices services, case management and referral systems	✓
<b>Data collection, M&amp;E</b>	<b>F1:</b> Administrative data systems and monitoring to routinely generate data on FGM	—
	<b>F2:</b> Data security and governance	✗
	<b>F3:</b> Research and surveys	—

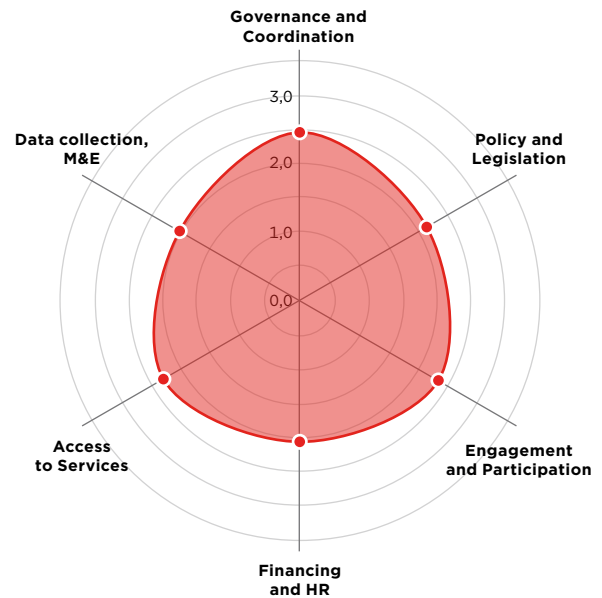


The benchmarks for each level of maturity have been defined and require certain priorities, processes, and results to be achieved for each subdomain, and can be contextualized by country. Feedback from the testing emphasized the role of the model as:

- a useful advocacy tool
- something that builds Government accountability and action towards elimination of harmful practices
- a tool to review and track the implementation of a national action plan.

On average, overall country ratings on a 4-point scale ranged from 1.8 (weak-building in Bangladesh) to 3.0 (good-integrating in Zambia). Financing and human resources (rating 1.3) emerged as the area where countries were rated the least, while governance and coordination (rating 2.7) were rated highly.

FIGURE 3: Policy maturity assessment for India



## Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The major challenge at both state and district level, is the limited ability of the various line departments to work together. Collaboration is hampered by frequent changes in bureaucracy, and a lack of continuity in strong leadership to enforce convergence. Other challenges include:

- Law enforcement agencies are reluctant to prioritize child marriage prevention, and elected representatives too often do not want to address the issue for fear of losing political support.
- Subdistrict level child protection structures are informal and weak, and building accountability within them requires time and intensive effort. Increased participation at block and community level is required.
- The inclination to use increasingly punitive measures to address child marriage increases the risk of criminalizing adolescent sexuality.
- Capacity-building needs to be carried out at institutional level to mainstream gender-transformative approaches in interventions and plans on ending child marriage through sustained and systematic commitments and partnerships.
- Grassroot level committees such as village level child protection committees need to be strengthened as they are key to addressing GBV and child marriage. Advocacy with the states should continue to highlight the importance of grassroot committees.

Support will be provided by the Global Programme in the several areas:

- UNFPA and UNICEF will strengthen their engagement in high-level advocacy with national and state actors for the proposed national bill to raise the minimum legal age of marriage for girls.
- UNICEF will advocate with the state governments to review, monitor and amend state and district action plans for ending child marriage and ensure coherence and convergence between all different stakeholders.
- The programme will continue to support Government workers in preventing and responding to child marriage, connecting girls at risk with services and integrating programmes and services for child brides, who are highly marginalized.
- In Madhya Pradesh, UNFPA is in discussion with the State Planning Commission for the development of the State Women's Policy. UNFPA technical support has been requested to also develop a strategy paper and action plan on addressing GBV and for integrating gender in the behaviour change communication framework developed by the Women and Child Development Directorate (WCD) – addressing child marriage through rights-based approaches will be integral to the policy documents proposed to be developed.
- In Odisha, UNICEF and UNFPA will continue to provide technical assistance to the WCD in addressing child marriage, with additional assistance on addressing violence against women through multisectoral coordination (involving the Departments of Health, Home, Mahila and Shishu Desks).
- In Bihar, UNFPA will support research on developing an investment case for ending child marriage in partnership with the A.N. Sinha institute of Social Studies.
- The programme will continue to focus on helping the Government to ensure child marriage interventions are able to reach the most hard-to-reach and marginalized communities.
- The programme will also continue to enhance important structures at district and community level, including DTF and grass roots-level committees for better implementation of district action plans.

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