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Executive Board

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda*

Management response to the evaluation report

Evaluation of phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage

Summary

UNICEF, together with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), conducted a joint independent evaluation of phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. The joint evaluation identified eight recommendations for both agencies at global, regional and country offices. The joint management response provides a summary of the actions agreed the global, regional and country offices for both agencies.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section III.

* [E/ICEF/2024/1](#).

Note: The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



I. Overview

1. The joint evaluation of phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (Global Programme) is broadly positive. UNICEF and UNFPA have both played a key role in keeping child marriage prevention and response on global, regional and national agendas. The Global Programme catalytic power of strengthening systems, mobilizing communities and girls' empowerment has further accelerated progress at significantly large scale.

2. Overall, UNICEF and UNFPA agree with the proposed recommendations in the evaluation. In particular, UNICEF and UNFPA welcome recommendations to further strengthen sustainability through advocacy, institutionalization at all levels, strengthening national and subnational systems, developing capacities of youth-led and women-led organizations, and mobilizing external and internal (sectors) funds at country level. Both UNFPA and UNICEF have started to address the issues identified in the evaluation and actions are under way, some as part of the phase III planning process.

3. While UNICEF and UNFPA agree, in principle, with the recommendation to “sustain and increase programme effectiveness, and deepen the gender-transformative approach and expand it in the countries where it is nascent”, the team notes that the evaluation missed some critical components and areas of the Programme's tools and approaches for social and gender norms transformation that focus on key reference groups (peers, siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other extended family members), including community, religious and traditional leaders. Likewise, the evaluation could have brought forward as part of the actions the need to continue building the capacities of grass-roots youth-led, women-led and feminist civil society organizations. However, this was added as an action by UNICEF and UNFPA, as these community networks play a critical role in the Programme's overarching strategy of gender transformation.

II. Key evaluation recommendations and UNICEF management response

<i>Action</i>	<i>Responsible section(s)</i>	<i>Expected completion date</i>	<i>Actions taken and implementation stage: Not started Under way Completed Cancelled</i>	<i>Supporting documents</i>
<p>Evaluation recommendation 1: Contextualize the global theory of change for national and subnational contexts and for specific populations.</p> <p>Rationale: The breadth, ambition and modalities of the Programme must be adapted to the resources, capacities and other contextual characteristics of the countries in which it operates. Depending on the context and the resources available, country offices may have to weigh the balance between breadth and depth, deciding whether to invest in reaching specific populations of at-risk girls or in scaling up promising or effective approaches more broadly.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>1 (a): Frame the contextualization of the global theory of change at national and subnational levels to adapt and invest to reach specific populations of at-risk girls, and to allow for greater expansion and reach of more girls through scaling up promising or effective approaches.</p> <p>1 (b): Countries should follow an inclusive consultative prioritization process between the two agencies during the adaptation of the global theory of change, with national- and subnational-level representation of implementing partners, and with realistic and due consideration of conditions for programmatic geographic convergence, which is critical to address the intersectional needs of adolescent girls.</p> <p>1 (c): Countries should define the evidence-based needs of adolescent girls at national and subnational levels in particular, girls in urban areas compared with rural ones (going beyond the prevalence figures of child marriage), and for girls with specific vulnerable profiles (social minorities, disabled, pregnant, married), document theory of change adaptations and revisions, and adapt monitoring and results frameworks as well.</p> <p>1 (d): Countries should conduct a “reality check” assessment of programme progress at the midterm of phase III, as well as a light situation analysis, and validate the adapted theory of change and its assumptions, and make adaptations, if needed, particularly on population targets, drivers of child marriage for subnational and specific vulnerable population groups.</p>				
Country offices take stock of the context, mechanism and outcomes, using programme effectiveness reviews or situation analyses, to validate the adapted theory of change and results framework and make necessary revisions that consider specific populations of at-risk girls, and the potential of scaling up interventions through an inclusive consultative process between both agencies and with the national- and subnational-level representation of implementing partners.	Regional offices Country offices	Fourth quarter 2025	Not started	Phase III Programme Document (2024–2030): UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage

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<p>Evaluation recommendation 2: Make the Programme more agile and adaptive for humanitarian and other complex contexts.</p> <p>Rationale: The Global Programme has developed normative and technical tools and guidance to support programme adaptation in crisis contexts. To make these ongoing adaptation processes more agile, countries will need enhanced capacities to contextualize programming approaches and to adapt existing tools to their humanitarian and fragile contexts.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>2 (a): Provide technical support to countries to enhance their capacities to contextualize programming approaches and to adapt existing guiding documents and tools to their humanitarian and fragile contexts, including capacities to enhance emergency preparedness and risk management planning and advocate with key actors to facilitate the integration of prevention and response to child marriage in humanitarian crises.</p> <p>2 (b): Propose a strategic phased implementation approach and support adaptation of the Programme to contexts where the operational capacity is regularly reduced due to political conditions, humanitarian crisis, or other situations as might occur in certain regions of countries with protracted crisis.</p>				
<p>Develop, adapt and roll out tools on the humanitarian-development peace nexus to child marriage, and adaptation design and implementation, to build the capacities of United Nations and local partners and guide strategic phased implementation.</p>	<p>Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team)</p>	<p>Fourth quarter 2025</p>	<p>Under way</p>	<p>Addressing Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings: Technical Guide for Staff and Partners of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage</p> <p>Female Genital Mutilation and the Humanitarian Development Nexus: Practical Ways to Support Programme-level Implementation of the Nexus Approach – Toolbox</p>

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<p>Evaluation recommendation 3: Sustain and increase programme effectiveness, and deepen the gender-transformative approach and expand it in the countries where it is nascent.</p> <p>Rationale: The Global Programme should continue to integrate the gender-transformative approach through the five core programmatic strategies selected. In order to diminish dependency on programme funds, UNFPA and UNICEF should continue building adolescent girls' skills and agency to alternative life choices beyond child marriage, and do so more systematically through a stronger and stable institutionalization of the approaches (such as life skills and comprehensive sexuality education), including the systematic exploration of options to expand thematic convergence by linking skills-building with opportunities for income generation for adolescent girls or at minimum mentorship.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>3 (a): The Global Programme should ensure that the Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool is rolled out to all 12 countries; that action plans for the Accelerator Tool have been developed and implemented, and are periodically monitored; and that countries undergo a second assessment phase with reviews, action plans, monitoring and reporting on implementation of the plans.</p> <p>3 (b): Consider integrating a standard and light measurement of the institutionalization of transformative programming, capacities of implementing partners, and eventually the change in norms and empowerment of adolescent girls. Adopt ways to better measure progress to capture social and gender norm and behaviour change that can complement existing tools.</p>				
<p>Adopt, adapt and scale up gender-transformative approaches and tools, including standard measures, and ensure that issues related to legal and customary/traditional norms and practices, and unintended consequences are integrated into the action plans of all country programmes.</p>	<p>Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team)</p> <p>Regional offices</p> <p>Country offices</p>	<p>Fourth quarter 2025</p>	<p>Under way</p>	<p>Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool for the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage</p>
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>3 (c): Expand the integration of men and boys at all levels to create new models of positive masculinity in favour of gender equality and ending child marriage, and, more specifically, focus on retaining the engagement of men and boys through approaches and interests that sustain their participation.</p> <p>3 (d): Continue to be intentional in engaging with families and community members; the understanding of family composition should be systematically assessed to embrace extended families and, hence, go beyond reaching parents to include uncles, grandparents and others who influence key decisions.</p>				

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<p>3 (e): Continue to engage with community and religious leaders to influence social and gender norm change, with emphasis on embedding behaviour change messaging within existing structures for sustainability (for example, in schools as done in school clubs, child protection mechanisms in the community, interfaith and religious councils), including enhancing alignment and complementarity of legal and customary/traditional norms and practices.</p> <p>3 (f): Continue advocacy for the enforcement of laws and policies, open an internal dialogue mechanism to discuss unintended consequences of the enforcement of laws limiting the age of marriage. This dialogue process should be documented to jointly identify risks and practical mitigation measures for country offices, and to complement the implementation of the well-developed technical note on child marriage and the law.</p>				
Develop, adapt and roll out tools to strengthen community-led networks in programming on positive masculinities, engagement of key reference groups (extended families, community, religious and traditional leaders), and retention of programme beneficiaries.	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team)	31 December 2024	Under way	Technical Note on Partnering with Men and Boys to End Child Marriage in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage
Monitor, assess and develop strategies mitigating potential gaps and conflicts in laws and law enforcement that could weaken the prevention and response to child marriage at regional, national and subnational levels.	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team) Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Not started	Child Marriage and the Law: Technical Note from the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage
<p>Evaluation recommendation 4: Make further strategic and ambitious use of the Global Programme’s potential to accelerate the elimination of child marriage globally.</p> <p>Rationale: UNFPA and UNICEF should make use of the Programme’s global and regional position of influence to strategically contribute to accelerating the elimination of child marriage globally. The Global Programme should build further on its proven and acknowledged influence beyond the focus countries and convening capacity of key regional and global partners, and demonstrated ability to galvanize and influence the generation and use of evidence on child marriage at global and regional levels.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>4 (a): The Global Programme should leverage opportunities with donors and particularly private sector actors, including at the national level, to strengthen partnerships, and also focus explicitly on humanitarian contexts.</p>				

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<p>4 (b): The Global Programme should make use of its global and regional position of influence to strategically contribute to accelerating the elimination of child marriage at the global level, to reach countries and regions with a high prevalence of child marriage beyond the current Global Programme countries.</p> <p>4 (c): The available information about the value added and positive influence of the Global Programme should be systematically documented, thoroughly analysed and utilized strategically to catalyse further results.</p>				
Country and regional offices develop and start using investment cases in national advocacy to influence decisions and catalyse investments, and to monitor and document value added and positive influence opportunities and outcomes.	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team) Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Not started	Ten Reasons to Invest in the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage
Develop a concept note, application toolkit and assessment criteria, and invite potential country offices for prepositioning as Global Programme additional countries	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team)	Second quarter 2024	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>4 (d): The Global Programme should partner internally and externally and make concerted efforts to advocate at global, regional and country levels the practical integration of the prevention of (as well as response to) child marriage and harmful practices in regular work in humanitarian contexts. This advocacy work should target measures ranging from including harmful practices in regular monitoring and reporting tools at the cluster level, to explicit reflection in funding appeals templates, to mobilize funding from donors or funds such Education Cannot Wait, the Education Outcomes Fund, or pooled funds such as the Central Emergency Response Fund or Country-based Pooled Funds.</p>				
Develop advocacy briefs with key messages on why prevention and response to child marriage should be prioritized, including in humanitarian action.	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team)	Fourth quarter 2024	Not started	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 5: Strengthen coordination and partner capacity and improve resource mobilization and flexible use of funds for increased efficiency.</p>				

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<p>Rationale: While the refinement of coordination mechanisms should be done considering the available human resources both funded through the Global Programme and by other means, concerted efforts should be placed on the generation of additional and predictable resources. The Global Programme should continue to identify opportunities for and mobilize additional funding for the Programme, making visible its successes and transcending the Programme's areas of influence or its catalytic effect; support should be provided to countries to mobilize their own resources, beyond the adaptation to the resource mobilization strategy.</p> <p>Management response: Partially agree</p> <p>Justification: The evaluation lacked evidence to fully support the recommendation on “expanding further the engagement of staff with gender and adolescent-youth programming expertise for the next phase”. Both UNFPA and UNICEF have dedicated staff at country, regional and global levels with expertise on gender and adolescent-youth programming who work on the Programme. Regarding the recommendation on the “refinement of the protocol to monitor funds utilization to add flexibility, also including provisions to utilize funds adequately and timely in cases of unachieved activities or changes in workplans”, both UNFPA and UNICEF procedures support flexible adaptation of workplans and allocation of programme resources.</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>5 (a): Review and refine the existing coordination mechanisms between agencies with the aim to further facilitate the programme geographic convergence, particularly at the subnational level, including reviewing and identifying strengths and weaknesses of the efforts to attain geographic convergence and regularly reviewing (i.e. during annual reviews or Global Programme meetings) what is and what is not working in this regard, especially at the subnational level.</p> <p>5 (b): Consider also expanding further the engagement of staff with gender and adolescent-youth programming expertise for phase III.</p> <p>5 (c): The Global Programme could consider complementary measures such as devising different types of incentives linked to the mobilization of external and internal (sectors) funds at the country level, including its measurement through the Global Programme monitoring and reporting system.</p> <p>5 (d): Consider the refinement of the protocol to monitor funds utilization to add flexibility, also including provisions to utilize funds adequately and timely in cases of unachieved activities or changes in workplans.</p>				
Country offices develop and start the implementation of resource mobilization plans specific to prevention and response to child marriage.	Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Under way	10 Reasons to invest in the Global Programme
Develop and deliver a capacity-building model to build capacity of grass-root youth-led, women-led, feminist groups, coalitions and movements to enable them to achieve greater organizational independence, autonomy and resource mobilization to participate in advocacy and programming initiatives to end child marriage.	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team) Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Under way	Gender assessment of civil society organization partners of the Global Programme

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<p>Evaluation recommendation 6: Generate more evidence on what works in programme contexts and utilize it.</p> <p>Rationale: Continue the Global Programme’s role and activities to generate evidence and broker knowledge on the elimination of child marriage at all levels. The Programme should use its global influence to expand and deepen the focus at the country level, to generate, accrue and use evidence to understand what works in different contexts, especially at subnational and community levels.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>6 (a): Consider the introduction of sentinel indicators to complement the monitoring of at least selected interventions and other light measurements to assess outcome-level change at community or intervention area level. Enhance the Global Programme global results framework, the monitoring and reporting system and tools, with learning-oriented refinements. Programme budgets should include costing for monitoring, evaluation and data generation from the outset.</p> <p>6 (b): Continue budgeting and supporting the conduct and use of research and evaluation and include also in this budgeting and support the generation of data from studies or third-party surveys that can integrate modules to measure girls’ agency and empowerment, as well as the prevalence of child marriage.</p> <p>6 (c): Identify and strategically select a few interventions across the Global Programme to invest in special measures to generate evidence on what works at the contextual level, using impact evaluation combined with process evaluation.</p> <p>6 (d): Incentivize and mobilize internal or external support to assess the effectiveness of promising and scalable interventions on Global Programme outcomes and pathways in diverse contexts, including in humanitarian contexts.</p> <p>6 (e): Assess the reach and access to the documentation and evidence gathered and accrued through Global Programme platforms and repositories. Target internal and external audiences, at national and subnational levels, including implementing partners.</p>				
<p>Monitor, assess and review the quality of research and evidence generated by regional and country offices, including mechanisms for the collection of disaggregated data, outcome measurement and promotion of learning.</p>	<p>Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team)</p> <p>UNICEF Innocenti-Global Office of Research and Foresight</p> <p>Regional offices</p> <p>Country offices</p>	<p>31 December 2025</p>	<p>Under way</p>	

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Continue expanding the uptake of evidence and research through international repositories, webinars and through the Child Marriage Research to Action Network, in partnership with Girls Not Brides.	Programme Group (Child Protection-Prevention of Harmful Practices team) Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Under way	
<p>Evaluation recommendation 7: Systematically integrate the Programme’s work with the social protection sector and advocate for the strengthening of public finance management for the empowerment of adolescent girls.</p> <p>Rationale: The Global Programme builds on existing analysis of public finance and financial landscape, and systematically expands the use public finance management to empower adolescent girls.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>7 (a): Expand existing Global Programme thematic convergence to systematically include social protection interventions such as cash transfer programmes.</p> <p>7 (b): Advocate for national and particularly subnational budget allocations and spending on goods and social services critical to the empowerment of adolescent girls and the prevention of child marriage.</p>				
Country offices start conducting a mapping of social protection programmes and other financing mechanisms; identify potential entry points and advocate to leverage them for girls’ empowerment.	Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Under way	UNICEF case studies on leveraging large-scale sectoral programmes to prevent child marriage
<p>Evaluation recommendation 8: Elaborate sustainability plans in each country, jointly with implementing partners and counterparts.</p> <p>Rationale: The Global Programme to ensure that the potential for sustainability is included as one of they criteria to inform prioritization of investments, strategies and approaches for the Programme during the planning of phase III and subsequent reviews.</p> <p>Management response: Agree</p>				
<p>Evaluation recommendations:</p> <p>8 (a): Adopt a bottom-up approach in developing sustainability plans in each country with implementing partners and counterparts, starting with the development of sustainability at the subnational level with selected interventions, by relevance in terms of investment, change potential or another criterion of criticality.</p>				

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<p>Include the development of these plans as an activity in the multi-year workplans of the Global Programme and incorporate indicators and benchmarks to assess the success of the development of the plans, to be used for annual reporting of the Global Programme. Prioritize systems strengthening interventions wherever they are institutionalized (comprehensive sexual education, life skills development, sexual health and reproductive rights related services, etc.).</p> <p>8 (b): Integrate processes and tools to increase learning, uptake and accountability, such as the Maturity Model assessment of government programmes, approaches, and systems to eliminate child marriage. While this is now only a piloted and nascent tool, this or an alternative one should be utilized across; its ownership and hosting should be planned and promoted so that it resides either with Governments or third parties that are credible, at the national or even regional level. These types of tools will help not only with regularly assessing progress at the institutional level, but also with building consensus around priority interventions.</p>				
Country offices develop and start the implementation of institutionalization and sustainability plans, based on a participatory approach with all stakeholders.	Regional offices Country offices	31 December 2025	Not started	
Develop a brief on key considerations for sustainability, institutionalization, and scalability including mechanisms for monitoring.	Programme Group (Child Protection- Prevention of Harmful Practices team)	31 December 2024	Not started	

III. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the evaluation of UNICEF social protection responses towards universal child benefits, its summary ([E/ICEF/2024/3](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/4](#));
 2. *Also takes note* of the evaluation of Phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, its summary ([E/ICEF/2024/5](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2024/6](#)).
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