

Joint Statement
Executive Board of UNICEF
First Regular Session 2024
Agenda Item 8: Evaluation of phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF
Global Programme to End Child Marriage

Delivered by: Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the
Netherlands to the UN, Amb. Yoka Brandt

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Mr. President, dear colleagues,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom *of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, the United States of America, the European Union as a donor, and my own country, the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

First let me thank Mr. McCouch and Ms. Gupta for their presentation.

We welcome this joint evaluation of phase II (2020-2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. The lessons from will inform the third phase of the programme to contribute to ending child marriage by 2030, and be instrumental in reaching SDG 5.3.

Child, early and forced marriage constitutes a human rights abuse and a form of gender-based violence disproportionately affecting girls. It keeps girls from reaching their full potential, jeopardizes their health, often puts an end to their education, and limits their ability to fully contribute to the development of their families, communities and countries.

Mr. President,

We are concerned that the prevalence of child marriage is decreasing at a pace that is too slow, from 23 % to 19 % in the past decades. Clearly the fact that one in five girls being married before 18 is deeply concerning. In addition, and even worse: Child marriage costs lives, worsens health and education, perpetuates intergenerational poverty and is the leading cause of death amongst adolescent girls in developing countries.

Therefore, we attach a lot of importance to the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage as it is the only multilateral fund dedicated to this cause

On the evaluation: We welcome that the evaluation found clear efficiencies from the joint work by UNFPA and UNICEF, at global, regional and country levels,. We would like to encourage further investment in solidifying and systematizing joint work, including at subnational levels.

We believe in a world where everyone, including all women and girls can make their own, informed choices about their lives, their bodies and their sexual and reproductive health and rights, free from coercion or discrimination – including the right to decide, when, whether or whom to marry.

We note the evaluation recommends the programme to expand Comprehensive Sexual Education, and to deepen gender-transformative programming in order to shift towards positive gender norms as critical approaches to ending child marriage. We are therefore pleased to see that that

Phase III includes the expansion of CSE and the focus on better access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

We also welcome the Programme's focus in Phase III on longer-term objectives to enable us to reach a larger proportion of adolescent girls, especially the most marginalized and hardest-to-reach girls.

Mr. President, 2 questions:

We would be grateful to learn about the criteria for the case studies of the deep-dives in the evaluation. And, as the report notes, there are significant challenges in reaching specific demographics of women and girls in programming. How were these considerations integrated into the evaluation approach?

We recognize that lockdowns and the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have had negative effects on the elimination of child marriage. We applaud UNFPA and UNICEF for their flexibility and continuing to deliver the programme given the constraints, and encourage them to step up efforts to supporting countries in ending child marriage in humanitarian and complex contexts.

Given the impact of COVID-19 on systems and institutions, it would be helpful to assess the resiliency of systems and institutions and their ability to maintain gains won prior to the pandemic. And so our question is: how do UNICEF and UNFPA aim to further strengthen sustainability of your child marriage

interventions? We heard a bit in the presentation, but we'd be keen to hear a bit more on this.

And finally, and perhaps I should have started with this, we welcome the management response and are confident UNFPA and UNICEF will closely follow through on the recommendations of the evaluation in Phase III.

Thank you.