

YEMEN

end
child
marriage

A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE

2022



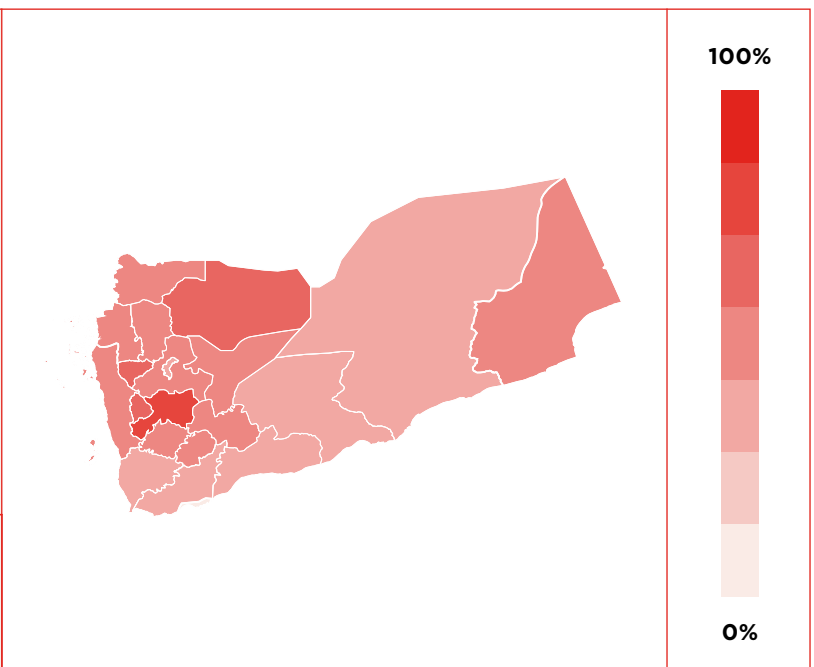
© UNICEF/UNI422198/ALfilastini

“ I think it’s unfair that we support the marriage of our children at an early age: we can at least wait till they finish school to enable them to have a better future and support themselves and their families in this difficult time facing our country.”

— Community leader, Hajjah

YEMEN

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



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,¹ 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.

Child marriage country context

There are 4.3 million child brides in Yemen, 1.6 million of whom were married before the age of 15. According to data from the Yemen Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2013, 32 per cent of women aged 20–24 years had been married before turning 18 and 9 per cent before the age of 15. Despite a reduction in child marriage prevalence from 63 per cent in 1988, the speed of progress is not rapid enough to meet the SDG target of eliminating child marriage by 2030. If the observed progress over the past 25 years continues, child marriage prevalence will still be at 21 per cent by 2030; however, if the slightly accelerated observed progress over the past 10 years is doubled, it is estimated that 9 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030.



Key highlights in 2022



Nearly **30,000** adolescent girls actively participated in **life-skills or CSE** in programme areas.



More than **50,000** individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in **group education** or **dialogue sessions** on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and **gender equality**.



Nearly **2,400** girls were supported by the programme to **enrol and/or remain in school**.



More than **8,600** individuals (boys, girls, women and men) were **reached by mass media** (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, **the rights of adolescent girls** and gender equality.



The **clinical management of rape** (CMR) protocol was **endorsed by the Ministry of Public Health**.



Despite the very challenging context due to the **ongoing conflict**, the programme **completed** a piece of **formative research** on the drivers of child marriage in Yemen.

Overall programme performance

TABLE 1: Summary of output indicator performance (2022)

Indicator	Target	Result
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or CSE interventions in programme areas	4,000	29,789
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	500	2,393
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	2,700	
Indicator 1221: 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	35,564	50,429
Indicator 1222: 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	37,500	8,600
Indicator 1223: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	144	
Indicator 1231: Number of CSOs newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme (cumulative)	1	
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	16	
Indicator 2131: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	47	
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services		
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support		
Indicator 3121: Number of subnational plans with evidence informed interventions to address child marriage		
Indicator 3211: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage	1	1
Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis	1	1
Indicator 3221: Number of south-to-south cooperation events (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	1	1

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

In 2022, the Global Programme in Yemen provided life-skills training, including mental health and psychosocial support, and vocational training to 29,789 vulnerable adolescent girls. Among them, 3,585 were child marriage survivors who were provided with multisectoral services as well as shelter in safe spaces by UNFPA using a survivor-centred approach. Some 291 child marriage survivors were also provided with emergency legal aid, including legal counselling and representation in courts,

through a network of experienced lawyers. UNICEF helped 20,199 adolescent girls with life-skills training and mental health and psychosocial support, through peer-to-peer training and counselling in safe spaces.

“I was 14, when I married a 60-year-old man. I didn't have a normal childhood like other girls of my age. In my husband's house I was frequently subjected to violence because I refused to obey him, I felt disgusted, I was scared, my mental state deteriorated so badly. I ran away from this hell

and was admitted into the shelter where I felt secure, I received great support starting from psychosocial sessions and ending with assigning a lawyer to help me get a divorce. My condition improved dramatically after psychosocial support sessions, and after receiving my divorce papers. I am finally free and can complete my education like girls of my age”.

— Amal a 15-year child marriage survivor- Ibb governorate

Life-skills and awareness-raising sessions, along with literacy programmes, helped promote self-esteem and problem-solving skills among girls and enabled them to interact with others effectively. Group psychosocial support activities in safe spaces for women and girls enabled adolescent girls to form support groups and exchange successful experiences with each other.

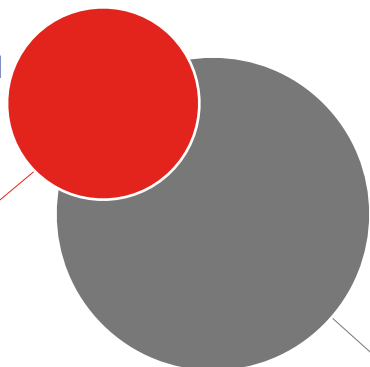
“My husband used to beat me and treat me cruelly because of his mental disorder. I lived a hard life full of abuse throughout my marriage; my husband then decided to divorce me due to poverty and deteriorating economic circumstances. I was very sick, and my health condition worsened, I did not have money to seek medical help. However, I feel very fortunate; through an awareness-raising session in the neighbourhood I knew about UNFPA support services they provide to women and girls, and through the case worker (after assessing my needs), I was given cash assistance to go to the hospital, I was also provided with medication and an additional amount of money so I can follow up the treatment plan with the doctor. My health condition has improved a lot, I now joined the literacy class, I was able to socialize with girls my age and learn new skills and even get trained on different handicrafts.”

— Reham, a 16-year-old divorced girl, Hajjah Governorate



© UNICEF/UN0276390/AlGhabri

1.6 MILLION married before age 15



4.3 MILLION married before age 18

Yemen is home to over **4 million child brides**; **1 in 3** young women were married in childhood.

FIGURE 2: Number of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18.

Despite the substantial challenges with security and political instability in the country, the Global Programme was able to support 2,393 girls aged 10–19 through UNFPA's 20 non-formal literacy classes in 16 targeted districts using the RELFLECT Methodology (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques). These classes target child marriage survivors, adolescent girls who have not got the opportunity to go to school, marginalized girls and those affected by the conflict and displacement. As of December 2022, 259 girls had been re-integrated into the formal educational system after gaining the necessary skills through the informal literacy classes.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Overall, programming in Yemen has been impacted by the protracted conflict and humanitarian crisis over the last decade. In some districts literacy classes are conducted in schools, but most of these schools are in poor condition and lack the necessary furniture (for example, chairs and tables are broken, and there is no lighting). Adolescent girls living in remote areas face further obstacles such as higher transportation costs that have led many to drop out of the literacy classes.

An holistic approach helped create social acceptance for some of the interventions for adolescent girls, such as raising awareness around menstrual hygiene, and life-skills which, if delivered separately from a general education, would be difficult for targeted communities to accept. UNICEF is prioritizing and mobilizing different sectors to provide multisectoral interventions for adolescent girls to address all their vulnerabilities. The diversity of the services provided by UNFPA's implementing partners also enabled survivors to be referred to various services, in one location and from the same entity, which helped build trust, enhanced confidentiality and ensured the safety of the girls accessing services.

Due to the success of the non-formal literacy programme, the local communities have asked for expansion and have insisted on including young girls and boys that are 20 years old and above. Moving forward, the Global Programme partners will work towards mobilizing alternative funding channels to expand non-formal literacy programmes in additional districts, not targeted under the Global Programme, as well as to provide cash assistance for girls who cannot afford to access safe spaces and non-formal literacy classes.



Enhancing the family and community environment

The Global Programme is engaging individuals in communities through dialogues facilitated by community committees. These dialogues, which include local governing councils, sheikhs and imams, identify the root causes and consequences of GBV and harmful practices, such as child marriage, and encourage community members to share their views as well as their ideas on how these can be addressed.

In 2022, 50,429 individuals participated in 11 community dialogues organized across six governorates. The Global Programme also supported five interactive plays attended by more than 8,600 men, women, boys and girls – most of them social influencers, decision makers, sheikhs and religious leaders within the governorates. Many expressed their support and readiness to stand up against issues such as child marriage, disowning women of their inheritance, and depriving girls of education.

“I think it’s unfair that we support the marriage of our children at an early age, we can at least wait till they finish school to enable them to have a better future and support themselves and their families in this difficult time facing our country.”

— *Community leader, Hajjah*

As a result of these efforts, 15 advocacy documents have been signed by local authorities that commit to support women’s rights such as defining the age for marriage, and combating the denial of inheritance and support girls’ education. These documents also stated that the local communities will provide the necessary support and coordination to ensure the smooth implementation of programmes that support women and girls in their governorates.

UNICEF conducted a study in 2021 aimed at collecting quantitative data on the social and behavioural drivers of child marriage in the governorates of Aden, Ibb, Sana’a and Amanat Al Asimah. The results, released in 2022, show the potential for social and behaviour change, identifying both influences and influencers, and assessing respondents’ readiness and inclination to end the practice of child marriage. Descriptive

norms appear to be a moderate driver of child marriage in Yemen. Despite the fact that close to three quarters of respondents (72 per cent) report having witnessed a girl getting married under 18 in the last year (100 per cent in the selected districts of Sana’a), and that 42 per cent believe the practice of marrying girls before 18 has increased in their communities in the last year, only 9 per cent are willing to marry a girl under 18, and very few said they have married children (aged 10–17) living inside or outside the home (3.2 per cent). Some 30 per cent of boys have witnessed a marriage under 18 in the last year, and only 14 per cent believed the prevalence of boys’ marriages had increased in the last year.

It seems to be common and socially acceptable for parents to refuse to marry a daughter under the age of 18. Half the respondents know of such a refusal, even though the parent had received proposals. Some 59 per cent of respondents said those who refused would be seen as good parents, with 54 per cent saying the parents would be praised for this decision. Most respondents said they would publicly support and engage with those who made the decision not to practice child marriage in many ways: by socializing with them (70 per cent), letting their children play together (69 per cent), considering marrying a male child with their daughter when she is ready (54 per cent). However, they may not be as likely to seek advice about their own daughters’ marriage from them (only 37 per cent of caregivers are willing to do so).

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Community mobilization and awareness-raising through community committees is being implemented in six governorates; Hajjah, Ibb and Al-Hudaydah (and in some districts in Amran) in the north and in the south in Aden, Abyan and Lahj. It has been increasingly difficult to work on community awareness in the north due to restrictions by the local authorities. Even in the current programme areas, it is challenging to convene community sessions as community committees and men2men networks are considered sensitive due to the political instability in the country. Authorities do not encourage gatherings for fear that these influential people would trigger a political conspiracy against the de facto Government, or even discuss sensitive topics that would provoke people and call for a demonstration.

However, the active participation of local influencers has enabled the programme to make progress within the communities. Child marriage is a sensitive subject

and local communities are more willing to accept interventions when it comes through respected/influential personalities from their own communities.

Strengthening systems

In view of the increased incidence of gender-based violence, UNFPA and the Ministry of Public Health developed the CMR protocol which was endorsed by the Ministry in 2022. GBV stakeholders in the health sector use the CMR guidelines in addressing sexual assault, including rape, alongside the Ministry of Health's own regular operating and referral procedures. The Global Programme's implementing partners have networked with previously trained CMR trainers for any cases that require immediate assistance. UNFPA also supported the training of more than 200 health care providers, gynaecologists and midwives on CMR to enable them to provide immediate medical assistance to survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. These health care providers were also trained on GBV principles and ethics, to ensure that a survivor's confidentiality is not breached, and that they do not put women and girls at further risk.

UNICEF initiated an advocacy campaign with the Minister of Public Health to ensure married adolescent girls and adolescent mothers are included in the vaccination campaign for children. In addition, meetings were held with the network of midwives and Ministry of Public Health focal points on mother and child health to increase investment in midwives, as key trusted members of the communities, to provide information about the risks of early pregnancy and child marriage.

UNFPA's implementing partners have further networked with major hospitals in targeted governorates and have focal points assigned to provide immediate services to GBV survivors when needed.

“As a result of displacement and ongoing conflict, I was traumatized and was in constant fear. This has affected my life, but thanks to the support I received from UNFPA, my mental state has now improved. I received free medication and a number of psychosocial support sessions. I feel like I am born again, I now have a stable life with my family and I am able to cope with difficult situations.”

— Manal, 16-years-old child marriage survivor, Al-Hudaydah governorate



© UNICEF/UN0717994/DotNotion

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

There is still a lack of commitment from the Government, particularly the Ministry of Public Health, to adopt concrete action to support child marriage interventions. Women and girls have difficulty accessing health care, which is also exacerbated by increased restrictions on their mobility, imposed by social norms and the conflicting parties. The lack of specialized health services in most governorates and the rising costs of fuel also hamper women and girls accessing good quality prevention and care services.

In 2023, the programme priorities will be to:

- strengthen the network with service providers and enhance the provision of service periodicity (especially at health facilities and courts and through lawyers etc.)
- provide continuing training for health focal points to enable them to provide immediate, confidential, health support using a survivor-centred approach
- review reproductive health messages for adolescent girls in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and grass roots CSOs
- focus more on health/ reproductive health awareness-raising activities for adolescent girls in safe spaces and non-formal literacy classes
- liaise/ coordinate with other NGOs and international NGOs working to support women and girls with health assistance in governorates where there are gaps (such as in Amran and Hajjah)
- continue to build the capacities of GBV workers in targeted districts and governorates to enable them to respond to the immediate needs of women and girls
- further enhance legal aid for GBV survivors
- improve the toll-free national hotline, complaint and feedback mechanisms, and ongoing community-level dialogues in targeted communities.



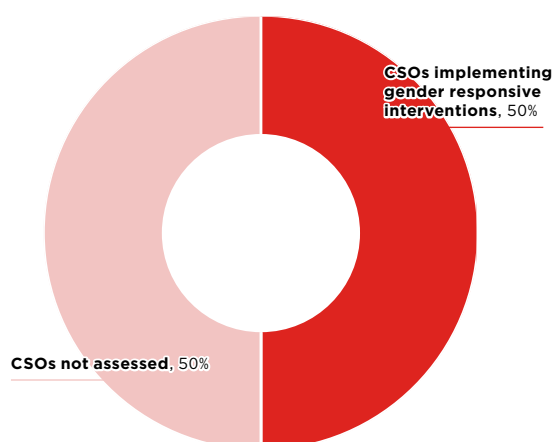
© UNICEF/UN0743031/Alghabri

Building partnerships

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

Partnerships are important for advancing gender-transformative programming and, recognizing this, in 2022, the Global Programme assessed the extent to which the CSOs were implementing gender-transformative approaches – based on the partners identified as focusing on promoting girls' and women's rights from the previous year (4 in Yemen). The assessment aimed to provide guidance to UNFPA and UNICEF on how to better identify and support opportunities to advance gender-transformative approaches within the Global Programme.

FIGURE 3: 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. Unfortunately, there was no available information about Al Zahraa and the Children and Youth Protection Organization (CYPO). Therefore, the gaps and challenges relate in part to a lack of information about CSOs and a need for better communication and knowledge generation.

The CSOs assessed were impressive for their gender-positive work, particularly in the context of the conflict and humanitarian crisis. The SOS Foundation was impressive for focusing on gender equality and seeking to encourage gender mainstreaming in Yemen peacebuilding initiatives. It hosted the Next Generation Feminist Leaders Retreat during which it conducted the training for 25 women activists and agents of social change, building their capacity in feminist leadership, mechanisms and approaches to shift and change attitudes, behaviours and social norms that perpetuate gender inequality. The Yemen Women Union ranked highly in terms of its monitoring and learning as it uses a data analysis tool to represent and measure progress and results. When reflecting on positive impact stories, it involves the people they work with in sharing their stories. It appears to be very intentional about connecting and collaborating with other feminist organizations to build their capacity and often assists by providing them with manuals to help their work.

It is recommended that the Global Programme engage with Al Zahraa and CYPO to confirm if they are still operating. If so, an analysis should be conducted to determine how best to support them. There are additional CSOs that the Global Programme may want to consider working with in Yemen, for example, Human Access which, in its impressive humanitarian work, is working on improving livelihood opportunities for women and young people through skills programmes. Deem Yemen is another organization to consider. It appears that UNFPA already has a working relationship with it on projects set to empower women and girls. In the context of crisis, war and a tribal/patriarchal society it is hard to implement gender-transformative approaches, however, these two organizations are working towards gender-transformative change and may be a welcome addition to the Global Programme.

end child marriage

A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE

2022

