



Members of adulation girls club show Red Dot challenge on her hand for Menstrual Hygiene Day at Sapon Tea estate in Dibrugarh district of Assam
UN0442519 / Biju BORO

Joint Assessment of Adaptations to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in light of COVID-19

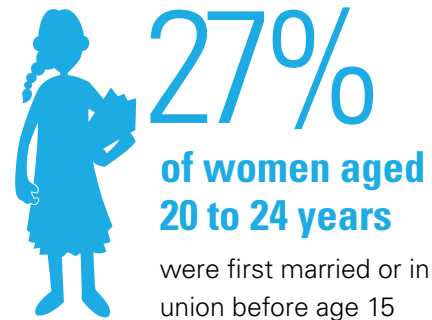
Country Report India

Evidence for this document was compiled under the 2021 Joint Assessment of Adaptations to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in light of COVID-19



India

India is home to the largest number of child brides in the world. With 223 million child brides, that account for a third of the global total. While it is illegal for girls under the age of 18 to marry in India, estimates suggest that at least 1.5 million girls under age 18 get married in India each year. Nearly 16 per cent of all adolescent girls aged 15-19 are currently married. Recent evidence, though sparse, highlights the persistence of family-arranged marriages without meaningful consent. The country has seen a large decline in the prevalence of the practice of child marriage in the last decade, from 47 per cent to 27 per cent of all young women being married in childhood – driving the reduction of child marriage globally. **This remarkable accomplishment, with progress observed in for example Bangladesh, is now under threat.** Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls across the world will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19.¹ The



United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization further estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic’s economic impact.²

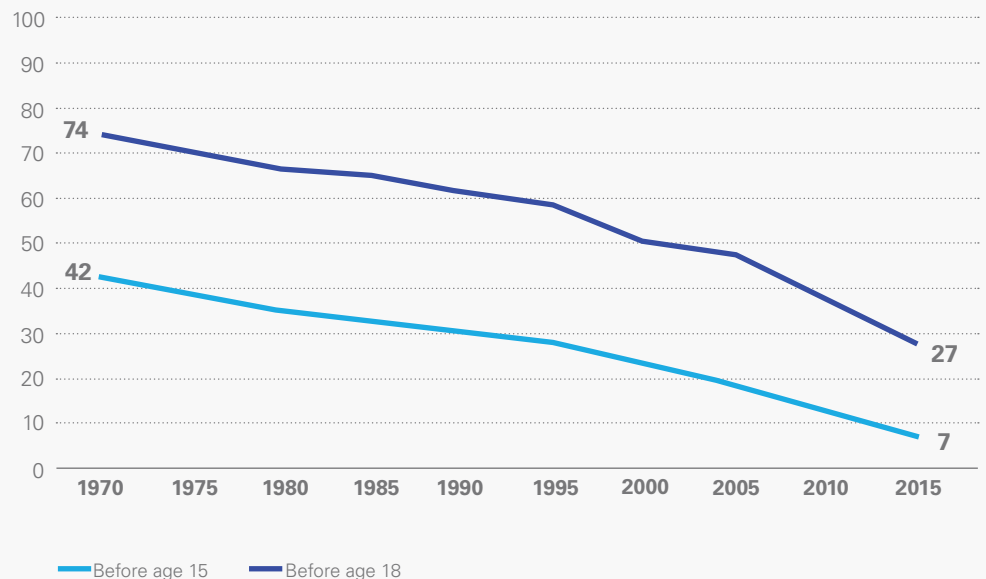
1 United Nations Children’s Fund, COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage, UNICEF, New York, 2021.

2 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in collaboration with McKinsey & Company, ‘COVID-19 Response –Remediation: Helping students catch up on lost learning, with a focus on closing equity gaps’, UNESCO, Paris, 2020.

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 15 and before age 18

Source: UNICEF analysis based on NFHS, as published in: United Nations Children’s Fund, Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in India, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

Notes: This trend analysis is based on the prevalence of child marriage across age cohorts, as measured in the NFHS 1992-1993, 1997-1998, 2005-2006 and 2015-2016. See publication noted above for additional details.

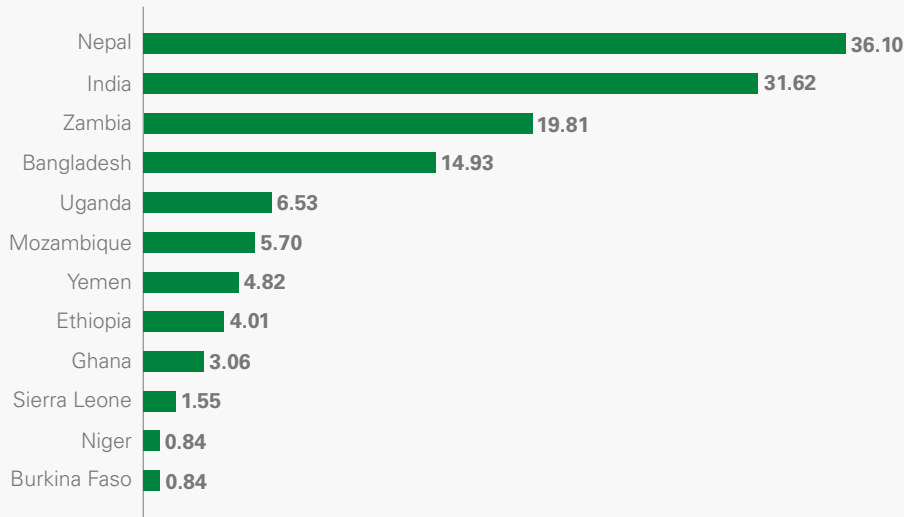


Background

COVID-19 Impact and Measures in Global Programme Countries, 2020

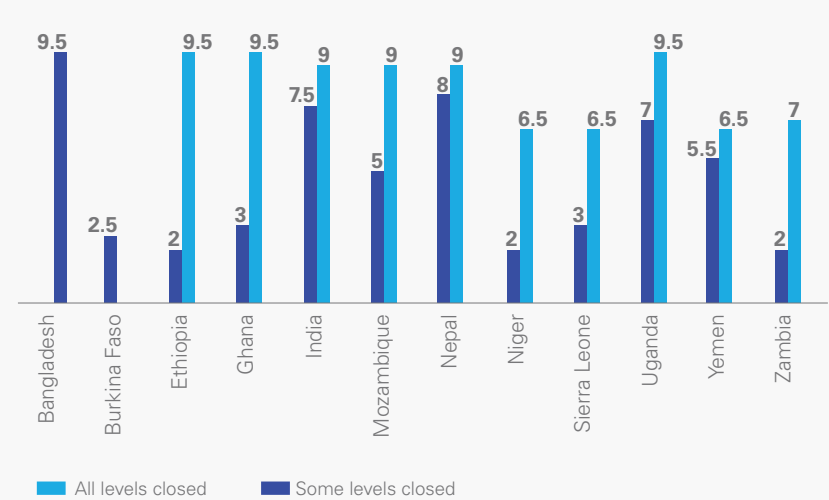
Deaths/100k pop

Source: John Hopkins University, has of 17 August 2021.



Number of months of school closures

Source: UNESCO. As of 31 May 2021.



Border closure



Public gathering ban



Lockdown



Travel restrictions



School closure

	Border closure	Public gathering ban	Lockdown	Travel restrictions	School closure
Bangladesh	n/a	n/a	26-Mar	25-Mar	16-Mar
Burkina Faso	20-Mar	12-Mar	20-Mar	20-Mar	16-Mar
Ethiopia	23-Mar	16-Mar	31-Mar	20-Mar	16-Mar
Ghana	23-Mar	15-Mar	30-Mar	27-Mar	16-Mar
India	12-Mar	24-Mar	25-Mar	12-Mar	13-Mar
Mozambique	n/a	19-Mar	n/a	19-Mar	23-Mar
Nepal	10-Mar	18-Mar	24-Mar	10-Mar	18-Mar
Niger	19-Mar	17-Mar	n/a	19-Mar	20-Mar
Sierra Leone	5-Apr	5-Apr	5-Apr	9-Apr	31-Mar
Uganda	21-Mar	1-Apr	1-Apr	25-Mar	20-Mar
Yemen	15-Mar	n/a	n/a	15-Mar	15-Mar
Zambia	17-Mar	13-Mar	26-Mar	17-Mar	17-Mar

Source: UNESCO, The Wire, Reuters, BarkaFoundation, ICNL, betterwork.org, OSAC.gov, ICNL, Uganda COVID info hub, UNB, Presidencia.gov.mz, ANP, APANews, Diggers, bdnews24, COVID19.sl

Overview of Key Adjustments to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

Intensive support to the most marginalized girl

During the COVID-19 pandemic advocacy efforts allowed to reach adolescent boys and girls with information, educational programmes and life skills trainings through multi-media channels, attempts to integrate life skills into outreach programmes, engaging volunteers, women's and community structures, teachers and peer educators to disseminate information and to promote continued education for girls and boys. Phone based applications were also used as well as a national media platform on television as an attempt to respond to the digital divide.



7.5 months

duration of school closure since february 2020

Family and community environment

Local level authorities were mobilised such as district level task forces, village child protection committees, community volunteers, influencers, elected Panchayats representatives depending upon the State. But also, given the restrictions, multi-media and inter personal communication packages for community mobilisation and dialogues, intergenerational dialogues and positive parenting shifted to social media and online modes of delivery. Digital platforms offering the possibility of two-way communication were used to engage men and boys in exchanges around social norms and masculinity.

Systems strengthening

Technical support initiatives were undertaken online to complement planned activities across the

states to roll out the School Health Programme, to implement remote learning programmes in the education sector, to the National Adolescent Health Programme and Scheme for Adolescent Girls for the adaptation of life skills education at different levels and to train all the child protection functionaries across all the states regarding remote case management and follow up.

Poverty drivers

Through its partnerships the GPECM supported social protection schemes in some states, such as food distribution for migrants, formulation of guidelines or cash transfer. In some states, social protection schemes could not be operationalized due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Laws and policies

Advocacy efforts and technical support to the states, in some taking place virtually, led to the development of costed and resourced multisectoral plans and the establishment of district task force for their implementation. Capacity building interventions were adjusted through online trainings to different types of cadres around adjusted strategies and the various drivers of child marriage including in the context of COVID-19.

Data and evidence

GPECM supported some states to conduct a variety of evidence generation initiatives such as studies on the triggers and drivers of child marriage during COVID-19 pandemic or analysis of cases of child marriage that were prevented but also assessments through U Report of adolescent vulnerabilities, for instance related to their access to essential services or the psycho-social issues they faced.

MAIN CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ADJUSTMENTS TO COVID-19

- **Addressing the digital divide in remote areas is essential** in order to continue reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised adolescent girls.
- Supporting communities and ensuring that outreach workers **reach the most vulnerable** adolescent was **severely affected because of the restrictions**.
- **Economic hardships** might be among the **stronger drivers of child marriage** in the COVID-19 crisis context and addressing is extremely challenging. Government's ability to invest in welfare schemes varied across states in line with the focus set on the response to the pandemic; therefore, **social protection schemes were not available for many** of the most at risk adolescent girls and their families.



KEY LEARNINGS AND GOOD PRACTICES

- The **constant generation of evidence from monitoring of the situation at community level** proved to be really useful because it was possible to quickly provide feedback to the districts for them to program their response.
- Integrating messaging or training on child marriage within the COVID-19 response somehow **compensated the impossibility of conducting outreach or school-based activities**.
- GPECM Phase II focus on gender transformation is very relevant particularly since disparities or discriminations faced by adolescent girls are increasing because of the impact of COVID-19.
- Adjustments to the child protection strategy integrated due to COVID-19, **synergistically integrated child marriage** issues.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, volunteers started experiencing innovative ways to maintain contact with communities like WhatsApp messages as it was more accessible than any other form of digital media in remote districts.



Country Report: India. Joint Assessment of Adaptations to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in light of COVID-19

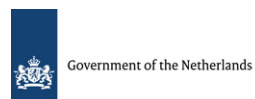
© United Nations Children's Fund, New York, 2021
United Nations Children's Fund
Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

The purpose of publishing reports produced by the UNICEF Evaluation Office is to fulfil a corporate commitment to transparency through the publication of all completed evaluations. The reports are designed to stimulate a free exchange of ideas among those interested in the topic and to assure those supporting the work of UNICEF that it rigorously examines its strategies, results and overall effectiveness.

The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF and those of UNFPA. The views expressed in this report are those of the team that conducted the assessment. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.

The copyright for this report is held by the United Nations Children's Fund. Permission is required to re-print/reproduce/photocopy or in any other way cite or quote from this report in written form. UNICEF has a formal permission policy that requires a written request to be submitted. For non-commercial uses, the permission will normally be granted free of charge. Please write to the Evaluation Office at the address below to initiate a permission request.

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



United Nations Population Fund
Evaluation Office
605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158 U.S.A.
unfpa.org/evaluation

United Nations Children's Fund
Evaluation Office
Three United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
unicef.org/evaluation