



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

Country Report

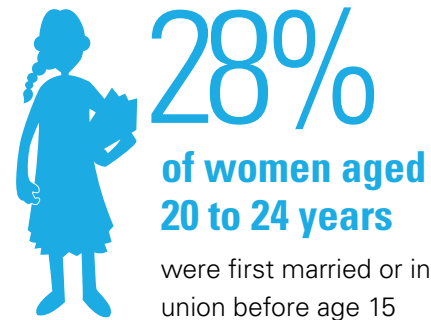
Niger

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



Niger

Niger is home to 5 million child brides. Of these, 1.9 million married before age 15. **Niger is the country in the world with the highest prevalence of child marriage**, with 76 per cent of all young women marrying before their 18th birthday – and there is no sign of progress in eliminating the practice¹. Compounded crises affect the well-being of children and adolescents in the Sahel, both directly and indirectly. In this climate of uncertainty, in a region firmly rooted in cultural traditions, it is common for marriage to be considered a safe haven for girls with few opportunities². Unlike the situation in Niger, globally over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. Over the next decade, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19. The United Nations Ed-



ucational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic’s economic impact⁴. **These risks making an already hard situation for girls in Niger even worse.**

1 Niger Demographic and Health Survey 2012.

2 UNICEF, 2020, [Child Marriage in the Sahel](#).

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

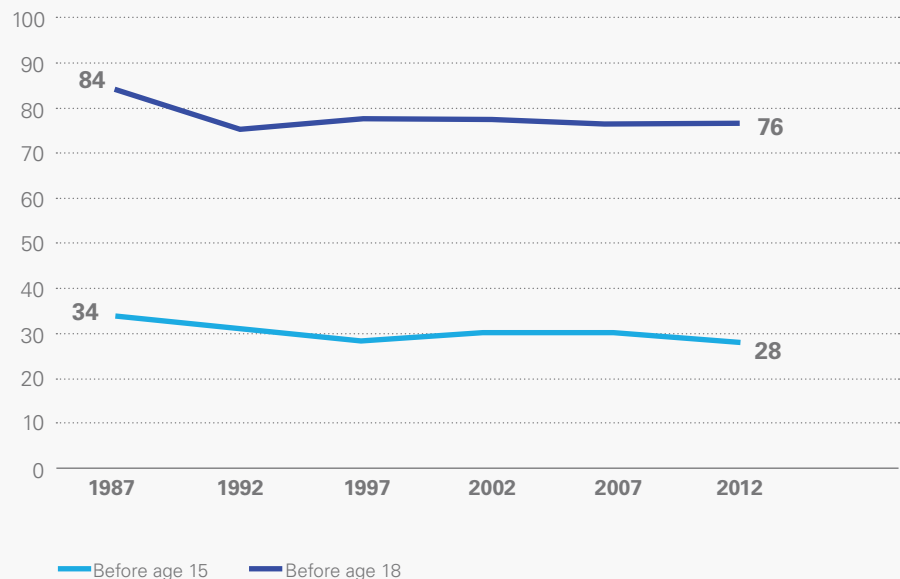
4 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in collaboration with McKinsey & Company, ‘COVID-19 Response –Remediation: Helping students catch up on lost learning, with a focus on closing equity gaps’, UNESCO, Paris, 2020.

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

Source: Niger Demographic and Health Survey 2012

Note: This trend analysis is based on the prevalence of child marriage across age cohorts, as measured in the latest available survey.

Projections are not shown for the Niger as the country does not show evidence of progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage, so it is not possible to build on observed rates of change. The projected prevalence will remain the same as today’s levels until signs of progress are evident.

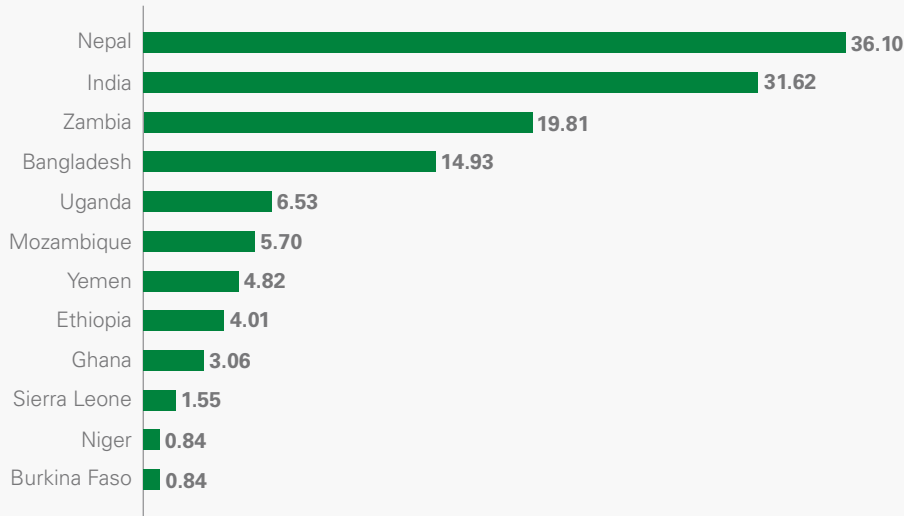


Background

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

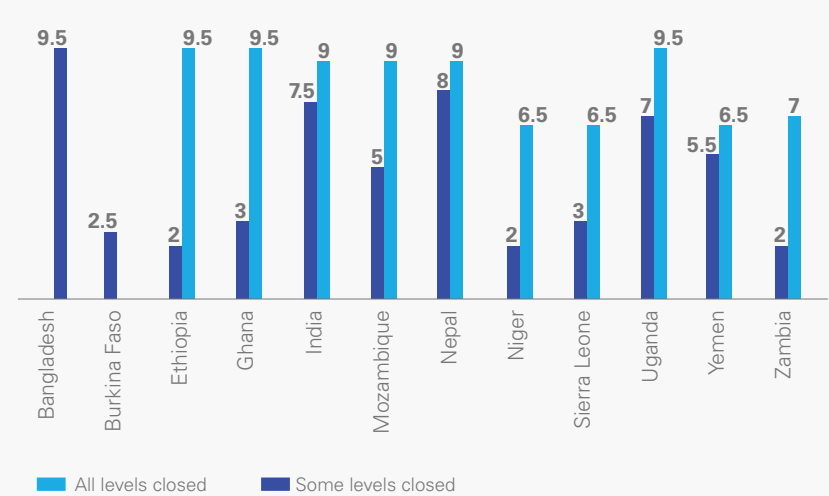
Deaths/100k pop

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

The community-based child protection approach involving all segments in the community was continued by UNICEF involving smaller groups and household visits instead of village gatherings. Illimin participants recruitment was delayed because the involvement of traditional leaders could only take place in the second part for the year. The new cycle was organised in 2020 but actually took off in 2021. Two teenage girls shared their stories on national television as part of launch of “Coping with COVID-19” promoting the use of smartphones and WhatsApp to strengthen adolescent girl’s empowerment.



6.5 months

duration of school closure since february 2020

Family and community environment

Leaders from the Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger (ACTN) carried out campaigns and community caravans as well as sensitisation through community radio stations on COVID-19 prevention measures incorporating GBV prevention, children’s and girls’ rights including child marriage. Later in the year, community dialogues, child protection committee and communal committee members besides educational talks on human rights, sexual and reproductive health and harmful traditional practices raised awareness on the prevention of COVID-19 while applying protection measures.

Systems strengthening

Social services received support to observe COVID-19 protection measures in order to continue ensuring appropriate violence and abuse case management, including during the peak of the pandemic. This required intensive advocacy at regional level. Eight regional forums were organised as planned to build capacity on improved access to school and retention of girls, integrating child marriage, GBV, sensitive gender planning.

Poverty drivers

Three hundred teenage girls, part of the Illimin programme, enlisted in the Centre for Professional Training in Niamey, had the opportunity to generate income through producing and selling protective masks against COVID-19 and to purchase sewing machines.

Laws and policies

The Global Programme supported the mid-term review of the 2019-2021 National Strategic Plan to end child marriage with government partners and all stakeholders. The other planned advocacy and capacity building activities were postponed to take place in 2021.

Data and evidence

Monitoring was conducted through virtual programmatic visits. The studies planned in 2020 were postponed to 2021.

MAIN CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ADJUSTMENTS TO COVID-19

- Reorienting interventions and adjusting work-plans and budgets with implementing partners were complicated because they were **not familiar with digital technologies** and internet connections were only operational close to urban centres. In addition, limited number of staff members, home working and priority put on other programmes led to delays.
- Adjusted **interventions reached less beneficiaries than planned** and required more sessions and more time from field-based staff.
- Setting up COVID-19 prevention measures with local authorities and communities **required important efforts because of stigma or disbeliefs about the pandemic** and sometimes conflicting prevention messages.
- The reception and follow-up of more than 10,000 Talibé children returned from Nigeria added on to the **burden of the teams and social worker** who were in charge of receiving and sending them to their families.
- Borders with Nigeria were closed what **hampered commercial exchanges** and affected targeted communities that depended on those exchanges.
- **Gaps in data and evidence** regarding changes in child marriage due to the pandemic and all types of vulnerabilities (handicap, orphans...) hindered



KEY LEARNINGS AND GOOD PRACTICES

- “What seemed impossible proved to be possible”: **Distance work became** possible and allowed to save time and money but may not be as effective in terms for results.
- Community mechanisms already set up, in particular child protection committees, community facilitators, or correspondents were mobilised further and provided **a good platform to disseminate messages related to COVID-19** but also to relay local concerns and needs.
- Communities accepted door to door visit which is unusual in the Niger context and this approach proved to be really effective to actually conduct in-depth discussion with people although very input intensive.
- **Community approaches** were revised based upon learning of COVID-19 e.g. adoption of smaller groups, visits to the most vulnerable households and included strategies for emergency situations.
- **Reframing skills/vocational training** on more relevant fields e.g. woodwork, motorcycle mechanics, mobile phone repair provided new opportunities for adolescent girls.
- **Adjustments such as distance training or workshops** showed a different way of working and is a positive learning for strategic decision making including at regional level.
- Adolescent girls gained more visibility through disseminating COVID-19 messages, making masks and the role of the correspondents has been boosted.
- Thanks to the Global Programme advocacy, the Government has established **child protection committees** focusing on ending child marriage with budgets that World Bank repositioned when unspent.
- Adjustments during the pandemic allowed **a real synergy between the Global Programme and Spotlight Initiative** at national level.

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

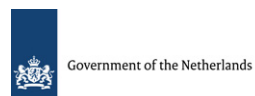
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