NEPAL

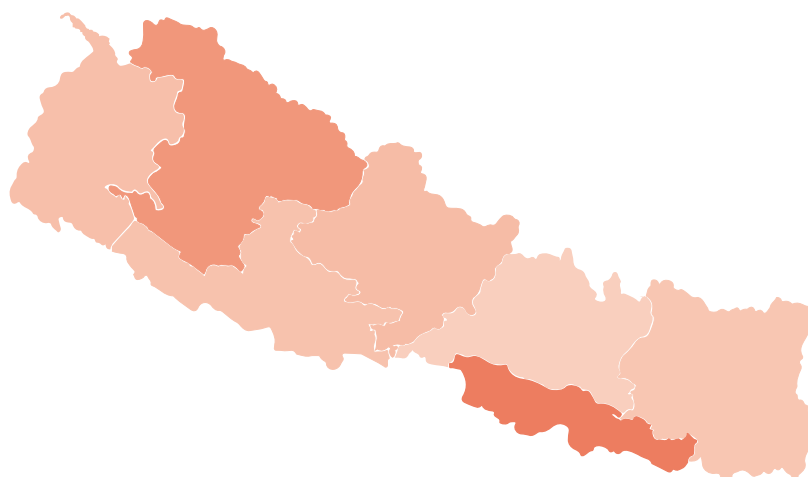**COUNTRY PROFILE**

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NEPAL

Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.

100%

0%

Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016. **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 the delimitation of any frontiers.

The country context

Nepal is home to 5 million child brides. Of these, 1.3 million married before age 15. The practice has become less common over the last decades, with the prevalence in the last survey in 2016 standing at 40 per cent, down from 55 per cent in 1991. However, the progress is not enough to reach the ambitious aim of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – to eliminate child marriage globally by 2030. If the progress observed over the past 25 years continues, the prevalence of child marriage will stand at 33 per cent at the end of the decade, and if the slightly accelerated progress from the last decade continues the prevalence will be 27 per cent in 2030. Even if the progress from the past decade is doubled, the child marriage prevalence will be 18 per cent in 2030, and down to 6 per cent in 2050.[1]

Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming a child bride. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls globally have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data show that over the next decade, 100 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides, according to pre-COVID-19 projections. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls are now at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic and measures

to stop its spread.[2] UNICEF Nepal reports that the economic pressure from the pandemic and containment measures are pushing adolescents to seek their own marriage and home, due to a combination of boredom, an increase in violence in the home, and their search for new opportunities because they are out of school and do not expect to go back. Further, UNICEF reports that there has been an increase in families disguising human trafficking as child marriage to earn money to survive; as the economic situation deteriorates, families can be more easily enticed to marry off their daughters for small exchanges of gifts and cash.[3]

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 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.[4] Out of school, Nepali girls lack their 'student' status, which would otherwise give them the agency to negotiate with their parents about marriage. School closures mean students lack safe spaces to socialize with the opposite sex, access to established child marriage reporting mechanisms, and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education. In addition, adolescents from poor and remote rural households in Nepal have far less access to online learning, reducing the likelihood that will return to school and increasing the likelihood of child marriage.[5]

Nepal was already affected by humanitarian crises before the COVID-19 pandemic, after the earthquake that severely affected thousands of people and more than 800,000 homes in 2015. According to the Global Programme-commissioned study 'Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia', in earthquake-affected communities in Nepal (Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha districts) child marriage prevalence is moderate. In both districts, the proportion of children married before age 18 was higher for girls than boys: 3 per cent among men aged 20–24 and 9 per cent among women in Sindhupalchowk district; and 5 per cent among men aged 20–24 and 7 per cent among women in Dolakha district.

The proportion of 15- to 17-year-olds currently married was slightly lower: 2 per cent of boys and 4.8 per cent of girls in Sindhupalchowk, and 0.6 per cent of boys and 4.6 per cent of girls in Dolakha. There were very low rates of marriage before age 15 years in both communities. Qualitative data noted a slight increase in child marriage after the earthquake in 2015, but reported child marriage to be on an overall declining trend in both districts. There are variants of marriages within this trend – for example, arranged marriages before age 18 are decreasing, at the same time, love marriages and elopements are increasing. This may be one area that saw a change specifically related to the earthquake – with reports of increased elopements following. Gender-based discrimination, systemic poverty linked to caste and ethnic discrimination, agency and self-initiated marriage, and economic insecurity were among the drivers of child marriage in settings where there was a humanitarian crisis in place before the COVID-19 pandemic.[6]

Despite these setbacks and challenges, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

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Key highlights

3,533

adolescent girls actively participated in life-skills programmes or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas.

7,716

underserved or marginalized adolescent girls enrolled and remained in formal or non-formal education.

8,014

individuals participated in group education or dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

44 health service delivery sites were assessed as providing quality adolescent-responsive services that meet programme minimum standards.

Despite the pandemic, 21 per cent of the sampled girls in the Rupantaran financial and livelihood skills programme expressed increased sense of self-efficacy, felt confident in their ability to negotiate and delay early marriage, and felt comfortable speaking without fear.

8.5 MILLION

individuals were reached through mass media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

Six provincial governments and **92 municipalities** committed to and developed action plans to address child marriage, and **51 municipalities** allocated a total of **US$100,000** towards scaling up implementation of the Rupantaran programme in their communities.

2020 Achievements

3,533

girls targeted by the Global Programme and

20,049

girls targeted by complementary interventions were engaged through the Rupantaran programme.

More than

3,000

adolescent girls were interviewed: the majority (2,336) being 11–16 years old, with slightly over half (51.5 per cent) not enrolled in school.

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme in Nepal places girls' empowerment at its core, and combines both macro- and micro-level considerations that impact a girl's life and her possibility to exercise her rights – making sure that girls are given opportunities to make informed decisions and that they are in a safe environment, free from any form of violence or harmful practice. Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities are the most successful channel for delaying their marriage.[7] UNFPA and UNICEF in Nepal are jointly supporting the social and financial skills programme, Rupantaran, to build skills and knowledge among adolescent girls to ensure that they can exercise their choices and build support networks. In 2020, while adapting the content of the programme into a radio show to respond to the changed context during the COVID-19 pandemic, the content on gender equality was also strengthened to ensure that it is gender-transformative and that it promotes critical thinking on gender roles and unequal power dynamics that exist in the society.

During the year, 3,533 girls targeted by the Global Programme and 20,049 girls targeted by complementary interventions were engaged through the Rupantaran programme. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19-induced lockdown, thanks to the adaptation to a radio show – where sessions were aired across multiple community radio stations – it was possible to remain in contact with most of the girls enrolled in the programme. The adaptations of the Global Programme, in terms of methods of delivery and content, were informed by a rapid assessment conducted by UNFPA and UNICEF in early March 2020, which gathered information on the impact of the outbreak on adolescent girls. The assessment looked at girls' access to information and services, their mental health, key challenges experienced, and emerging needs and vulnerabilities, to determine alternative modalities to safely continue existing empowerment interventions. More than 3,000 adolescent girls were interviewed: the majority (2,336) being 11–16 years old, with slightly over half (51.5 per cent) not enrolled in school. After the assessment, the content was adapted to include

themes such as mental health and online safety, while ensuring a gender lens in all episodes of the radio show to spark discussions about gender norms and rethink and challenge prevalent power dynamics in Nepal among the listeners. Further, the radio sessions included quiz contests to ensure engagement of the listeners: recording an 85 per cent correct response rate. To ensure the appropriateness of the adaptations in terms of delivery and content, a survey using KoBo Toolbox (a free toolkit for collecting and managing data in challenging environments) is used to monitor the impact of the programme among a sample of the adolescent girl listeners.

In addition to the radio programme, UNFPA and UNICEF also ensured a strong follow-up component in the adaptations, to ensure in-person interactions through phone calls and household visits by mentors (outreach workers or peer leaders), conducted in smaller groups to ensure adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols. Despite increased risks for many of the girls due to the pandemic, only 0.45 per cent of the girls enrolled in the Rupantaran programme (14 out of 3,079) got married during the COVID-19 lockdown.

To reach the most vulnerable girls from the targeted communities, the Global Programme has initiated a system for maintaining a profile of vulnerable girls. The girls listed under the profile benefit from the social and financial skills package and are also referred to other appropriate services. In some programme areas, some of the girls enrolled in the Rupantaran programme have received in-kind support such as education materials, scholarships and uniforms on the basis of their economic situation.

As evidence suggests a strong correlation between lack of education and child marriage, the Global Programme is also supporting out-of-school girls with literacy and numeracy skills through the non-formal education programme Girls Access to Education (GATE). After completion of the non-formal classes, the girls are provided with further support for enrolment in formal education. Some girls also received cash and in-kind support for them to remain in school.

As a result of their empowerment and the strengthening of their sense of agency, the adolescent girls participating in the programme are gaining recognition at the local level. Some of the girls enrolled in Rupantaran have also been mobilized by the Government in other activities, including, for example, the distribution of supportive kits (dignity kits and adolescent kits) to pregnant women, lactating mothers, women with disabilities, and other adolescent girls and women affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, landslides and fires. Adolescent girls from one

district, Bajhang, were further recognized by the local government for their contribution to COVID-19 prevention and response activities.

To assess the impact of the Rupantaran programme, a concept mapping exercise was conducted, with technical support from the University of Pittsburgh, to develop an empowerment measurement tool. As a result, the Global Programme in partnership with local governments in Nepal developed and implemented the first ever standardized 'empowerment scale' specific to Nepali girls in 2020 ('Power in Nepali Girl' [PING]). The mapping exercise indicated significant short- and medium-term behaviour change among the participating adolescent girls. The measurement tool will be used to influence local governments to implement the Rupantaran package in programmes designed to empower girls.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps
The target for engagement with adolescent girls for Global Programme was partially achieved in 2020, with face-to-face engagement limited to only 3,533 girls, while about 23,000 girls were reached through the radio broadcast of the Rupantaran sessions. This was due to the national COVID-19-induced lockdown and movement restrictions, which posed a major challenge for the programme when activities could not be conducted as planned. Despite the lockdown restrictions, outreach workers kept a record of all the girls enrolled in the programme and this proved essential in keeping in contact with the girls and their parents, and ensuring that girls have access to key information related to COVID-19 prevention and transmission and other services.

The rapid assessment conducted to increase the understanding of the impacts of the pandemic on girls was essential to inform programme adjustments – adaptation of the programme delivery modality – and also provided an opportunity to integrate relevant content on psychosocial support and information on relief into radio sessions. The revised modality of delivery of the Rupantaran programme through radio allowed for more innovative approaches to be used to strengthen interaction with adolescents, including quizzes, question-and-answer sessions, phone follow-up sessions and home visits with adolescent girls, which supported learning and skills-building. This has ensured that the radio shows have good listenership and strong youth engagement.

The implementation of the Rupantaran programme as a common modality between UNFPA, UNICEF and partners, continues to serve as a platform for collaboration and a space for gender-transformative approaches across the socio-ecological framework.

Having in place a system for identifying the most marginalized girls in the programme areas allows the programme to follow up on their progress to ensure that no girl is left behind in the fight against child marriage in Nepal. In 2021, the programme will review the radio versus the face-to-face components of Rupantaran to allow for future adaptations in the programme delivery modality as required.

Enhancing the family and community environment

The Global Programme in Nepal aims to build capacities of communities for attitudinal change to alter intergenerational transmission of behaviours that promote child marriage. To do this, the Rupantaran programme is also used as a platform to reach out to community members by engaging boys and men to create a supportive and gender-equal environment for girls and women. Realizing the importance of enhancing the knowledge and skills of parents and caregivers to

be able to provide the enabling environment for girls to exercise their voice, choice and agency, the Rupantaran parenting content has built in strong gender equality content. In the context of the pandemic, messaging on COVID-19 was integrated into the child marriage messaging delivered through the programme, and all social and behaviour change activities were implemented according to COVID-19 safety protocols as mandated by the Government. Public service announcements (PSAs) and community radio campaigns on harmful practices and COVID-19 were developed and aired in local languages. The content was informed by the findings of the rapid assessment and research on the context of child marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic, and developed in partnership with multiple organizations. Overall, 8,014 community members were reached through dialogue sessions and over 8.7 million individuals through the Rupantaran parents package adapted into radio sessions during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

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In 2020, the Global Programme mobilized young people to conduct community dialogues on ending child marriage, gender equality and on alternatives to child marriage, facilitated through radio sessions during COVID-19.

In 2020, the Global Programme also mobilized young people, most of them men, to conduct community dialogues on ending child marriage, gender equality and on alternatives to child marriage, facilitated through radio sessions during COVID-19. These dialogues included parents and community influencers to expand critical and transformative reflections. In addition, 378 religious leaders, local leaders and influencers were engaged by the programme in dialogues and consensus-building sessions to end child marriage and lead the support to community protection and surveillance mechanisms. As a result of these social and behaviour change radio campaigns and engagements, the majority (73.5 per cent) of surveyed adult respondents that participated in the radio campaigns are now able to identify the benefits associated with ending child marriage and are increasingly aware of the harmful effects of children marrying before the age of 18. However, only a small proportion (6.9 per cent) of participants were able to identify sanctions linked to the practice.

These community campaigns have led to increased reporting of child marriage cases. In 2020, through the support to the community protection monitoring systems, 64 cases of child marriage were registered with the police, compared with 31 cases in 2019; 443 cases of potential child marriages (before the marriages took place) were reported through the child helpline, compared with 285 cases in 2019. Around 350 cases of child marriage (before and after the marriages occurred) were identified in Global Programme-targeted areas through the incident reporting mechanism. Of these reported cases, more than 40 per cent were resolved (averted/intercepted) successfully, only 10 per cent were concluded without any action, and actions are ongoing for the remaining 50 per cent of cases.

Youth participation was enhanced during the year, with 30 young people from Province 2 attending forum theatre training for conducting edutainment (educational entertainment) on ending child marriage as part of risk communication and community engagement activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people delivered child marriage messages through radio and megaphone announcements; in addition, 16 episodes on child-marriage-related issues targeting religious and community leaders, fathers, men and boys were developed and broadcast through eight FM radio stations covering all districts of Province 2. In the same province, two child marriage testimony songs were prepared by young people in the local language and aired through radio and megaphone announcements for awareness-raising. The young people engaged also collected and documented 14 real-life stories of child marriage, which will be used to develop a storybook. Adolescents taking part in the storytelling found the process of preparing stories empowering. The published storybook will be disseminated in schools and communities for further awareness-raising.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps
The COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown and restrictions on movement and travel severely disrupted programme implementation. In 2021, the programme plans to assess the Rupantaran package delivered through both face-to-face and radio to strengthen its content and implementation strategies. The flexibility built into the programme supported the timely adaptation and implementation of activities in 2020, highlighting the importance of integrating space for review, revisions and improvisation to achieve results. One of the major lessons learned during the COVID-19 response is the need for greater flexibility, both in terms of the use of funds and in implementation, to deliver timely results on the ground. This is essential for responding effectively to rapidly evolving and fluid situations.

The programme will prioritize the strengthening of strategic partnerships and coalitions of women's rights organizations and men's/boys' groups to advance the gender-transformative agenda in 2021.

Strengthening systems

At a systems level, the Global Programme supports child protection, sexual and reproductive health and education services to ensure adolescent girl-responsive services. In 2020, the Global Programme supported the child protection sector, capacitating 301 justice and security authorities with skills and knowledge on justice for children, including data management and diversion, strengthening their capacity to provide quality services that are child and gender sensitive. Throughout the year, a total of 13,939 cases related to women and children were registered with the police, which exceeded the annual target by 47 per cent. The rise in reporting could be because of the increased awareness and trust in justice/security authorities and increased service-seeking behaviour among women and children. However, it could also indicate an increase in cases related to gender-based violence.

UNFPA in coordination with local governments organized orientation on disaster management, protection and emergency health preparedness and response in selected municipalities. The participants were selected from the respective municipal executive members, local disaster committee members and thematic section chiefs of the municipalities. This has resulted in the formation of municipal protection cluster committees, ensuring the availability of protection services and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.

The generation of evidence on adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and its utilization for policy and advocacy has resulted in an increase in investment from local provincial government, the Family Welfare Division and relevant stakeholders in adolescent sexual and reproductive health programming. The Government and all seven provinces have allocated a total of US$124,500 towards adolescent sexual and reproductive health training and the certification of adolescent-friendly service sites in all 77 districts.

During the year, the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Training Package was revised and improved with an added focus on building the skills and modelling the behaviour of health service providers, with technical support from the programme to the Family Welfare Division, the National Health Training Center and the Ministry of Education. Fifty-seven health-care providers have received training on the revised training package, which strengthened their capacity to provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services to adolescents. A training package (trainer's guide, participant handbook, adolescent sexual and reproductive health reference materials, and adolescent job aid) was provided to all service providers during the

training to use during examination and service provision to adolescents. The efficacy of the training can be measured by the increase in the number of adolescents visiting the centres for services. A total of 51,669 adolescents (26,401 girls and 25,268 boys) utilized sexual and reproductive health services in five districts during the year – a 7 per cent increase in service utilization.

The Global Programme has supported the establishment of adolescent-friendly information corners in schools in programme areas. In coordination with the Health Facility Management Committee, 44 health service sites were supported to deliver adolescent-friendly services following pre-certification criteria. Materials such as information booklets, posters, comic books and a television screen were provided to these health service sites to comply with the set standards. With the objective of familiarizing adolescents with the services provided by the adolescent-friendly information corners – and to ease barriers between adolescents and service providers – site visits to the corners have taken place for over 50 per cent of girls participating in the Rupantaran programme.

In the education sector, in collaboration with the Center for Education and Human Resource Development, a partnership was established with a civil society organization to promote girls' education; end gender-based violence in schools; ensure equity in education (through the establishment of a complaint response mechanism in schools); and establish a Girls Education Network and Gender Focal Points with local government participation and collaboration. A one-day virtual orientation on safe school reopening, after the pandemic-induced closure, was conducted for political authorities and education officers of 37 local governments. The orientation session focused on the promotion of girls' education, gender equity and social inclusion, linking officers from the local governments with the Girls Education Network and the Gender Focal Points to ensure the return of vulnerable girls to school. Likewise, orientation sessions were conducted with 299 teachers from 19 districts, focusing on the safe reopening of school, girls' education, gender equity and social inclusion, the use of the complaint response mechanism and suggestion box, and the role of Gender Focal Persons in promoting girls' education.

The Complaint Response Mechanism Guidelines, developed in 2018, were amended in 2020 and approved by the Government. The amendment incorporates changes to the role and responsibility of Gender Focal Persons and the Complaint Response Committee, integrating lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the subnational level, a Girls Education Network was formed in three municipalities in Province 2 and network members were oriented on

girls' education, gender equity and social inclusion, and the purpose and functions of the Girls Education Network. Additionally, 69 schoolteachers were trained on the Complaint Response Mechanism and on providing psychosocial first aid support.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps
Across the world, 2020 was a challenging year to continue programmes for ending child marriage, and the situation in Nepal was no exception. The disruption of services for sexual and reproductive health and child protection, school closures, lockdown measures that prevented girls from meeting in person, increase in gender-based violence and economic burden on families due to loss in income were some of the most pressing challenges affecting the Global Programme implementation. However, the country team took measures to ensure the continuation of services reaching the most marginalized adolescent girls, boys and families in need by pivoting critical interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enhancing the capacities of government at the national and subnational levels to deliver responsive services for adolescent girls during the COVID-19 lockdown was a successful approach. The provision of technical tools and capacity-building allowed the Global Programme to leverage existing national mechanisms and networks, and partnerships between the Government and civil society organizations increased local capacities and achievement of results.

Cross-sectoral collaboration was strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic in a number of areas. This has led to opportunities to drive a more dedicated advocacy strategy and to coordinate child marriage efforts with other issues such as mental health, girls' education and menstrual hygiene management. It is important to constantly look for opportunities for strategic collaboration and avenues to reach a wider audience, which also ensures optimal use of resources.

Addressing poverty

In 2020, the progress in addressing economic drivers of child marriage was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, by pivoting interventions, UNICEF has initiated a partnership process for strengthening the promotion of the birth registration campaign with the aim of promoting online birth registration systems that link with birthing centres, ward offices, the Beti Bachau Beti Padau ('Educate a Girl, Save a Girl') scheme, and the girls' insurance scheme of Karnali Province, in addition to capacitating local governments to strengthen online civil registration and the social protection programme implementation system in 100 wards of Province 2 and Karnali Province covering the Global Programme target areas. Under this partnership, ward offices will be capacitated to carry out online vital events and the social protection registration system; strengthen linkages between birth registration systems of birthing centres, ward offices and the Beti Bachau Beti Padau scheme; and conduct birth registration campaigns for increased demand-generation.

At a systems level, the Global Programme supports child protection, sexual and reproductive health and education services to ensure adolescent girl-responsive services.

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The Global Programme has established a partnership with the National Youth Council to conduct a mapping of existing programmes on technical and vocational education and training centres, microfinance, government grants and employment programmes implemented by municipalities at the local level, to create linkages for accessing economic empowerment initiatives for girls graduating from the GATEs and Rupantaran programmes. This initiative is expected to provide information to girls on the existing economic empowerment and on ways of accessing these services.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

There were significant delays in establishing the partnership to conduct the planned activities, as some of the activities were relatively new for UNFPA and UNICEF in the country and required comprehensive discussions to identify the appropriate partner to implement activities. The COVID-19 lockdown also affected the consultation processes for defining the scope of the partnership.

In 2021, the programme will expand the engagement and partnership with other United Nations agencies that have programming experience on addressing poverty drivers, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

The Global Programme undertakes evidence-informed advocacy to strengthen governance and sustainability in order to prevent child marriage, and generates data and evidence to inform public investments in promising interventions. An important strategy used by the Global Programme in Nepal based on its new federal structure is the partnership with the provincial and municipal governments to advance the child marriage agenda. The technical support covers supporting the governments to develop subnational action plans, to implement and monitor the action plans, and to integrate the child marriage issue into other public programmes and plans.

In 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF in Nepal continued providing sustained advocacy, technical and programmatic support for the implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage, which has contributed towards a decline in child marriage prevalence in Nepal. In line with the national strategy, several local and provincial governments have advanced the agenda on ending child marriage through action plans and dedicated government schemes, which has contributed to the reduction. As a result of the joint advocacy of UNFPA and UNICEF,

two of the provinces, under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Development and with technical support from the Global Programme, have developed a provincial-level strategy on ending child marriage in alignment with the national strategy. The development of the provincial-level strategies and action plans were supported with the purpose of setting up mechanisms and approaches for ending child marriage at the provincial level and to guide provincial and local governments in addressing child marriage. The provincial-level strategy in Lumbini Province was developed in close coordination with various stakeholders such as child clubs, adolescent group networks, youth clubs, local civil society organizations, parents, teachers, religious leaders, elected leaders, members of the provincial parliament and division offices of the Social Development Ministry. Three virtual consultations were conducted with targeted groups, including youth and children, social leaders and elected representatives, religious leaders and teachers, and policymakers/higher authorities.

A comparison between the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) data from 2014 and 2019 indicates a decline in the prevalence of child marriage among women aged 20–24 of 15.7 percentage points (48.5 per cent in 2014 to 32.8 per cent in 2019). A similar reduction can be seen among girls aged 15–19 who are currently married or in union (24.5 per cent in 2014 to 19.3 per cent in 2019). Although this decrease is not attributable to activities in the last couple of years alone, it is important to highlight the impact of the Global Programme since its inception in 2016.

The programme had planned to work intensively with 92 municipalities and 6 provincial governments to ensure coherent programming on ending child marriage and to establish stronger linkages with other existing programmes supported by the two organizations, and to increase local resource allocation. During Phase I (2016–2019), the programme began to advocate for local resource allocation, which resulted in local governments announcing various schemes and activities to address child marriage. In 2020, the Global Programme advocated for resources and support for action from local governments to implement activities to end child marriage. Fifty-one municipalities have now allocated funds to support the implementation of Rupantaran in their communities. On average Rs.250,000 (US$2,500) was allocated by each municipality; a total contribution of approximately US$100,000.

During the year, UNFPA and UNICEF advocated for the inclusion of child marriage in the national short- and long-term COVID-19 response plans. Through active participation in the harmful practices working group,

interventions that contribute to end child marriage were included in cluster plans, supported by the development of a technical brief on harmful practices and COVID-19, with specific guidance for the various clusters.

Next steps
A key focus will be to develop a communications and visibility strategy for the Global Programme in Nepal and the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage with a focus on gender-transformative approaches.

Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2020, the Global Programme conducted a rapid assessment covering over 3,000 girls in the Rupantaran programme within three months of the imposition of the nationwide lockdown to reduce COVID-19 transmission. The assessment aimed to explore the impacts of the outbreak and identify alternative modalities for the delivery of the programme within the new context. While the overarching goal of the rapid assessment was to gain an understanding about the ideal modality for continuation of the Rupantaran sessions, it also gathered information from adolescent girls about how the lockdown was impacting their access to information and services, their psychosocial condition, the key challenges they were facing and how emerging needs could be addressed to avoid increased vulnerabilities. The findings from the rapid assessment were used to adapt both the modality of delivery of Rupantaran into a radio show and to include additional relevant content to address adolescent girls' emerging needs. In addition, the knowledge, attitudes and practice (KAP) matrix used pre- and post-participation has been reviewed and revised to incorporate the findings from the rapid assessment.

During the year, the Global Programme in Nepal had planned to revise the web-based reporting system in line with the Global Programme Phase II indicator reference guide. However, post-participation data collection for already enrolled participants and pre-participation data collection for newly enrolled girls could not take place due to COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Yet, to still be able to monitor change among participants of the programme, a survey was designed using the KoBo tool with 10 per cent of participants from all target groups randomly selected to respond to the questionnaire.

The Rupantaran social and financial skills programme is a flagship component of the Global Programme in Nepal and has been part of its activities since the programme's inception in 2016. In the context of COVID-19, the need to demonstrate results became more relevant than ever. The programme has reached thousands of adolescents, especially girls, and a mapping study was conducted to assess and validate the evidence of positive change. The findings from the study provide valuable examples of how empowerment is a key prerequisite for social change and development, and the programme's positive impact on knowledge and skills development, which can be measured and attested to by the people closest to these change processes, providing a foundational evidence for future work.

In 2020, a final report of the study conducted on the effectiveness of adolescent sexual and reproductive health interventions was released. The study was conducted in two programme districts to determine the extent to which the programme's work on adolescent sexual and reproductive health is contributing to improving the capacity of adolescent-friendly health service programming. Recommendations are in line with activities that are being undertaken by the programme. Some of the recommendations include ensuring the presence of trained service providers to provide adolescent, girl-friendly services; strengthening coordination between provincial/local government and adolescent-friendly health-care facilities; strengthening monitoring, recording and reporting of data; generating demand for adolescent-friendly health services; and building an enabling environment for adolescents to access services. The programme will continue working on these recommended areas in 2021.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps
The COVID-19 lockdown and mobility restriction resulted in the suspension of regular community monitoring and mobilization that was developed during Phase I of the Global Programme. As an interim option, a survey using the KoBo tool was developed. The programme will review the use of the KoBo tool for monitoring with outreach workers and if this platform proves more efficient and effective, it will be used throughout the remaining programme period.

It is important to ensure that if programmatic adaptations are made during humanitarian contexts, plans for revising programme monitoring, which may be affected in the changed context, take place concurrently. As the monitoring mechanism was aligned at the onset of adaptations to the programme, there were relatively few challenges needed to comply with reporting requirements.

In 2021, the programme plans to conduct a study on self-initiated child marriages, work initially planned for Phase I. Given the new context of COVID-19, considerations around child marriage drivers and trends during the pandemic will be incorporated into the study.

Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Nepal, the programme worked with 17 partners in 2020: 11 civil society organizations, 4 government bodies and 2 academic institutions. Of the civil society organizations, 2 partners are youth-led, 2 have a specific focus on children's rights and 2 have a specific focus on women's rights. For the government bodies, these focus on youth, gender and health.

Partnerships have been enablers and represent a strategic dimension for Global Programme implementation in Nepal. The rapid assessment among girls enrolled in the Rupantaran financial and social skills package was jointly conceptualized by UNFPA and UNICEF, involving field office staff and all implementing partners. Data collection was undertaken by the respective partners with the support of field offices. Data cleaning, data analysis and report writing were completed by the UNICEF partner Nepal Fertility Care Centre (NFCC) for both UNFPA and UNICEF.

Numerous technical joint meetings with implementing partners from both organizations were also conducted to review the KAP matrix for the Rupantaran girl and parent programmes. In addition, the revised content outline developed by a UNICEF-contracted consultant was extensively reviewed in these technical joint meetings. Joint orientation sessions on rolling out the radio show were provided to implementing partners by the consultant.

Further examples of joint work in the country were the support to provincial governments to develop a provincial strategy, led by UNFPA with technical support from UNICEF in one province, and led by UNICEF with technical support from UNFPA in the other. The monitoring mechanism for the programme was also jointly conceptualized and implemented.

Going forward, the programme will explore strategic partnerships with the private sector for promoting girls' education and gender equity.

Communicating the need to end child marriage

> **"When I learned that my parents wanted to marry me off, I knew I couldn't let it happen. If I did, what kind of message would I be sending to other girls?" – Phulan, 18,** stood up for her rights to choose her own future.

During the year, the Global Programme in Nepal communicated messages on child marriage and adolescent girls' empowerment extensively on social media, focusing on sharing the stories and voices of girls.

> **"I didn't want to ruin my future."– Even though child marriage was nothing out of the ordinary in Rashida's community in Mahottari, she mustered up the courage to say no.**[8]

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the story of Chandani was filmed and shared on national and global platforms, showing how girls in their communities in Nepal are walking door to door to convince community members and parents to change their attitudes and practices for an end to child marriage. Videos under an #ENDViolence campaign also showed Praksha in Bagmati Pradesh, Kristina in Province 1 and Priyanka in Province 2, with Praksha's message on how we need to raise our voices against all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse against children.[9] Another video showed Mantoriya, the first girl in her village to go to college and a strong believer of education for girls to ensure that they can follow their dreams.[10]

Throughout the year, the programme has highlighted stories of girls who have been empowered to support their communities during the pandemic. Bidhya, from Kapilvastu, had stopped her own child marriage and, together with members of the adolescent girls' group of her village, began educating villagers about how to stop the spread of coronavirus when the pandemic hit. Meanwhile, Rupa in Bajhang started to provide emotional support to women and adolescent girls who were stressed because of the pandemic and disruptions to their studies.[11]

The programme also published messages from, for example, Simran Shilpakar, co-founder of Astitwa Nepal, on why it is important to raise public awareness around different forms of violence and harmful practices, and the rights of children;[12] and from journalist Malvika Subba on why violence against children is detrimental to the development of children.[13] The programme also published a message from Prashansha KC, winner of the UNICEF Nepal Short Film Competition 2019 with *One Childhood Story*. Prashansha was 15 when she first began working for girls' rights. It was seeing young girls in her community in Rukum District being forced into marriage – including among her own family and friends – that spurred her into action. She initiated different campaigns to build support against child marriage, including teaching girls self-defence and raising awareness among children and families about the harms of child marriage. Currently studying engineering, Prashansha is an enthusiastic film-maker whose documentaries aim to educate and encourage viewers to be part of the change.[14]

In addition, the programme produced awareness-raising materials to support norms change in favour of children's rights. A short video series showed common scenarios related to child marriage in the country to make people reconsider attitudes and practices. An animated film produced together with Save the Children further highlighted the issue of child marriage.[15]

Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	28,000	3,533
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	9,908	7,716
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	16,500	432
Indicator 1221: Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	2500	8,014
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	200,000	8,768,799
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	180	378
Indicator 1231: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	15	5
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	31	368
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	55	124
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	2	5
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	2	2
Indicator 3211: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	2	0
Indicator 3212: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	4	0
Indicator 3221: Number of South–South cooperation activities (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	N/A	N/A

N/A, not applicable.

ENDNOTES

1   UNICEF analysis based on the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016.

2   United Nations Children's Fund, *COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage*, UNICEF, New York, 2021, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/>, accessed 17 August 2021.

3   United Nations Children's Fund, 'Battling the Perfect Storm: Adapting programmes to end child marriage during COVID-19 and beyond', *Child Protection Learning Brief #3*, UNICEF, New York, March 2021, <www.unicef.org/documents/battling-perfect-storm-adapting-programmes-end-child-marriage-covid-19>, accessed 17 August 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, July 2020, <www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/About%20Us/COVID%20Response%20Center/Overview/COVID-19%20Education%20Response%20Toolkit/202010_UNESCO-McKinsey%20Response%20Toolkit_Remediation_VF.pdf>, accessed 17 August 2021.

5   'Battling the Perfect Storm'.

6   Leigh, J., et al., *Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia: Study results from Bangladesh and Nepal*, United Nations Population Fund Asia Pacific Regional Office and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2020, <www.unicef.org/rosa/media/9991/file/Child%20Marriage%20in%20Humanitarian%20Settings%20in%20South%20Asia.pdf>, accessed 17 August 2021.

7   Malhotra, A., and S. Elnakib, '20 Years of the Evidence Base on What Works to Prevent Child Marriage: A systematic review', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 68, no. 5, 2021, pp. 847–862, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.11.017>, accessed 17 August 2021.

8   Lama, Sundar Kumar, 'The Courage to Say No: Non-formal education classes help 14-year-old girl from south-eastern Nepal put a stop to her impending marriage', United Nations Children's Fund, Kathmandu, 17 February 2020, <www.unicef.org/nepal/stories/courage-say-no>, accessed 17 August 2021.

9   See the videos here (only in Nepali): <www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/402966600783772>; <https://www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/1355224681502701>; <https://www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/514460072864385>.

10   See the video here: <www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/141709880468652>.

11   See their stories here: <https://twitter.com/UNFPANepal/status/1288414858984091650>; <https://twitter.com/UNFPANepal/status/1290561406597607424>; <https://nepal.unfpa.org/en/news/adolescent-girls-band-together-showing-communities-%E2%80%98she-counts%E2%80%99>.

12   See video here: <www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/1062055150897759>.

13   See here: <www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/629988524370213>.

14   See the message from Prashansha, as well as her winning video, here: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2RKwxi7iFc>; <www.facebook.com/228556243855812/videos/352135812796079/>.

15   See for example: <https://twitter.com/UNFPANepal/status/1238314983550664704>; <www.facebook.com/unicefnepal/videos/354305302288381>.

UNFPA-UNICEF
**GLOBAL PROGRAMME
TO END CHILD MARRIAGE**

ACT NOW:
**Accelerating gender equality
by eliminating child marriage
in a pandemic**

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