



UGANDA

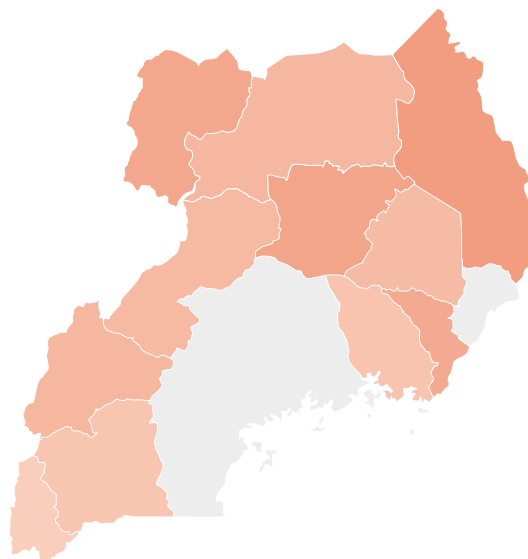
COUNTRY PROFILE



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UGANDA

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



Source: Uganda 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. No data for grey regions.

The country context

Uganda is home to five million child brides. Of these, 1.3 million were married before age 15. The practice has become less common in the last 25 years, with the percentage of young women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 dropping from 45 per cent in 1991 to 34 per cent in 2016. However, this rate of progress is not enough to meet the target of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: to eliminate child marriage by 2030. If the rate of progress observed over the past 25 years continues, 29 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood in 2030 in Uganda. Even if the slightly accelerated progress observed over the past decade is doubled, 18 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030 and the level will be down to 8 per cent by 2050.¹



Although the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent over the past decade, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5 girls becoming child brides – meaning that the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted – this remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent data show that up to 10 million more girls globally are at risk of child marriage in the next decade due to the pandemic.² The pandemic has exacerbated existing risks and created new risk factors for child marriage across the world. For example, lockdowns have prevented a significant proportion of the population in many countries from going to work and many have lost their sources of income. A COVID-19 impact study conducted in July 2020 found that 71 per cent of Ugandan refugees, internally displaced persons and host community respondents had lost a job or employment income since March 2020.³ Moreover,

during the lockdown, the informal sector in the country – which employs more women than men – was worst hit. The reduction of income among women and girls risks wiping out decades of gains in women’s empowerment and increasing gender inequality.⁴ This type of economic shock pressures adolescents and their families to find new survival strategies. In Uganda, girls have become more likely to engage in forms of work that put them at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. For many, this results in pregnancy. They are then more likely to cohabit with their abuser to secure basic support – or their families may marry them off to avoid the stigma associated with premarital sex and adolescent pregnancy.⁵

In normal times, many adolescent girls in Global Programme countries have some (albeit limited) access to quality sexual and reproductive health, education,

protection and social support services that prevent child marriage. The pandemic has disrupted and suspended many of these vital services. For example, when Uganda's Child Helpline was temporarily suspended, girls were left without a child marriage reporting mechanism or social services. With little or no access to resources to prevent unplanned pregnancy, teenage pregnancies increase, making child marriage more likely. In addition, special court sessions on gender-based violence (GBV) slated to take place in hard-to-reach areas were postponed due to COVID-19.⁶

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.⁷ In Uganda, school closures and the shift to online learning (without safeguards in place) have introduced new risks of online bullying and child sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, which can result in school dropout. The longer children are out of school, the more likely marriage becomes.⁸

Despite these setbacks, 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 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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The elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality.

Key highlights



Over

74,000

adolescent girls participated in life-skills training delivered using the rights-based training manuals for in-school and out-of-school children that enhanced their knowledge and understanding of their rights to information and services, and boosted their service-seeking behaviour to protect themselves. Close to

3,400

of these girls were provided with economic empowerment and livelihood training, including funds to start up their own businesses.



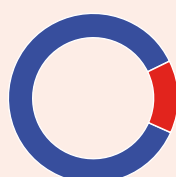
Over 13,000 girls accessed integrated sexual and reproductive health and GBV outreach services, with an estimated 40 per cent accessing emergency contraceptive services.



Through sustained coordinated approach to tackling child marriage issues and advocacy with partners, the Ministry of Education and Sports released a circular allowing **pregnant girls to return to school immediately after reopening following lockdown**, in line with increased government commitment to ending child marriage and teenage pregnancies across line ministries.



Through successful advocacy, the social welfare workforce was included in the essential staff category of the Government during COVID-19, providing services to **over 73,000 community members.**



14%

The National Development Plan III includes a specific target of **reducing child marriage prevalence to 14 per cent in the country by 2025.**

2020 Achievements



In total,

74,335
adolescent girls and



69,050

boys in 12 districts participated in training during the year, covering topics such as gender, HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and child marriage.

Some

16,706

adolescents that are especially vulnerable (**8,168 girls and 8,520 boys**) received mentorship support and life-skills sessions during COVID-19 from peer educators through this adapted approach.



The programme contributed to **81 per cent of all students** (715,406) receiving home learning materials – recording

121,000

interactions with academic and life-skills content through the Kolibri e-learning platform.

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

In Uganda, adolescent girls and their families, especially those most vulnerable to child marriage, are supported to access information, skills and economic opportunities to build their resilience and enable them to protect themselves, demand and seek services as needed, make informed decisions about their lives, and report incidents of child marriage. 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 among programmes evaluated to date.⁹

The Global Programme in Uganda supported life-skills training for in- and out-of-school adolescents in 2020, using a rights-based training manual to enhance adolescents' knowledge and understanding of their right to information and to access to services, in order to boost their service-seeking behaviour to protect themselves. In total, 74,335 adolescent girls and 69,050 boys in 12 districts participated in the training during the year, covering topics such as gender, HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and child marriage. The sessions are led by qualified club patrons, senior male and female teachers, and peer educators who have benefited from training for trainers led by the Ministry of Education and Sports and primary teachers' colleges. Members of the school clubs have gone on to take up leadership roles within their schools and through the Adolescent Volunteer Initiative, becoming advocates in their communities and participating in awareness-raising radio programmes focusing on issues related to adolescents. Post-training surveys show that 60 per cent of the participating adolescents have enhanced their knowledge of their right to information and services, and 30 per cent indicated that they now know how and where to access services and information they need.

Following the school closures due to COVID-19 in March 2020, the approach to empower adolescents with skills shifted from in-school to out-of-school club engagement. Some 16,706 adolescents that are especially vulnerable (8,168 girls and 8,520 boys) received mentorship support and life-skills sessions during COVID-19 from peer educators through this adapted approach.

The participatory 'Go to school, back to school, stay in school' campaign run during 2020 addressed factors that continue to affect retention and transition rates among adolescents, such as limited parental support for education and high school fees, especially in secondary schools. The campaign is rolled out by district authorities and district security officers have been brought on board to patrol trading centres to identify children who are not in school. Advocacy efforts have yielded results in which some district councils (Mairungi and Kobo) have committed to the process of developing by-laws to curb drug addiction, which was identified as a barrier to education in those communities. School-level monitoring at the beginning of the academic year showed that 7,337 students (5,136 female and 4,201 male) who had previously dropped out of education re-enrolled in 2020.

The programme contributed to national and district-level COVID-19 efforts, including the preparation and operationalization of COVID-19 preparedness and response plans. The focus of the plans was to minimize the adverse effects of COVID-19 on students, teachers and the education system at large, promoting coordination among education stakeholders for a more effective response and enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Sports and local district governments to promote the protection of students and to support continuity of learning. As a result, the programme contributed to 81 per cent of all students (715,406) receiving home learning materials – recording 121,000 interactions with academic and life-skills content through the Kolibri e-learning platform. Some 85 per cent of all students are, however, still denied access to education as schools remain closed. Coordination with the ministry and districts to review the partial reopening of schools is ongoing, to inform decisions by the Government on full school reopening, which is hoped to take place in 2021.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

As schools closed in March 2020, all school-based interventions, such as adolescent clubs run through schools, were cancelled. This meant that adolescents' access to protection, reproductive health and other services was made more challenging during the year. As schools were closed, many of the adolescent engagement activities moved online. There is a need for new and innovative ways to sustain the virtual engagement of adolescents during emergencies such as COVID-19, and a need to provide diverse platforms for adolescent engagement, going beyond the traditional platforms such as radio. There is also a need to improve adolescent participation in these activities, including on how to bring sexual and reproductive health services closer to the adolescents who need them.

In 2021, the Global Programme in Uganda will focus on strengthening community-based clubs as safe spaces for adolescent engagement and for the provision of protection services: aiming to reach at least 20,000 girls with integrated GBV and sexual and reproductive health services in Global Programme-targeted districts. The programme also aims to strengthen resilience-building activities for both adolescents and their parents and caregivers.

Enhancing the family and community environment

Community-based structures, including para-social workers, SASA! activists, male action groups and village health teams, are the engine for social norms change work within the Global Programme. Community mobilization and capacity-building activities are based on annual capacity needs outlined by the Ministry of Gender and from government strategies and guidelines, such as the male action group strategy and the SASA! activist curriculum. At a logistical level, community structures are provided with equipment and materials such as bicycles, smartphones, protective gear (as a safety measure during COVID-19), public address systems, telephone airtime and fuel to enhance their capacity to coordinate among themselves and conduct home visits, sensitizing community members around the harms of child marriage and encouraging adolescents to access available services. The Global Programme in Uganda uses gender-transformative approaches, where men and boys are engaged for social change, to ensure a conducive environment for girls' empowerment. This is carried out, for example, through sexuality education via online and mass media, mobilization by religious and cultural institutions, multimedia and social media campaigns, and through the engagement of parents – to ensure change in negative gender and social norms, and to challenge inherent beliefs and attitudes that drive child marriage in patriarchal societies.

Community engagement was intensified during the year through multimedia campaigns, virtual engagements with community-based actors such as para-social workers, and home visits. Developing specific indicators to measure attitudinal and behavioural change around child marriage will be prioritized in 2021, but anecdotal information from U-Report polls conducted in 2020 indicates that attitudes have started to change among community members, with the majority (87 per cent) of respondents believing that marrying off their children before age 18 is not the best option, while 78 per cent believed that girls can go back to school after pregnancy and childbirth.¹⁰ In 2020, a total of 6,043,669 individuals were reached with information to increase their awareness around violence against children and child marriage through multimedia campaigns, and another

73,073 individuals (37,821 females and 35,252 males) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality. Some 41,937 parents and caregivers (18,830 females and 23,107 males) also benefited from parenting programmes that enhanced their knowledge and skills around positive parenting, and also built their resilience to withstand the challenges faced by their adolescent children. Of these parents, 2,499 (1,301 females and 1,198 males) were adolescents aged 15–19.

A total of 3,989 local actors, including para-social workers, members of male action groups and local councils, were engaged in dialogues on child marriage before the restrictions due to COVID-19 were implemented, and through virtual spaces for engagement (closed user groups) once the lockdown was in place. These actors, after their engagements, reached out to 46,871 individuals (10,321 boys, 11,852 girls, 12,112 men and 12,586 women) through home visits to further spread awareness on child marriage during the year.

Through platforms like U-Report, over 42,000 community members, including adolescents and their parents, were provided with critical information and knowledge about services available for adolescent girls, especially those that had become pregnant during the COVID-19 lockdown. In addition, the programme supported a youth-led organization called RAHU to create awareness among girls and duty-bearers and implement comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). Throughout the whole lockdown period, RAHU ran a media campaign on CSE and also hosted several online conferences and webinars to support a sustained conversation at the national level on the importance of CSE. The activism around CSE in part shaped inter-ministerial dialogues and influenced the joint statement to the President on child marriage by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Education and Sports; and Makerere University – resulting in the Ministry of Education and Sports issuing a circular to permit pregnant girls to go back to school upon school reopening.

Engagement of men and boys through male action groups emerged as a strong structure for social change in 2020, and in sub-counties where the groups are present there was evidence of promotion of sexual and reproductive health services and of GBV prevention activities. The engagement with men and boys is guided by the strategy on male engagement developed by the Ministry of Gender. During the year, members of the groups intervened and stopped 350 cases of child marriage or female genital mutilation in their districts.

Leveraging the joint United Nations Programme on Gender-based Violence and the Spotlight Initiative, seven major religious institutions (Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Muslim, Seventh Day Adventist, Baptist and Born-Again Federation), congregating under the Interreligious Council of Uganda, for the first time ever issued joint policy guidance in the form of five pastoral letters focusing on family planning, HIV preventions, maternal health, GBV prevention and teenage pregnancy. This guidance has harmonized thinking around issues that have been approached differently by different denominations, and in some cases in conflict with national policies – for example, over the stance against and age of use of modern family planning methods. In addition to informing commitments at denominational level, the pastoral letters have facilitated capacity-building of religious leaders in close contact with communities, and have helped build consensus across denominations through common messaging and accountability in religious structures for implementation. Moreover, the intensified awareness of religious institutions and the implementation of action plans on the prevention of child marriage by cultural institutions have led to by-laws on education and alcohol abuse being enacted in half of the Global Programme focus districts. An estimated 1 million people have been reached through the religious institutions, while cultural institutions have engaged around 3,000 girls directly affected by child marriage, and signed declarations to curb negative cultural practices such as child marriage.

The engagement of cultural and religious leaders, and parish chiefs as community-based legal volunteers has increased legal awareness in communities, improved reporting and referral mechanisms, and ensures a more sustainable approach to ending child marriage. The same is the case for the engagement of SASA! activists, which has led to broad sensitization and awareness creation on healthy relationships and power imbalances between men and women, boys and girls, and how these perpetuate child marriage and GBV, as well as inhibit the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for everyone.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Due to COVID-19, interventions on social and gender norms change slowed during the year.

Poor parenting has been identified as a major driver of violence against children and child marriage in Uganda. Hence, there is a need to increase the support for and investments in programmes that target parents to build their capacities, skills and knowledge on how to nurture and provide for their children and how to protect them from harmful practices such as child marriage. There is also a need to increase support for resilience-building

programmes that reach and engage adolescents, their parents and caregivers to build their capacity to find alternatives for their family well-being and livelihood besides child marriage.

There is a need to continue to identify and engage community gatekeepers, including religious and cultural leaders, on positive social and gender norms change to ensure that demand-related barriers to services are challenged. It is evident that religious and cultural leaders remain powerful structures and champions for change to end child marriage. For example, part of the high visibility of child marriage issues seen in the country was because of the relentless highlighting of child marriage and teenage pregnancy prevalence by the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, and his public support for sexuality education. Further, male engagement as a way of creating sustainable gender transformation that favours girls and women, as well as creating a supporting and protective system, has been seen as a key aspect in the fight against child marriage, and will continue to be a key strategy for the programme.


The Global Programme in Uganda will continue to engage with key gatekeepers, opinion leaders and custodians of culture and religion in the communities. The programme will sustain community engagement on positive parenting and on social and gender norms change through volunteer para-social workers, SASA! activists, male action groups, the Interreligious Council and other cultural structures. The programme will adopt intergenerational dialogues that provide a platform and space for adolescents and adults to discuss issues that drive child marriage and teenage pregnancies, and explore transformative approaches for the engagement of men and boys, and of cultural and religious institutions.

Strengthening systems

In Uganda, the programme adopts a child protection systems-strengthening approach from national to subnational levels, including at the household level where the adolescent girls reside, to achieve the Global

Programme vision. This approach integrates the actions of families, with a central focus on adolescent girls and their communities; formal (education, social welfare, health, legal institutions, local district governments, cultural and religious institutions) and non-formal (volunteer) structures; state and non-state actors and institutions across all sectors, to work together to protect children from child marriage. The capacity of the Government to deliver coordinated, quality services and programmes that respond to the specific needs of adolescents has been built through technical, material and financial support of the Global Programme. This was done through various multisectoral initiatives, such as the development of the child policy approved by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in June 2020. The policy provides a framework within which all child protection work is to be undertaken, ensuring a coordinated and systematic approach to the prevention of and response to all forms of violence against children, including harmful practices such as child marriage. Several other guidelines and strategies in the health, education and social development sectors were also reviewed, revised, finalized and approved during the year for the standardization and improvement of coverage and quality of adolescent-responsive services. These guidelines will further ensure a coordinated and systematic approach to delivering adolescent programmes and services, and also ensure their quality.

The Global Programme continued to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services, especially in response to COVID-19 lockdown measures, during 2020. UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Health and Reproductive Health Uganda to piggyback on ongoing immunization and HIV/AIDS programmes, which ensured that 13,595 young people aged 10–24 (6,390 girls) had access to integrated sexual and reproductive health and GBV outreach services. This led to over 4,000 girls receiving family planning services. Through fuel voucher support to district health offices, adolescent girls and young women aged 13–20 years old also had access to life-saving services such as antenatal care (673 girls), safe and clean deliveries at health-care facilities



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(2,281 girls), emergency obstetric and neonatal care services (324 girls), postnatal services (4,360 girls), family planning commodities (5,766 girls) and treatment within 72 hours for survivors of sexual violence and GBV (643 girls). Through coordinated efforts with the joint United Nations programmes on GBV and HIV/AIDS, the Global Programme partnered with a private transport motorcycle company, SafeBoda, to distribute over 1 million condoms to young urban people during the COVID-19 lockdown; and an e-personal health shop was set up to support young people, girls and women seeking information and ordering sexual and reproductive health services online, with over 22,000 orders being recorded, of which 40 per cent were from girls aged 13–19 years old looking for emergency contraception.

Also in the health sector, several guidelines were revised to include adolescent-specific output areas on HIV/AIDS, nutrition and GBV. The guidelines include:

- National Young People and Adolescent Peer Support (YAPS) Model Mentors' Guide, which details roles and responsibilities of service providers in ensuring HIV-positive young people and adolescents receive appropriate care and support.
- National Strategy and Implementation Guidelines for Sexual and Reproductive Health, HIV and AIDS, and Gender-Based Violence Integration (for 2020–2024), which will assist in providing a standardized approach to sexual and reproductive health, HIV and GBV integration across the country, including in humanitarian settings.
- Consolidated Guidelines for Prevention and Treatment of HIV and AIDS in Uganda.
- Guidelines on Maternal, Infant, Young Child and Adolescent Nutrition (MIYCAN), which provides guidance for the health sector to deliver high-quality nutrition interventions to prioritized vulnerable target groups.
- Menstrual Health Management Guidelines, which will be used to orient girls, boys, and male and female teachers in 2021.

All these guidelines are in their final stages for approval by the high-level national management.

In the education sector, both UNFPA and UNICEF provided financial and technical support to the Ministry of Education at national level to advance gender equality and improve girls' education, especially contributing to removing gender biases and discrimination in terms of access to education for pregnant girls and child mothers. Guidelines and frameworks developed include the revised Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings; the National Guidelines for Implementation of Roles

and Responsibilities of Senior Male and Senior Female Teachers; the National Guidelines for Formation, Management and Strengthening of School Clubs; and the Menstrual Health Management Guidelines for Schools.

During the year, 492 schools were supported to meet at least two of the key elements for quality prevention of and response to violence against children in schools, including recording data on violence, implementing the Reporting Tracking Response and Referral Guidelines, being aware of and having in place a teachers' code of conduct, establishing functional school clubs, and committing to practising positive discipline. Some 420 of the schools were further supported to integrate life-skills and citizenship education in their school development plans, as a sustainable approach for keeping adolescent concerns and strategies to address these high on the agenda – supporting girls to stay in school, including transition to higher grades. During the year, 897 teachers (348 female and 549 male), including senior teachers and club patrons, gained better knowledge on violence against children, menstrual hygiene management, HIV, and gender-responsive pedagogy, while another 320 lower secondary teachers were trained on sexuality education guidelines and teaching materials that had been developed in 2019 together with the Spotlight Initiative. In 2020, CSE reader guides for schools and menstrual health management guidelines were finalized. The out-of-school CSE guidelines were reviewed again by the senior management at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development with support from the Global Programme, with the guidelines being tabled for approval in 2021. Implementing CSE in and out of schools will be a priority in 2021.

In the child protection sector, civil society partners and local district governments were supported to provide critical child protection services to children directly and indirectly affected by emergencies during the year, including floods, displacements and the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 35,681 children received psychosocial support during the year, while an additional 30,798 children and their parents, affected by the pandemic, received mental health and psychosocial support services. Some 2,142 unaccompanied children in refugee and flood contexts benefited from alternative care support and 2,049 children impacted by COVID-19 received social care and support services in 2020. The continuation of services during the pandemic was made possible through the provision of supplies and materials such as mobile phones, bicycles, protective gear and case management books to 5,612 para-social workers, which allowed them to sustain community engagements through house-to-house visits for psychosocial support and counselling to both adolescents and their parents to prevent child marriage.

The capacity of the Government to deliver gender-equitable services was enhanced during the year through the recruitment of 67 social welfare officers, boosting the capacity of the social service workforce to prevent and respond to violence against children and GBV in the 67 sub-counties across 9 districts where these officers are based. Thirty-six justice professionals (13 male and 23 female) were also supported to enhance their capacity to prosecute child-related cases, resulting in the fast-tracking of cases involving 3,484 children (1,562 boys and 1,922 girls) and the diversion of cases involving 687 children (473 boys and 214 girls) from the justice system (national diversion rate of 74.3 per cent).

The inclusion of the social welfare workforce in the COVID-19 response resulted in strengthened linkages between the social welfare and health sectors, and led them to be recognized as a critical part of the workforce for addressing the effects of future pandemics. This was achieved thanks to technical support and guidance to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to advocate and build a case for the successful inclusion of the social welfare workforce (social workers, community development officers, para-social workers and justice actors) in the essential staff

category of the Government during COVID-19, which enabled them to continue working during the lockdown, providing services to over 73,000 community members. The provision of sexual and reproductive health, GBV and menstrual health management services was also successfully integrated into the COVID-19 essential services guidelines and training packages developed by the Ministry of Health, allowing these services to continue during the pandemic. However, there was still a break in the social service delivery during the year, and capacity-building activities such as training were put on hold to follow the standard operating procedures that were put in place for the health sector. To counter the temporary suspension of services, community-based volunteer para-social workers were provided with technical and material support to sustain community engagement, interpersonal communication and remote case management through technology platforms (by phones) at district and sub-county levels.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

COVID-19 containment measures halted and affected programme interventions that require people coming together (e.g., training and community engagements) and limited access to communities, vulnerable/at-risk

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children and services. For example, special court sessions and GBV/sexual and reproductive health outreach camps in Sebei were postponed due to the pandemic. Underfunding further constrained the breadth and depth of the child protection emergency response.

COVID-19 led to a break in protection, health and education services. As a result of a directive for the social service workforce to work from home and the temporary closure of the SAUTI child helpline, girls could not receive social services or even report cases of child marriage. Initially, the presidential directive was to focus on health and the prevention of COVID-19, which left social workers and justice affairs stranded and unable to deliver services. With the closure of schools, girls could not meet in their groups/clubs to look out for and protect one other either, which led to many girls being married off during the lockdown. While the Global Programme ensured continued access to sexual and reproductive health services during the lockdown through its partnerships with SafeBoda, Reproductive Health Uganda and local district governments, many girls still had limited or no access to essential and life-saving sexual and reproductive health services as a result of restrictions on movement and closure of schools. This resulted in unwanted and unintended pregnancies among girls, which in turn put pressure on them to marry. The limited access to sexual and reproductive health information has been identified as one of the contributing factors for teenage pregnancy and child marriage, confirming that many adolescents engage in sexual activities without sufficient knowledge of their bodies or potential consequences.

Hence, some of the key lessons from this period include the need for strengthened community protection and surveillance systems that link to the education and health sectors, to ensure that adolescents at risk of harmful practices or violence are identified, protected, referred and linked to adolescent-friendly services, even during emergencies. There is also a need to strengthen community response mechanisms through providing support to temporary shelters for adolescents who run away from home due to child marriage and through providing social workers the time and space needed to engage with parents for reconciliation and re-unification with their children.

There were contingency plans put in place to counter the challenges brought on by COVID-19, including increasing and strengthening case management through support to the child helpline and the formal and non-formal community-based protection structures available, such as the para-social workers. The programme also contributed to UNICEF's support to national and subnational preparations and operationalizations of

COVID-19 preparedness and response plans to ensure minimalization of adverse effects on students and teachers. This included support to the education system at large to promote coordination among actors and to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Sports, local district governments and other stakeholders to promote the protection of students and to support continuity of learning during lockdown. To ensure continuation of education, the Global Programme contributed to the printing and distribution of home learning materials, including revamping the online learning content via the Kolibri e-learning platform.

Going forward, the programme will focus on supporting existing routine reporting mechanisms, including the SAUTI child helpline, to enhance reporting of child marriage cases. There will also be a continued focus on providing a holistic approach to addressing child marriage, for example, through systems integration and by continuing with the SAUTI child helpline to support appropriate and comprehensive case management. The priority in 2021 will be to disseminate and operationalize all the finalized and approved guidelines across sectors at sub-county level in collaboration with the local district governments in targeted districts.

Addressing poverty

The programme sought to reduce vulnerabilities of girls and their families through economic empowerment activities. In 2020, some 2,500 out-of-school girls were enrolled in the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) clubs in targeted districts. By the end of the year, all girls had participated in livelihood and financial literacy training. Some 850 girls in 25 groups, previously engaged in sex work, benefited from seed funding of 4 million Ugandan shillings each, with 20 of the groups creating village saving schemes based on which group and individual businesses were started. The ELA clubs were also used as platforms for linking the girls to GBV and sexual and reproductive health services, with 2,272 girls reporting to have accessed services such as support with modern contraceptives for child spacing and to avoid unintended pregnancies.

In addition to the ELA clubs, initiatives by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) BRAC and Aids Information Center benefited 3,350 girls directly with economic empowerment and livelihood training and business start-up capital.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

To strengthen governance to end child marriage and support adolescent girls, the Global Programme in Uganda supports advocacy at the national level, which

has led to the inclusion of child marriage elimination and teenage pregnancy reduction in the new National Development Plan III and the United Nations framework for the country, with a specific target to reduce child marriage prevalence to 14 per cent by 2025. Partnerships have been established with government at both national and subnational levels, and with civil society organizations, for the implementation of adolescent-friendly social protection programmes and for the integration of child marriage outcomes in multisectoral approaches, leveraging resources for a catalytic effect and a more sustainable approach to ending child marriage.

The Government of Uganda has increased its capacity to deliver coordinated, quality programmes and services that meet the needs of adolescents. For example, the approval of the Child Policy will ensure a coordinated and systematic approach for the prevention of and response to issues affecting children, including harmful practices such as child marriage. The Government has also reviewed, revised, finalized and approved various guidelines across the health, education and social development sectors, to include critical aspects that address adolescent-related issues. These include:

- revised guidelines on the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings
- national guidelines for the implementation of roles and responsibilities of senior male and senior female teachers
- national guidelines for formation, management and strengthening of school clubs
- YAPS Model Mentors' Guide
- national strategy and implementation guidelines for sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, and GBV integration (for 2020–2024)
- consolidated guidelines for prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS
- guidelines on MIYCAN, and menstrual health management guidelines, which will be used to orient girls and boys, and male and female teachers in 2021.

In 2020, the Global Programme enhanced the foundation for accelerated achievements for the elimination of child marriage in Uganda, by enforcing a coordinated approach to tackling child marriage issues in the country as a whole rather than as separate agencies/actors. This was evidenced, for example, by a series of inter-ministerial meetings on the risk for escalating cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancies, which led the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the Ministry of Health; and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to write a joint statement and meet with the representative of the President, resulting in the immediate release of a circular by the Ministry of Education and Sports allowing pregnant girls to return

to school immediately after school reopening. The Government also committed to increase investments in ending child marriage and teenage pregnancy through line ministries, and to continue to include child marriage indicators in data generation and reporting systems.

One of the main outcomes of the ongoing efforts to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy in Uganda has been the amplification of child marriage as a harmful practice, and the observed growing levels of awareness and recognition by the Government, partners and community members, of the devastating cost of inaction to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy. As a result, concrete actions have been taken by the Government to ensure its elimination, including the review, revision and fast-tracked approval of guidelines to address specific drivers of child marriage, and child marriage being included in two programme areas of the National Development Plan III, putting it firmly on the agenda of the Government. This has been achieved through sustained engagement, orientation and training of various multisectoral stakeholders, including the National Planning Authority, which has garnered and increased political will to fight child marriage.

With the approval and launch of the Child Policy in 2020, and the inclusion of child marriage into two of the government programmes in the National Development Plan III, all of which provide frameworks and guidelines for actions aimed at ending child marriage, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development demonstrates its capacity to advocate for coordinated implementation of national and subnational action plans and systems. The plans also include a specific target of reducing child marriage prevalence in the country to 14 per cent (from 34 per cent) by 2025.

The programme partnered with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; the Ministry of Education and Sports; Makerere University and 15 local district governments to ensure that child marriage and teenage pregnancy – and the impact of COVID-19 on these issues – featured in national inter-ministerial meetings in 2020. As a result, a joint statement on child marriage by the Ministry of Health; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development; Ministry of Education and Sports; and Makerere University was developed, advocating for increased investment in the elimination of child marriage, and a policy pronouncement was issued to ensure that pregnant girls would be able to access education once schools reopened. The joint statement was presented to the representative of the President at the State House, resulting in immediate circulation of a circular by the Ministry of Education and Sports permitting pregnant girls to access education. In addition, on World Population Day, 11 July, the Global Programme

organized a virtual e-conference on child marriage with all local district government chairpersons, which resulted in a joint agreement by the chairpersons and chief administrative officers to include strategies for addressing child marriage in the District Development Plans.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

During the year, there was strengthened cross-sectoral coordination of adolescent programmes at various levels of management and administration (from village to sub-county, district and national levels) and across various partners. The subnational, district and sub-county levels proved to be the most effective platforms for bringing adolescent issues to the attention of decision makers.

A key lesson was that, thanks to the leveraging of the joint United Nations programmes on GBV and female genital mutilation, and the Spotlight Initiative, the Global Programme was able to reach a wider audience and improve coordination and advocacy, especially at national level, where there was widespread publicity on child marriage and teenage pregnancy during the year. As a result, child marriage was a key subject of discussions in

inter-ministerial meetings, COVID-19 response structures (the COVID-19 GBV sub-committee), the medico-legal task force, the National Gender-Based Violence Reference Group and the Gender Development Partners Group.

Regional complexities such as human trafficking and cross-border female genital mutilation from neighbouring countries, such as Kenya and South Sudan, require a rethink if the national strategy on child marriage and teenage pregnancy is to be effective. Another challenge in Uganda is the lack of harmonization of laws regarding the legal age for marriage, which further problematizes the concept of being 'underage' and the legal definition of child marriage, especially as most children still lack a birth certificate.

The programme will continue to enhance national-level advocacy and coordination, especially through inter-ministerial dialogues and by following up on previous recommendations. Focus will also be on ensuring the integration of child marriage prevention in all government coordination mechanisms.

Generating and applying data and evidence

The Global Programme in Uganda supports data and evidence generation and analysis for evidence-based programming and policymaking. However, this strategy was challenged in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic. To better understand the new context, there are ongoing efforts to generate data on child marriage and risk factors through the community integrated system, and an impact assessment on the pandemic in the country includes a section on child marriage.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development was supported to conduct a midterm evaluation of the national strategy to end child marriage in 2019, and the final report provided evidence on trends and emerging issues related to child marriage in Uganda – feeding into advocacy papers that informed the discussion of including child marriage in the National Development Plan III in 2020. The evidence also led to acceleration of the approval of guidelines for school re-entry, and retention of child mothers, which has the potential to reduce child marriage, especially post COVID-19. The evaluation also provided information on progress, challenges and lessons learned in terms of addressing child marriage and teenage pregnancy in the country, making recommendations for improvements to ensure a multisectoral and comprehensive response.

The findings revealed critical aspects related to child marriage that will influence programming going forward.

For instance, the report reveals that, according to both parents (75.4 per cent) and adolescents (70.3 per cent), peer pressure is the major reason why boys marry or make girls below age 18 pregnant. This informed the development of resilience-building initiatives for adolescents themselves and for their parents, through the parenting programmes. Although findings suggest that many adolescents are largely empowered to decide when to have sex, the first sexual experience of girls was found to have been consensual in only 69.9 per cent of the cases, which explains increasing rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancy. This evidence informed the need to focus on resilience-building activities to empower adolescents and enable them withstand peer pressure. The report also revealed that the general perception in regions that perform female genital mutilation is that the practice is becoming increasingly unpopular among parents and adolescents because of the increased awareness of risks for child marriage and teenage pregnancy associated with female genital mutilation.

The report highlighted key practices in addressing child marriage, which were adopted and will be strengthened by the programme; for example, the multidimensional-multisectoral nature of the national strategy and the joint supervision and monitoring by line ministries.

Looking ahead, an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices (child marriage and female genital mutilation) is under way and expected to generate new evidence to better understand the situation for girls in the country. The programme will also intensify routine data collection, analysis and evidence generation overall; strengthen monitoring and data collection for enhanced accuracy and quality in reporting; and advocate for the inclusion of all required disaggregation variables in data collection tools at national and subnational levels.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

During the year, monitoring and evaluation activities and data collection related to activity implementation and the situation of child marriage were challenged by COVID-19 restrictions that did not allow for field visits as planned. Hence, the programme had to rely on anecdotal evidence to a large extent. The adoption of improved data collection approaches by the Government and other implementing partners, and the COVID-19 impact assessment on GBV, were also delayed due to the pandemic.



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 Uganda, the programme works with 16 partners: 11 civil society organizations and 5 government bodies. Four of the civil society partners have a specific focus on women’s rights, and two of these have an additional focus on children’s rights. The engagement with the government bodies shows the breadth of the programme in Uganda, and the importance of multisectorality: engaging the sectors of health, education, gender, social protection and statistical services across 15 local district governments.

In 2020, there was increased geographic and thematic convergence of UNFPA and UNICEF interventions at both national and subnational levels. Geographic convergence on a subnational level was achieved through the implementation of programmes by UNFPA and UNICEF in the same geographical locations in 13 of the 15 targeted districts in 2020.

Thematic convergence was most evident at national level, where both organizations worked with line ministries

to ensure that adolescent issues are mainstreamed into government plans. For example, both organizations coordinated, engaged with and advocated through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to ensure that child marriage is adequately addressed within broader initiatives and plans of the Government, and that plans promote gender equality and are gender transformative. Both organizations are also working with the Ministry of Education and Sports on the guidelines addressing pregnancies among students, leading in 2020 to their revision and the allowing of adolescent girls who have given birth to re-enter education.

Joint planning, evaluation and monitoring will be further strengthened in Uganda within the Global Programme, including strengthening of coordination at subnational level. UNFPA and UNICEF will also continue to strengthen convergence with other programmes, especially the Spotlight Initiative on Violence Against Women and Girls and other joint United Nations programmes such as those on GBV and female genital mutilation, and other initiatives focused on improving access to justice for girls.

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	155,690	74,335
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	22,886	183
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	30,000	28,000
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	90,000	46,876
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	329,849	338,060
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	1,540	1,623
Indicator 1231: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	3	4
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	215	492
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	900	N/A
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	4	3
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	17	N/A
Indicator 3211: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	N/A	N/A
Indicator 3212: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	N/A	N/A
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 Uganda 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 Gorevan, D., *Downward Spiral: The economic impact of COVID-19 on refugees and displaced people*, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo, 2020.
- 4 EPRC Uganda, 'Why Gender Matters in Uganda's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic', Economic Policy Research Centre, Kampala, 15 May 2020, <<https://eprcug.org/blog/why-gender-matters-in-ugandas-response-to-covid-19-pandemic/>>, accessed 28 September 2021.
- 5 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.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 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.
- 8 'Battling the Perfect Storm'.
- 9 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.
- 10 Among the respondents, 12 per cent were adolescent boys and girls aged 15–17.

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Accelerating gender equality
by eliminating child marriage
in a pandemic

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