Gender-Transformative Programming in UNICEF
Selected Case Studies

A global reckoning to address gender inequalities

There is a growing recognition that the intersecting inequalities faced by children, adolescents and women require bolder, more interconnected and transformative policies and programmes.

COVID-19 has led to a confronting reversal of gender equality progress, calling for a greater consciousness of gender inequality through critically informed policies and programmes to redress gender-based disadvantage.

A new agenda for UNICEF programming

UNICEF’s new Gender Action Plan 2022-25 (GAP) focuses on the expansion of transformative approaches in programming, as well as in institutional policies, partnerships and capacities. Specific emphasis is placed on supporting adolescent girls’ leadership and wellbeing, based on available data.

With its concern for the first two decades of life, when gendered destinies are set, and with its government-to-community reach, UNICEF is uniquely positioned to be a champion in advancing transformational change toward gender equality. At its core, gender transformative programming seeks to address the structural and social root causes of gender inequality.

In practice, this means a multi-pronged approach that tackles changes in laws and policies, systems and services; increases the allocation and distribution of resources; and advances gender equitable norms, behaviour and practices, including by disrupting discriminatory beliefs and stereotypes.

The GAP describes how UNICEF and its partners can redress the underlying structural barriers to equality.

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This is by examining and addressing power dynamics and gender roles, norms and relations – at multiple levels of society and across the life cycle; reinforcing positive norms that support equality and non-discrimination; targeted actions to empower adolescent girls; and working with boys and men to embrace and take action towards gender equality.

**Origins and state of the evidence**

The term ‘gender-transformative approach’ first arose during the HIV/AIDS pandemic, from concerns that gender dimensions were being overlooked in the pandemic response. This led to the development of a *Gender Integration Continuum* (see Figure 1).

This diagnostic tool characterises the gender equality efforts within a programme along a spectrum from gender discriminatory to transformative. It is widely used by agencies, including UNICEF. Large-scale initiatives such as the UNFPA UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage have already included gender-transformative benchmarks and indicators for measuring progress in its results framework.

Gender-transformative programming has been guided by the socio-ecological model systems theory. Drawing on lessons from social norms change and preventing violence against women, this model highlights the opportunities for influencing fundamental change. Programmes are more effective when they are multi-level, or when they complement action at other levels. The circles can also denote the scale of change generated at each level of the socio-ecological model.

A systematic review of 59 gender-transformative programmes targeting the health and well-being of children and young adults found the following: that many of the approaches significantly improved one or more health indicators; that short-term programmes could produce substantial change; and that programmes mostly assessed individual attitude and behaviour change measures, and few captured social norm measures. It concluded that evaluation approaches needed to better capture the pathways of change and that more information is needed on lessons from implementation. This case study synthesis contributes to that end.

**Gender-transformative programming in UNICEF**

The internal evaluation of UNICEF’s first two Gender Action Plans (2019) urged the agency ‘to significantly upscale the ambition and aspiration of its vision for gender equality’ aligned with its mandate as defender of children’s rights.

The evaluation also noted a growing awareness of gender-transformative approaches across UNICEF, and increased integration of the concept in programmes for child protection and education. This included action to address structural barriers to access, and efforts to challenge social norms.

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**Figure 1: Gender Integration Continuum**

Source: Adapted from Pulerwitz Population Council’s *Gender Equity Continuum* and USAID IGWG *Gender Equity Continuum 2013*
Additionally, there were numerous examples of ‘upstream’ work, such as UNICEF’s work in over 70 countries to remove gender discrimination from policy frameworks. Country offices with a gender specialist were more likely to be engaging in this kind of normative-level work.

The evaluation also underlined the importance of a gender-transformative ‘intent’ to drive programming, to ensure substance and results. The GAP 2022-2025 embraces this intent, highlighting several areas for more ambitious and transformative results, including in child protection to address violence and harmful practices; in supporting girls’ leadership and skills in education and learning, and through transformative social protection and care programmes.

Case studies and promising approaches

This case study synthesis showcases a sample of programmes across UNICEF that are working on or towards gender-transformative programming. They represent a mix of promising early programming and maturing approaches.

Ahead of a global diagnostic tool on gender-transformative approaches, the selection was necessarily subjective. Programmes were shortlisted on the basis of their rating for the Annual Results Report for the Gender Section (2018-2021), on recommendations from the HQ and Regional Gender Advisers, and an availability of reviews and evaluations. A cross-section of regions and goal areas was sought.

Programmes were chosen if they had at least two of the following elements:

- Diagnoses structural barriers to gender equality through gender analysis, including norm change at different levels.
- Builds the agency of women, girls and people with non-binary gender identities.
- Works with men and boys to engage and embrace gender equality.
- Thinks and works inter-sectionally.
- Embeds women’s, girls’ and gender-diverse people’s perspectives at all stages.
- Takes a life course and inter-generational perspective.
- Works at multiple levels and across sectors.
- Partners to increase reach and impact, with women’s and girls’ rights organisations. It is hoped that the case studies will ignite interest, the exchange of practice and learning, and inspire action.

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6 UNFPA and UNICEF. Technical Note on Gender-Transformative Approaches in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage Phase II: A Summary for Practitioners.
To promote women’s participation in the labour force and encourage early childhood care and support, UNICEF Argentina is working with government and private sector partners to promote family-friendly policies.

**Context**

In Argentina, only 19% of children under three years of age access child care and early child education. An estimated 50% of parents have access to parental leave, with the legislated national maternity leave being under the ILO minimum recommendation of 14 weeks, and paternity leave being one of the shortest in the region at 2 consecutive days.

Private sector employees in a small minority of companies fare better, with 6% offering more than the legislated 90-days of maternity leave. It is estimated that 6 days is the average length of paternity leave across the private sector workforce. Two thirds of companies provide for breastfeeding breaks, but less than 10% of companies have a place for breastfeeding.

In the absence of a public sector parental and child care regime, an estimated 6% of children are left alone or with another child under 10 years, and there is a 20% gender gap in labour force participation rates.

**Action**

Since 2016, UNICEF has been working to revise family-leave legislation and access for both parents, and to promote comprehensive early childhood policy. Alongside technical advice to the executive and legislature on family-friendly policies and affordable childcare, UNICEF has advocated for change in gender social norms relating to care responsibilities. UNICEF has promoted equal sharing of care roles, and highlighted the social, emotional and cognitive benefits for children through communications campaigns and other initiatives.
To leverage the role of the private sector, UNICEF launched “Empresas Que Cuidan” (Companies that Care), a strategic alliance with initially 30 leading corporations. UNICEF has led family-friendly dialogues and produced numerous digital self-assessment workbooks and toolkits for companies, chambers of commerce and trade unions to champion this agenda. The guidance emphasises the gender equality imperative and child benefits of shared parental care.

**Results**

- A draft bill was presented to Congress that guaranteed mothers’ and fathers’ right to time for child care and co-parenting.
- The Empresas Que Cuidan initiative led to increased paternity leave in leading national and multinational employers (e.g. Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Telefonica) and within the SMEs of large corporation supply chains.
- More than 300 companies are using a digital platform called ECU to generate a self-assessment and access tools, and in 2021, more than 170 companies improved their capacity to implement family-friendly policies.
- UNICEF had 1.9 million views for its social media campaign ‘painted fathers’ in the lead up to Father’s Day to advocate for equal caring roles, especially during COVID 19. This was based on data collected by UNICEF with ELA and the Institute of Masculinities and Social Change.
- More than 300 media articles, 12 videos and 4 media partnerships on ECD and parenting have been widely published.
SOMALIA & SOUTH SUDAN
Communities Care

Phase II period: 2018 - present

In Somalia, the Communities Care Programme has helped to reduce sexual violence through the reduction of harmful norms.

Context

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most prevalent human rights abuses faced by women and girls. In humanitarian settings, a number of factors elevate the risk of GBV, including extreme poverty, displacement and disrupted family support systems, minority status, curtailed mobility, and stress on access to all resources essential for survival. South Sudan and Somalia have both experienced ongoing instability and protracted live conflict, with significant displacement and ongoing challenges to quality service delivery and access. Women and girls are at significant risk of violence, including gender-based violence.7

Action

Launched as a pilot in 2013, Communities Care is a holistic social transformation programme for gender-based violence prevention in humanitarian settings. It has been described as a theory-based, ‘feminist public health approach’ to GBV prevention and response.8

Its goal is to create safer communities for women and girls by challenging social norms that sustain gender-based violence, and spur new norms that uphold women and girls’ equality, safety and dignity.9 It provides compassionate, survivor-centred care for women and girls, and it forms partnerships

9 Ibid
with local communities to address the underlying drivers of sexual violence.

The programme is active in four locations in Somalia and South Sudan, engaging many stakeholders. It commences with a mapping of survivor response services for the referral of women and girls experiencing violence, as a matter of ethical priority. This is followed by a series of structured, facilitated dialogues with influential community members to examine social norms that cause and perpetuate GBV, and the pathways for transforming them.

The peer-facilitated dialogues between young people (15 years+) and adults support the community group to identify harmful social norms that lead to GBV, and explore the benefits of change. Community members are then encouraged to consider alternative norms and behaviours that can replace the norms that lead to violence. The final stage in the process is to make new behaviours and norms visible through social and traditional media.

Results

• Communities Care’s unique approach in multi-stakeholder dialogues has demonstrated more impact than previous awareness raising efforts.
• Evaluations from Somalia have shown significant reductions in GBV-related harmful norms, with sustained change over time.
• In Somalia, the impact evaluation found a decline in the blaming of survivors and the rejection by their families. It also found an increase in support for the reporting of sexual violence.
• Community dialogues promoted inter-generational discussion, with elder women and men talking with youth about GBV and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and they helped to increase referrals for survivors to essential care services.
VIET NAM
Un-stereotyping’ education and forging STEM pathways for girls
Programme period: 2020 - present

In Viet Nam, UNICEF is working to address the barriers to education for ethnic minority girls, and to challenge gender stereotypes and bias in the curriculum, teaching practices, and the fields of study promoted to girls.

Context

A champion for children’s education, Viet Nam has achieved near universal enrolment up to lower secondary education.

However, despite these gains, ethnic minority girls and boys continue to miss out, especially in adolescence. Out-of-school rates for ethnic minority girls and boys of secondary school age are twice the national average. In some mountainous districts of the country, only 10% of ethnic minority girls even sit the exam for upper secondary school. Reasons for this include early engagement in economic activities and child marriage.

Action

To address the gender gap in enrolment amongst ethnic minority communities, UNICEF has partnered with the Viet Nam Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), the National Teacher Training Institute and other agencies to introduce a holistic package of policy and systems-strengthening initiatives designed to address gender bias and stereotypes in the education system that limit learning outcomes for girls.

Partners are working inter-sectionally to champion the rights of ethnic minority girls to access quality learning, including by:

• Integrating age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education into education, from pre-primary level through to secondary schooling, including content on gender-related power dynamics in teacher workbooks.

• Early childhood educators are trained on gender-based violence programmes.

• Equipping schools to provide gender-responsive career counselling and encourage girls to consider STEM subjects, and linking classes of ethnic minority girls with STEM ‘mentors’ to offset the lack of teachers with STEM qualifications.

• Introducing Augmented and Virtual Reality education software so that teachers and girls can engage with STEM concepts through gamification and immersive interaction.

• Revision of the national Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum and teaching materials to eliminate gender bias and stereotyping, and instead promote progressive and equitable depictions of all genders.

• Allocating budget for a Digital Literacy Framework within the new Education Sector Plan, in order to close the digital divide and STEM learning gaps for girls.

Results being tracked

No independent evaluation has yet been carried out of this initiative, but initial results include:¹³

• Explicit commitments to gender equity in ECE curricula;

• Evidence of gender sensitisation in ECE educator training; and

• Classroom observations of gender-equitable practices (among teachers and students).

The Global Programme to End Child Marriage works with partners to advocate for and implement practical actions to end child marriage and to promote the empowerment of adolescent girls.

Context

Designed as a 15-year programme (2016-2030) to address child marriage, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (GPECM) is well-resourced, global in reach with opportunity for comparative learning, and - above all - determined and reflective. It is currently refining its methodologies for a gender-transformative agenda under Phase II (2020-2023) but has much insight to share.

The strategic objective of GPECM is to accelerate action to end child marriage, through increasing political support, cultivating key allies, catalysing shifts towards positive gender norms on the right to choose whom and when to marry, and enhancing investments in girls’ agency.14

Action

Working across 12 diverse countries and four UNICEF regions, GPECM offers many instructive entry points of gender transformative approaches. For example:

In Nepal, the Rupantaran adolescent empowerment programme takes girls through life-skills modules in parallel with a mirror training package for their parents. Each module encourages a questioning of patriarchal norms and offers information to expand their awareness of choices beyond early marriage.

Mozambique identified initiation rites as one of the main cultural drivers of early marriage. A strategy of community dialogues was implemented and reviews have highlighted the

importance of skilled community facilitation, engaging key local influencers, and parallel activity on positive masculinities with boys.\footnote{15 UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage: Newsletter 6 September 2019.}

In 2021, GPECM developed a Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool to facilitate 3-day, intensive programme reflection and action, and ensure the concept and opportunities for gender-transformative action are well discussed.

**Results and lessons shaping Phase II**

- **Supporting girls’ individual agency** in their own futures is **core to shifting discriminatory gender norms** and the very perceptions that limit girls.\footnote{16 ibid}
- The Phase I evaluation highlighted the necessity of **systematic, careful engagement of men and boys** - given their specific roles as grooms and fathers of child brides\footnote{17 UNFPA & UNICEF. 2020. UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage: Technical Note on Gender Norms.} - in order to dismantle harmful patriarchal gender norms.
- Efforts to **reach the most vulnerable girls** (e.g. rural and out-of-school) had not been achieved.
- **Results and impact measurement** was inadequate in Phase I, and focus is needed on translating good practice into costed packages that can be replicated at scale.
- Social and behavioural change communication is valuable but it **cannot shift gender and social norms without action linked to systems and services.**

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![Figure 3: Women aged 20-24 years, married by age 18.\footnote{18 UNFPA & UNICEF. 2019. Global Programme to End Child Marriage: Phase II Programme Document.}](image-url)

1. **Reflection on ‘gender continuum’**
2. **Analysis and prioritization**
3. **Action planning for acceleration**
ARMENIA, UKRAINE and TIMOR LESTE
Other promising practices

Armenia

Armenia has one of the highest rates of gender-biased sex selection (GBSS) in the world. As a result, girls are missing from families, classrooms and communities. Over the past 7 years, it is estimated that more than 4,000 girls who would have been born in Armenia were not, due to the persistent preference for sons.

UNICEF Armenia commissioned research that explored the causes and impact of a preference for sons in Armenia, conducted from 2017 to 2019 by researchers from Brown University, ETH Zurich and the University of Lausanne, highlighting deeply entrenched norms that still value sons more highly than daughters as a key driver of GBSS.

UNICEF and partners are working to challenge GBSS and the norms that underpin it. This includes mobilising the government, civil society and media.

UNICEF Armenia is working with a national broadcast partner to air a special TV series to tackle gender norms and preferences linked to parenthood. Decades of behavioural research show that, as a popular form of media consumption, such edutainment approaches have succeeded in influencing social norms. UNICEF hopes the TV series will resonate with youth and young parents.

Ukraine

In March 2021, UNICEF Ukraine launched an educational programme on menstrual hygiene for school children. Since then, the programme trainers have toured almost all the regions of the country, visiting both small villages and large cities. More than 70,000 teenagers and 1,200 teachers have taken part in the workshops.

UNICEF is partnering with NGO Girls which runs the Health without Shame menstrual hygiene sessions in all schools across Ukraine.
Before the first wave of Health without Shame training sessions, UNICEF and U-Report conducted a large survey among adolescents. It found that 91.2 per cent of girls believe that they need more information on menstrual hygiene and 48.4 per cent do not know what they can or cannot do during menstruation. This topic is also of great interest for boys. Almost 74 per cent of boys want to know more about menstruation. It also found that 45 per cent of girls faced bullying and humiliating jokes on topics of menstruation.

The first wave of menstrual hygiene sessions proved successful. According to the survey, over 90 per cent of the adolescents found the lessons interesting, and more than 25 per cent of adolescents improved their knowledge of menstrual hygiene. The second wave of training will commence in the new academic year.

Timor Leste

UNICEF Timor Leste has been implementing a parenting programme called Hametin Familia (Strengthening Families) since 2016. The programme promotes comprehensive infant and child care, including encouraging the involvement of fathers. The programme is implemented in two municipalities which also have high rates of spousal violence.

With the pilot phase concluding in 2020, the endline survey included new questions to assess the potential of the programme to transform norms and reduce intimate partner violence and violence against children.

The EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, the global programme to end violence against women, has agreed to support the next phase of Hametin Familia. This will include revision of the parenting curriculum to integrate content on gender discriminatory behaviours, the role of men in parenting, modules on skills for respectful, non-violent relationships, and new guidelines for the Fathers’ Network.
# RESOURCES

## 1. Gender Action Plan 2022-25

Figure 4: Gender Action Plan 2022-25 with gender equality programming for transformative results as a cross-cutting organizational priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Area 1</th>
<th>Goal Area 2</th>
<th>Goal Area 3</th>
<th>Goal Area 4</th>
<th>Goal Area 4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Child Protection</td>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>Social Protection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Cross-cutting organizational priorities**
- Address gender-based violence
- Gender equality programming for transformative results, including to address discriminatory gender norms
- Gender-responsive workplaces and institutional accountability

**Gender priorities across the life course**
- Quality maternal health care and nutrition, and HIV testing, counselling and care
- Gender-responsive education systems and equitable access to education for all
- Addressing violence against girls, boys and women and harmful practices
- Equitable water sanitation and hygiene systems
- Gender-responsive social protection systems and care work

**Boys and men as allies for gender equality**
- Promote adolescent girls’ nutrition and pregnancy care, and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and human papillomavirus
- Advance girls’ education, learning and skills, including science, technology, engineering, mathematics and digital skills
- Eliminate child marriage and early unions
- Promote accessible and dignified menstrual health and hygiene services, including tackling taboos about menstruation

## 2. UNICEF Courses and Guidance:

### Online Agora courses:
- Foundations of Gender-Transformative Approaches
- Gender-Transformative Approaches to End Child Marriage
- Gender-Transformative Approaches to Eliminate Female Genital Mutilation
- Gender-Transformative Approaches to Adolescent Girls Programming
- GenderPro Capacity Building Programme

### Guidance and tools:
- UNFPA-UNICEF Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool
- UNFPA-UNICEF Technical Note on Gender-Transformative Approaches in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage Phase II: A Summary for Practitioners
For every child

Whoever she is.
Wherever he lives.
Every child deserves a childhood.
A future.
A fair chance.
That's why UNICEF is there.
For each and every child.
Working day in and day out.
In more than 190 countries and territories.
Reaching the hardest to reach.
The furthest from help.
The most excluded.
It's why we stay to the end.
And never give up.