

end
child
marriage

A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE



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2024 Annual Results Report

India

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage

Canada



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation



Government of the Netherlands

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ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL
BRIDGING A BETTER WORLD
FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS



unicef
for every child



“

Earlier, I felt hopeless, just going along with society, thinking I couldn't bring about change. After joining the Advika programme, I realized I can be a catalyst for change. For me now, the sky is the limit.

Rengali Janzi,
a 17-year-old Honour Arts student,
who overcame family pressure to marry
at 16 after joining Advika: I am Unique,
an adolescent empowerment programme

”



COUNTRY SITUATION

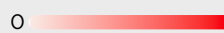
India alone accounts for one third of the world's child brides¹ – the highest total number globally. Today, 222.4 million girls and women living in India were married before the age of 18, including nearly 90.5 million who were married before age 15.² Despite these large numbers, India is a key driver of the global decline in child marriage. Currently, 23 per cent of young women aged 20 to 24 were married before 18,³ and 5 per cent before age 15. These figures represent a reduction of more than half in the prevalence of child marriage compared to 30 years ago, with evidence pointing to accelerated progress over the past 15 years. Over half of the girls and women in India who married in childhood live in five states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh is home to the largest number.⁴

India continues to experience increasingly severe and unpredictable weather events due to climate change, which increase the vulnerability of girls and women. In 2024, several states faced floods, droughts and cyclones. Assam endured localized storms in March and two waves of monsoon flooding, while Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra grappled with prolonged drought. In late May, Cyclone Remal struck six districts in southern West Bengal, affecting nearly 2 million people across the three hardest-hit areas.

In 2024, India reaffirmed its commitment to ending child marriage. The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) launched Bal Vivah Mukht Bharat (Child Marriage Free India), an ambitious campaign aimed at ending child marriage by 2030. The initiative adopts a 'whole-of-government, whole-of-society' approach, mobilizing collective action to reduce the national prevalence of child marriage by 70 per cent by 2027, with the ultimate goal of ending the harmful practice entirely by 2030 – aligned with SDG Target 5.3. At

the policy level, India achieved a major policy milestone with the Supreme Court of India's most progressive rulings on child marriage, in the case of the Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action (SEVA) vs. Union of India. The ruling cited the Global Programme's 'What Works' evidence paper⁵ and underscored the urgent need to make all villages child marriage-free. It highlighted the severe societal impacts of child marriage and affirmed that prevention must involve active community engagement. Following the ruling, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj directed all States and Union Territories to adopt concrete measures to achieve this goal, providing renewed momentum for national action to prevent and address child marriage.

Prevalence of child marriage in India*

0  100

Prevalence

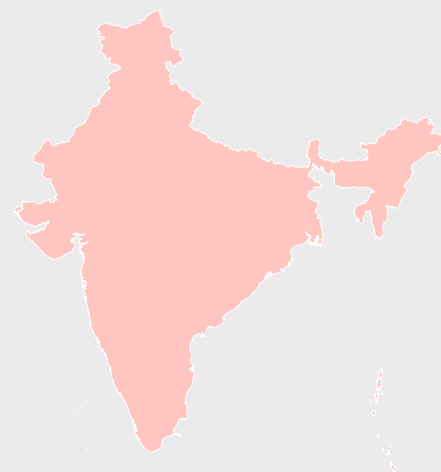
23%

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

Absolute number

222.4 million

the total number of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before age 18



*No recent data at subnational level is available for India.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations, and are for illustrative purposes only.

¹ The term 'Child brides' includes girls under 18 who are already married, as well as women of all ages who first married in childhood.

² Child Marriage Data Portal, India country profile, <https://childmarriagedata.org/country-profiles/india>

³ India Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2019-21.

⁴ Ending Child Marriage - A profile of progress in India, 2023 update, https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Ending_Child_Marriage-profile_of_progress_in_India_2023.pdf

⁵ UNICEF, 'A synthesis of what we know works to prevent and respond to child marriage', 2024, www.unicef.org/documents/synthesis-what-we-know-works-prevent-and-respond-child-marriage

2024 INDIA GLOBAL PROGRAMME KEY RESULTS



Over **6.6 million** adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 were engaged in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas



Over **8.2 million** adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 were supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school



Over **2.8 million** boys and men were engaged in educational discussions addressing harmful masculinities and gender norms



Over **2.8 million** local actors such as traditional, religious and community leaders were engaged in meaningful dialogues and consensus-building efforts to end child marriage



Over **24.3 million** individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in community education/dialogue sessions on the consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality



Over **204.6 million** individuals (boys, girls, women and men)

were reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality



925,825 boys and girls

in programme areas benefited from prevention and protection services



Over **2.2 million** adolescent girls

(10-19) in eight states were provided access to cash transfer and other social protection schemes to prevent child marriage and continue their education



180 District Action Plans (DAPs)

under Mission Shakti (Beti Bachao Beti Padhao) and convergent schemes, addressing child marriage and adolescent empowerment, were approved and rolled out with technical support from the Global Programme



317 new Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHC),

in addition to 769 existing ones (taking the total to 1086 clinics) are delivering quality adolescent-responsive health services in four States



PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Table 1: Summary of output indicators performance for 2024

Indicator	2024	
	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	2,919,100	6,655,438
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	2,381,118	8,215,181
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	2,670,400	2,856,806
Indicator 1221: Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	3,504,700	24,373,272
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	64,626,400	204,633,765
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	1,156,710	2,868,612
Indicator 1231: Number of women-led and youth-led, feminist organizations, networks and coalitions of CSOs mobilized by the Global Programme this year in support of challenging social norms, mitigating the pushback and setbacks and promoting gender equality through advocacy, community mobilization and capacity-building efforts	1,015	1,019
Indicator 2102: Number of girls and boys in programme areas who accessed prevention and protection services	83,802	925,825
Indicator 2111: Number of primary/ secondary/ non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	N/A	N/A
Indicator 2121: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	750	1,086
Indicator 2201: Number of girls (10–19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes	2,876,500	2,288,749
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	397	95
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support	21	22
Indicator 3121: Number of subnational plans with evidence-informed interventions to address child marriage implemented	37	181
Indicator 3122: Number of policy and budget analysis documents developed and disseminated to inform budgeted multisectoral gender responsive planning to address child marriage	8	3
Indicator 3201: Number of evidence and knowledge products addressing child marriage which have been used in policy decisions, programme design and advocacy	8	20



MAIN PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024

★ Creating a primer on the Annulment of Child Marriage under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

accompanied by popularized tools⁶ with illustrations aimed at supporting civil society organizations (CSOs) and other actors who engage closely with young people, especially adolescent girls who may be vulnerable to the risk of child marriage. It is also intended to advance UNFPA's work with a previously underserved group – married adolescents. It explains the provision on annulment of child marriage within the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in simple terms, and seeks to uphold the agency of young people affected by child marriage.

★ Strengthening adolescent/youth participation and civic engagement across all 15 states:

UNICEF supported state adolescent programmes such as Advika, Ujavani and Udaan, with an estimated 5 million adolescent girls who have actively participated in life skills and over 24 million community members reached through online and offline platforms with messaging on ending child marriage (ECM) and ending violence against children and women (EVACW). In Andhra Pradesh, evidence-based advocacy resulted in the new Chief Minister directing all state District Collectors to specifically work on preventing and reducing

child marriage issues and the Ministry of Women and Child Development department developing an integrated adolescent programme, 'Kishori Vikasam', with a special focus on ending child marriage.

★ Linking adolescent girls to social protection:

Strategic partnerships between UNICEF and civil society partners linked over 2.2 million adolescent girls to existing social protection schemes such as the Ladli Laxmi Yojna scheme in Madhya Pradesh and Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal. In Uttar Pradesh, continuous advocacy by UNICEF led to an increase in cash benefits under Chief Minister Kanya Sumangla Yojana from INR 15,000 (US\$179) to INR 25,000 (US\$299) per beneficiary, benefiting 1.9 million girls in the current financial year. Firdaus's story illustrates the vital role of social protection in building brighter futures for girls. A 13-year-old from Uttar Pradesh, she dreams of becoming a police officer. But when her family's income was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, her dream began to slip away as she started missing school more frequently. Firdaus' dreams got a new life when Meena Pal, a local Facilitator from the UNICEF partner organization ActionAid Association, introduced Firdaus to the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana (MKSJ) social protection scheme, as well as to an active local adolescent group. MKSJ is a transformative social and economic initiative designed to empower girls. It provides financial support

⁶ UNFPA, Annulment of Child Marriage: A Primer, 2024, <https://india.unfpa.org/en/publications/primer-annulment-child-marriages-enfold-proactive-health-trust-support-unfpa-2024>

ranging from INR 5,000 (US\$60) to INR 7,000 (US\$84) per beneficiary at six crucial developmental stages, starting from birth and up to Grade 12. MKSY has shown remarkable results in delaying child marriages, particularly in communities where early marriages for girls between 15 and 18 were common. Field workers play a crucial role in this by conducting door-to-door visits, identifying potential beneficiaries, monitoring school attendance, and providing support through community learning centres. They ensure the programme reaches those who need it most. In March 2024, Firdaus received her first MKSY deposit of INR 3,000 (US\$36). With this, she bought her school books, pens, clothes and shoes. For Firdaus, this was more than just financial assistance; it was the opportunity to finally take control of her life. She could now make her own decisions, pursue a career path, and prioritize her mental, physical, and financial well-being – paving the way for a brighter future that truly reflected her dreams. In her local adolescent group, she found more than just a gathering – it became a sanctuary where girls like her could finally voice their thoughts without judgement. Firdaus no longer fears that she will never attend a class again. She says, “Now, I attend school every day!”

★ Enhancing learning and engagement for adolescents with disabilities:

UNFPA, in collaboration with the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, established the Disability Innovation and Experience Lab at the Integrated Infrastructure Centre, Jatni, Odisha. This state-of-the-art facility, equipped with assistive technologies, played a pivotal role in enhancing learning and engagement for adolescents



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with disabilities in developing their life skills, including critical thinking, communication, collaboration and comprehensive sexuality education. Through the lab, experience and exposure camps were successfully conducted for over 150 adolescents with disabilities (hearing impairment, visual impairment and intellectual disability), including 50 girls from selected schools. These camps introduced participants to assistive technologies and provided opportunities for transformative life skills education (LSE) sessions tailored to their needs.

★ Localizing Sustainable Development Goals through women- and girl-friendly Gram Panchayats (village councils):

UNFPA's advocacy with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj led to the adoption of key measures to create 770 women- and girl-friendly Gram Panchayats across all districts in the country. To this end, UNFPA supported the capacity-building of all State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs) in India in 2024. This strategic initiative aims to localize the Sustainable Development Goals through institutions of local self-governance, with particular reference to SDG 5.

★ Sustaining community engagement through social and behaviour change (SBC) tools and interventions:

The Global Programme sustained community engagement and rolled out behaviour change tools to support the development of a parenting continuum – from early childhood to adolescence – in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. It also facilitated capacity-building for government and civil society functionaries working in child protection on the use of the SBC Behavioural Toolkit, leading to the development of district-level SBC-focused action plans.



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PROGRAMME CHALLENGES

The major challenges faced by the Global Programme in India in 2024 include:

🔒 Punitive approaches to addressing child marriage:

Efforts by the police forces of the State of Assam to prosecute child marriage were seen to promote punitive approaches/strict enforcement measures. Given that the issue of child marriage is a normative one requiring multi-stakeholder engagement, there were concerns that fear of legal repercussions may have deterred married or pregnant girls from accessing essential sexual and reproductive health services, including obstetric care, to avoid revealing their underage marriage. This should be an area for future focus for the Global Programme since the issue is not limited to India, and it appears to be growing in importance. The Global Programme continued its advocacy with the state departments and the Assam Police for a preventive and multisectoral approach to address child marriage comprehensively. The Global Programme provided technical assistance for the implementation of the state and district action plans on ending child marriage and the formulation of related standard operating procedures. Subsequently the state government, taking a preventive approach, launched a financial assistance scheme called Nijut Moina to encourage girls and their families to pursue higher education.

🔒 Funding constraints:

While the programme continues to attract support from local philanthropists, additional resources are needed to expand and scale up efforts – particularly in high-prevalence states like Tripura, where adolescent girls and their communities

face persistent barriers and multiple forms of deprivation. Uncertainties about programme funding and the disbursement schedule also affect the scale and pace of implementation of interventions.

🔒 Political transitions:

One nationwide general election was peacefully conducted in 2024. However, due to the administration of the 'Election code of conduct' that limits civic actions by government officials, work on some programmatic interventions, e.g. state reviews of ECM and adolescent issues slowed down.

🔒 Shrinking civic space for CSOs:

In India, the regulatory frameworks at the national level have stringent compliance requirements for CSOs, particularly in relation to their funding and registration processes. These frameworks set parameters for permissible activities and funding compliance, particularly in areas involving public advocacy.

LESSONS LEARNED

Key lessons learned in 2024 include:

✍ Strong multisectoral collaboration is required. In India, multisectoral collaboration, adolescent-friendly policies, and critical supportive government actions (e.g. rolling out of adolescent schemes and services) have enabled better institutionalization of programmes targeting adolescent empowerment and gender equality. In addition, the multisectoral approach adopted by the district administration through the development of district action plans and its implementation

overseen by the District Task Force has helped identify teenage mothers, out-of-school girls and other girls at risk of child marriage.

✍ Multi-component approaches that combine efforts are more effective than stand-alone interventions in creating a supportive ecosystem to empower adolescents and prevent child marriage. Examples include community-level adolescent forums, marriage registration at the Panchayat (village council) level, improved access to adolescent-focused schemes, vocational and life skills training, extracurricular engagement, and continued access to formal education.

✍ Training tribal and religious leaders as advocates for gender-equitable norms fosters broader community acceptance. Engaging diverse actors – such as Panchayati Raj Institutions⁷ (PRIs), religious institutions and tribal communities – expands programme reach and ownership. Tailoring interventions to local cultural contexts and involving trusted community figures significantly amplifies impact, particularly for the last mile.

✍ Gender champions, including men and boys, play a crucial role in promoting gender equality. Strengthening their involvement and expanding their outreach to peers across programming regions is essential for scaling impact.

✍ To enhance the impact of positive masculinity programmes, it is essential to integrate the curriculum with a communication-driven campaign using digital platforms and channels established by the education department. Social media toolkits and online platforms offer cost-effective, scalable means to amplify key messages and engage youth more effectively.

✍ Contextualizing social protection programmes to address the specific needs of adolescent girls, by integrating life skills training, mentoring, and tailored support, can significantly enhance their economic empowerment and resilience.

✍ Strengthening local structures such as Child Protection and Welfare Committees (CPWCs), in alignment with the revised Mission Vatsalya⁸ guidelines and embedded within Gram Panchayat frameworks, fosters local ownership and enhances the delivery of preventive child protection services.

✍ Engaging local governments, PRIs, and community leaders as champions for adolescent girls' empowerment has strengthened the responsiveness of sectoral systems and



institutions, leading to more sustainable, locally owned solutions and improved access to integrated services.

✍ Regular outreach to schools and colleges remains vital for building strong connections with adolescents and enhancing the uptake of services at Adolescent-Friendly Health Clinics (AFHCs).

✍ Clarity on legal provisions across different legislation related to child marriage is essential for standardizing the legal framework among stakeholders. Aligning interpretations and interventions under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and the Juvenile Justice Act will enable more consistent and coordinated prevention, response, and rehabilitation efforts.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Global Programme's **priorities in India for 2025** include:

➤ **Investing in life skills and platforms that promote career guidance for adolescent girls to support their smooth school-to-work transition;**

➤ **Integrating life skills and counselling into government mandates and programmes for long-term sustainability,** including a focus on digital and financial literacy for empowering girls and equipping them with critical skills for their future;

⁷ Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is a system of rural local self-government in India.

www.drishtiias.com/important-institutions/drishti-specials-important-institutions-national-institutions/panchayati-raj-institution-pri

⁸ Mission Vatsalya (formerly the Integrated Child Protection Scheme) serves as a road map for advancing child development and protection priorities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It emphasizes child rights, advocacy, and awareness, while also reinforcing the juvenile justice care and protection system under the guiding principle of 'leaving no child behind'.

- **Strengthening financial and non-financial partnerships with women-led organizations** to advance gender-transformative programming and support women-led, youth-led, and feminist organizations to advocate for girls' rights;
- **Strengthening partnerships with government and CSO-led platforms on gender-transformative approaches (GTA), developing a mechanism for providing handholding support and monitoring results achieved;**
- **Scaling up vulnerability mapping to identify children and families facing protection risks** and link them with skilling, social protection and other preventive and protective services;
- **Demonstrating interventions to reach the last mile, including rescued girls, tribal and migrant communities, and pregnant teenagers and mothers:** This includes prioritizing focused support for teenage mothers by ensuring continuity of care, facilitating reintegration into education and skill-building, establishing mechanisms to track rescued girls for their safety, and strengthening linkages between community programmes and institutional support;
- **Continuing advocacy at the national and state levels, especially on the implementation of Women -and Child-Friendly Panchayats** to promote adolescent empowerment as an effective way to address child marriage comprehensively;
- **Building a cadre of young ambassadors/ champions, especially girls,** to promote adolescent-led actions on issues of gender, child protection and other civic issues within communities and institutions;
- **Incentivizing innovation for adolescent empowerment:** This includes developing, showcasing, and scaling innovative solutions, including programme and technology-driven platforms that raise awareness, provide education, and support at-risk girls;
- **Addressing poverty drivers of child marriage:** This can be done by strengthening cash transfer programme with cash plus initiative through linkages with schools, training on career guidance, adolescent mental health, transformative life skills education; and increasing access to social protection, especially for the unreached, excluded, and marginalized, complemented by other entitlements;
- **Providing technical assistance to intervention states, ensuring the effective implementation of adolescent health and wellness initiatives:** This includes pilot testing and documenting health and wellness messenger-led sessions to enhance peer engagement;
- **Supporting the roll-out of a technology-based management information system (MIS)** for real-time reporting and monitoring of cases, strengthening programme oversight and data-driven decision-making;
- **Training state and district trainers to provide ongoing mentoring and supportive supervision to teachers,** ensuring the quality of life skills education in schools;
- **Extending technical support to finalize and roll out a new training module and activity book for peer educators** under the Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakaram (RKSK, a health programme for adolescents), equipping them with the tools needed to engage adolescents effectively;

- **Strengthening policy and advocacy for gender-responsive child marriage interventions:** This includes the integration of the guidance from the Supreme Court ruling into policy guidance, action plans, standard operating procedures (SOPs), capacity-building, communication packages, and ending child marriage state plans. It also requires strengthening the integration of gender-transformative approaches and equity into overall policy designs and advocacy;

- **Capacity-building and system strengthening of local governance structures:** This includes capacity-building of key local government stakeholders, including newly notified Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, panchayat secretaries and newly elected urban and rural representatives; strengthening District Task Forces to focus on the key drivers of child marriage (particularly in reaching the last mile) and creating robust reporting mechanisms to monitor progress; and systematizing monitoring and simplifying the reporting of District Action Plan implementation.



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