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2025 ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT

India

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage



“

If I stay silent, many
girls will suffer.
So I choose to speak.

”

Vasundhara Parjapat,
a 19-year-old from Dardaturki village in
Tonk district, Rajasthan, who resisted her own
child marriage and became a Youth Advisory
Leader, now representing thousands of girls and
helping to prevent at least six child marriages
while improving adolescents' access to health,
education and protection services

COUNTRY SITUATION

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 18¹, 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. Currently, West Bengal, Bihar, Tripura, Jharkhand are the States with the highest prevalence of child marriage.

Political and legal environment

In 2025, the Ministry of Child and Women Development (MoWCD) launched the *Child Marriage Free Bharat* campaign, a supportive follow-up intensive 100 days civic engagement campaign to further strengthen the *Bal Vivah Mukht Bharat* initiative launched in 2024 to eradicate child marriage in India by 2030. The launch of 100 days campaign symbolised the resolve from the government of India to engage and mobilize “*whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach*” towards ending the harmful practice by 2030. The Supreme Court of India is also currently adjudicating a matter urging a reconsideration of the statutory age of consent (18 years) in India. This includes consideration of pleas seeking a reduction of the age of consent to 16 years and/or a “close-in-age / Romeo-Juliet” exception to avoid criminalizing consensual adolescent relationships. Necessary stakeholders (including government, civil society organizations) have been formally included in the case, and updates are expected in the coming months. During periods of heightened administrative focus, such as state-level transitions in government functionaries, elections, or major government initiatives, programmatic momentum in certain districts has experienced delays which has resulted in slower progress in the initial quarters of implementation, particularly in districts that are geographically remote or administratively underserved.

Humanitarian and climate context

In 2025, escalating climate and weather shocks emerged as significant risk multipliers for children and adolescents, compounding existing vulnerabilities related to poverty,

gender inequality, and social norms. Several states in India experienced extreme weather events on 270 of 273 days between January and September, resulting in widespread disruption to education, livelihoods, and child protection systems. Flooding in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Assam, Bihar, and droughts in Maharashtra, and Rajasthan led to livelihood losses, prolonged school closures, diversion of administrative and community resources toward relief efforts, and interruptions to ongoing programme implementation, including in districts supported under the Global Programme. In flood-prone tea garden areas of Assam and climate-vulnerable districts in Bihar and Maharashtra, these shocks disproportionately affected marginalized communities, increasing risks of school drop-out, child marriage, and exploitation among adolescent girls. In Chhattisgarh, rising climatic variability—marked by heatwaves, intense monsoon rainfall, and flooding in remote and tribal areas—restricted mobility, disrupted schools and Anganwadi services, and heightened health and safety risks for adolescents and frontline workers. In addition, Southern parts of Chhattisgarh-Bijapur, Sukma, Dantewada, and Narayanpur districts, which face constrained access to services and education for adolescents, particularly girls due to incidents of violence, have gradually improved access as the government steps up efforts focused on restoring peace and stability.

23%

Prevalence

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

222.4 million

Absolute number

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

Note: absolute numbers data from *Child Marriage Data Portal, India country profile*

¹ India Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2019-21

2025 INDIA GLOBAL PROGRAMME KEY RESULTS

Over **6.5 million** adolescent girls (10-19) actively participated in Life Skills or CSE interventions supported by the Global Programme



Over **9.2 million** girls (10-19) were supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school



Over **4.4 million** boys and men actively participated in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms which are supported by the Global Programme



950,426 local actors (traditional, religious, community) were mobilized by the Global Programme to advocate for an end to child marriage



Over **11.9 million** individuals participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality



Over **4.3 million** girls and boys accessed prevention and protection services



Over **1.7 million** of the poorest adolescent girls (10-19) benefited from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes supported by the Global Programme in the reporting year

PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Table 1: Summary of output indicator performance in Phase III Year 1 (2024) and Year 2 (2025)

Indicator	Phase III Year	
	Year 1: 2024	Year 2: 2025
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (10-19) who actively participated in Life Skills or CSE interventions supported by the Global Programme	6,655,438	6,550,478
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (10-19) supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	8,215,181	9,283,846
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms which are supported by the Global Programme	2,856,806	4,477,051
Indicator 1221: Number of individuals who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality	24,373,272	11,912,312
Indicator 1223: Number of local actors (traditional, religious, community) who have been mobilized by the Global Programme to advocate for an end to child marriage	2,868,612	950,426
Indicator 1231 (i): Number of women-led or youth-led CSOs supported financially by the Global Programme this year	1,019	24
Indicator 1231 (ii): Number of women-led or youth-led CSOs the Global Programme convened to support the ECM agenda this year (non-financial contribution)	(total mobilized)	1,067
Indicator 2111: Number of education institutions which were supported in the reporting year to provide quality gender-responsive education (including CSE)		118,597
Indicator 2121 (i): Number of health, child protection or GBV service delivery points which were supported in the reporting year to provide quality adolescent-responsive services	1,086	1,224
Indicator 2121 (ii) (<i>old 2102</i>): Number of girls and boys who accessed the services described in 2121 (i)	925,825	4,322,564
Indicator 2201: Number of poorest adolescent girls (10-19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes supported by the Global Programme in the reporting year	2,288,749	1,767,349
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (formal and informal) to deliver adolescent- and gender-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	95	82
Indicator 3101: Total number of national and sub-national Child Marriage Action Plans whose implementation the Global Programme supported this year	181	217
Indicator 3111: Total number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage whose development or adoption the Global Programme supported this year	22	25
Indicator 3122: Total number of budget analysis documents developed by the Global Programme this year	3	7
Indicator 3201: Total number of evidence or knowledge pieces developed this year in country	20	21

Note: Phase III of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage runs from 2024-2030; Indicators 1231, 2121 and 3101 were modified for 2025



MAIN PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2025

Institutionalizing child marriage prevention at the grassroots

Both UNFPA and UNICEF have been working closely with panchayats² and line institutions to advance the child marriage prevention discourse at the community level. UNFPA enabled the institutionalization of child marriage prevention and empowerment of women and girls within local governance systems by supporting the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) to adopt a national framework for establishing 770 Women and Girl Friendly Gram Panchayats³ across all districts of India in 2025. This embeds adolescent priorities and prevention of harmful practices into routine Panchayat planning and action, advancing localisation of SDG 5. Accountability was institutionalized through a national digital dashboard with 41 indicators, including Panchayat-level actions to prevent child marriage, integrated into the MoPR's Panchayat Advancement Index.

UNICEF's support to state governments' Child Marriage-Free villages and campaign initiative with a focus on prevention, empowerment, and sustained social norm change in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat was sustained.

In Chhattisgarh, UNICEF supported the Child Marriage Free Campaign resulting in Balod district being officially declared as a first Child Marriage-Free District in the state, marking a significant milestone in the collective efforts to eliminate child marriage. In Odisha, 27 per cent of villages have been declared as child marriage free through community ownership and collaboration with local governance and district administration. In Gujarat, UNICEF has supported the government in the rollout of Balika Panchayats (girl led village councils) across all 17,725 villages in Gujarat, institutionalizing girls' participation in local governance and strengthening adolescent girls' leadership. UNICEF will support the capacity building of 103,000 adolescent girls as members of Balika Panchayats. In multiple

² A panchayat is a decentralized unit of local self-governance in India.

³ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 'Model Women-Friendly Gram Panchayats Initiative Launched; One Model Gram Panchayat to be developed in each District', 5 March 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2108572®=3&lang=2>

states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, engagement at the village level with elected representatives and community platforms contributed to setting up of child friendly villages and Bal Sabhas (child led-local governance councils) that have enabled collective action to prevent child marriage and advance adolescent empowerment. UNICEF supported 235 Gram Panchayats (local governance councils) to integrate child friendly indicators into GPDP (village development plans) leading to allocation of INR 94 million (approximately US\$1.03 million, based on 2025 exchange rates), 9 per cent of total Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) budget in Madhya Pradesh state.

Transforming adolescent health education at national scale to prevent child marriage

In 2025, UNFPA supported the Government of India to update the curriculum for the Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) - Gol's flagship national programme on adolescent health, aligning it with the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE). The revised curriculum⁴ strengthens adolescents' understanding of consent, respectful relationships, prevention of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and safe use of social media, ensuring that health education responds to contemporary risks faced by girls and boys, including emerging risks such as climate change. Through training of 200 national and state master trainers across 32 States and Union Territories, the reform triggered a nationwide cascade expected to reach 600,000 peer educators and nearly 15 million adolescents in 2026.

Strengthening accountability for adolescent well-being through digital systems

To improve monitoring of adolescent empowerment efforts, UNFPA supported the development and rollout of a digital Management Information System (MIS) for India's School Health and Wellness Programme (SHWP). Replacing fragmented manual reporting, the system enables real-time tracking of programme delivery across schools, including outreach to adolescent girls with health and life skills education. By 2026, over 140,000 schools and 280,000 teachers are expected to report through the MIS, significantly strengthening government capacity to identify gaps, course-correct implementation, and ensure no adolescent is left behind. This digital reform enhances accountability and sustainability of one of India's largest platforms for adolescent empowerment, directly supporting prevention of child marriage through sustained school-based engagement.

Driving policy reform to end child marriage

UNICEF catalysed and sustained policy dialogue for reforms to enhance prevention of child marriage by shaping state strategies, financing commitments and institutional mechanisms across 14 states. This included UNICEF and UNFPA support to Odisha's State Strategic Action Plan (2024–2029) with strengthened safety policies, and to the Women and Child Development Corporation (WCDC) in Bihar to finalize Bihar's State Action Plan for Ending Child Marriage. **In Chhattisgarh, UNICEF also supported the allocation of a dedicated ₹1.5 crore budget (approximately US\$170,000, based on 2025 exchange rates) for the Child Marriage Free Campaign**, anchoring the state's political and fiscal accountability. These reforms were translated into action through the operationalization of 214 state and district action plans, strengthening coordinated, multi-sectoral prevention and response systems. UNICEF further institutionalized adolescent-centred platforms by supporting formation of **Kishori Sevika Groups across all 35 districts in Assam**. UNICEF enabled state-wide scale-up of adolescent girls' empowerment programmes namely Kishori Vikasam and SNEHA in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, embedding child marriage prevention within livelihoods, health, safety and empowerment frameworks.

UNFPA successfully developed and disseminated a state Investment Case on reducing child marriage and adolescent pregnancies in Bihar, strengthening the economic and policy rationale for scaled action. Conducted with technical support from Victoria University and the Burnet Institute, the study generated robust evidence on the effectiveness and cost-impact of existing interventions and identified priority areas requiring enhanced investment. The study



⁴ See the Peer Educator Package: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nQbA-LIQddJmIKhJfD6okI2axOS0oYOx?usp=sharing>



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recommends increased financing for life-skills education, community participation, improved school infrastructure, cash incentive schemes, and extending the age coverage of girls under the Right to Education from 14 to 16 years—interventions with a demonstrated and measurable impact on delaying marriage and preventing early pregnancy. The findings were validated through a multi-stakeholder workshop with 130 participants, including government, civil society, and academic institutions.

UNFPA, in partnership with Enfold, identified and documented replicable, rights-based models for care, rehabilitation, and reintegration in shelter homes, aftercare homes, and child care institutions. Disseminated through a national virtual release and expert panel, the findings reached over 200 stakeholders from government, civil society, and service providers across multiple states. The dialogue strengthened consensus on system-level gaps and scalable good practices, informing clearer pathways to improve institutional care standards, service quality, and long-term rehabilitation outcomes for women and children.

Strengthening systems to prevent and respond to child marriage

Life Skills Education: Life skills interventions focusing on most at-risk adolescent girls enabled them to acquire critical life skills and enhance their agency through multi-pronged approaches that engaged them on their career paths, enhanced adolescent participation through community and state-based platforms including innovative initiatives like the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyayas (KGBVs)⁵ and Tribal Residential Schools. In Rajasthan, UNFPA

ensured that adolescents most likely to be excluded were reached by integrating Life Skills Education within government institutions serving tribal, minority, disability, and socio-economically vulnerable groups, rather than creating parallel delivery mechanisms. Sustained advocacy led to the inclusion of tribal schools, KGBVs, Madrasa, schools under Social Justice and Empowerment, and institutions for children with disabilities within the National Health Mission State Programme Implementation Plan (2024–26). In Odisha, UNFPA operationalized inclusion through discourse-oriented life skills education for tribal adolescents. The curriculum included identifying harmful norms and community priorities, strengthening youth leadership, critical thinking, and civic engagement. Complementing this, insights from the Disability Innovation and Experience Lab informed a contextualised life skills education for adolescents with hearing and visual disabilities, ensuring that adolescents with disabilities were included in system-level learning and protection interventions.

Adolescent Friendly Health Services: To address persistent vulnerabilities linked to adolescent pregnancy, menstrual hygiene, and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services, UNICEF and UNFPA supported several states to strengthen adolescent health, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and menstrual health management (MHM) systems through school- and community-based platforms, with a focus on prevention, early action and continuity of care. At the national level, UNFPA strengthened adolescent-responsive health systems by upgrading four government Adolescent-Friendly Health Centres (AFHCs) across Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, and Rajasthan as disability-inclusive demonstration sites. These centres now feature accessible infrastructure, assistive devices, disability-inclusive information, education and communication (IEC) materials focusing on SRH concerns (changes during puberty, contraception, family planning, respectful relationships), alongside training of 72 counsellors and adolescent-facing staff (Rajasthan and Odisha) to communicate respectfully and effectively with adolescents with diverse disabilities, including appropriate verbal and physical etiquette and use of accessible tools.

Leveraging government platforms and partnerships for gender transformative programming and last mile reach

UNICEF advanced gender transformative programming and policy in nine states with a focus on multi-convergent delivery of services, scaling positive masculinity interventions in last mile groups like tea gardens and technical leadership to state level policies and campaigns.

⁵ KGBVs are government-run residential schools for girls from disadvantaged groups, covering Classes VI to XII, established to improve access to quality education and reduce gender gaps.



In Assam, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Women and Child Development's Nari Adalat (Women Community Courts) activating a gender responsive justice redressal mechanism at the Gram Panchayat level by linking social protection schemes. In Bihar, UNICEF supported the state to develop a gender transformative policy for adolescent programming. In West Bengal, UNICEF partnered with the Panchayat and Rural Development Department to leverage 1.2 million self-help groups, reaching 10 million people with a Gender campaign against harmful norms and child marriage. UNICEF advanced gender-transformative programming 'SAKSHUM', by leveraging government platforms to enable multi-sectoral convergence across five departments, delivering integrated services for adolescent girls and last-mile communities at risk of child marriage across 12 districts in Maharashtra. Digital governance tools such as the Track the Girl Child portal strengthened accountability for girls' education, supporting vulnerable girls to return to school and link with social protection schemes in Parbhani district. In Gujarat, UNICEF's pilot with the district administration to enable free and safe transportation for schoolgirls informed the government-led 'Vidya Nandini' initiative, institutionalizing free transport for students in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

UNFPA partnered with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to support the Adi Karmayogi Volunteers initiative⁶, to equip

tribal youth to act as catalysts for grassroots change and strengthen last-mile service delivery in tribal regions. As part of this initiative, 82 UN Community Volunteers have been deployed across 82 blocks in 13 districts of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan as Adi Karmayogi Volunteers, supported by UNFPA, for an intensive two-month grassroots engagement. These volunteers will support Village Vision 2030 planning, awareness drives, outreach, and improved access to schemes and services.

ROSHNI PERWEEN: A SURVIVOR-TURNED-LEADER TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF GIRLS IN BIHAR

Roshni Perween, from Kishanganj, Bihar, was married at 13 and experienced intimate partner violence. After returning to her parents' home, she faced stigma, depression and profound hardship, while also becoming a young mother. These experiences shaped her determination to stand up for girls and women facing child marriage, violence and discrimination. She went on to become a champion of girls' rights and an advocate for ending child marriage. Through UNICEF's UDAAN Project for Adolescent Empowerment and Ending Child Marriage (2021-2022), she helped prevent child marriages, enrol out-of-school children and connect families to social protection schemes.

In 2023, she founded the Janta Express Welfare Foundation, through which she has supported 102 survivors of domestic violence, helped prevent 75 child marriages, and raised awareness among more than 10,000 community members on women's rights, child protection, domestic violence and legal safeguards. Her work has made her widely recognized within her community and by the district administration. That same year, Roshni received international recognition as the first Indian to be selected as a UN Young Activist Laureate, chosen among 34,000 nominations worldwide. She was invited to the United Nations in Geneva in November 2023 to share her experience as a young change leader⁷.

With continued support and mentorship from UNICEF, she secured a government position in July 2025 as Centre Administrator at the Sakhi One Stop Center in Bihar, under the Women and Child Development Corporation. In this role, she has handled more than 90 cases related to domestic violence, dowry harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence, and linked 30 women to government welfare schemes to support their economic empowerment. Deeply shaped by lived experience, Roshni continues to dedicate her life to empowering marginalized girls and women and preventing child marriage in her community and beyond.

⁶ Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 'Adi Yuva Fellowship & Adi Karmayogi Volunteers Launched to Empower Tribal Youth Across India', 22 September 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2169786®=3&lang=2>

⁷ Asif, Tanzil, 'Indian Activist Roshni Perween Recognized Among Five Champions at the 2023 Young Activists Summit in Geneva', *Main Media English*, 16 November 2023, <https://english.mainmedia.in/indian-activist-roshni-perween-recognized-among-five-champions-at-the-2023-young-activists-summit-in-geneva/>

DOCUMENTING NORM CHANGE

In 2025, the Global Programme in India generated important evidence that social and gender norms can shift, while also clarifying where deeper work is still needed. In Maharashtra, a UNICEF-supported Gender Perception Dipstick Assessment with 18,500 students across 12 districts found positive changes following the Gender Transformative School Program, which was implemented in 950 schools and reached 246,960 girls, 257,606 boys, 25,155 mothers and 22,886 fathers. Through play-based sessions, adolescents explored gender roles, child marriage, decision-making and available support services, including the Child Helpline. Pre- and post-assessment results among 18,282 participating adolescents showed more gender-equitable attitudes on games, professions and household responsibilities, as well as less gendered perceptions of traits such as fearlessness, sensitivity and emotional expression. Girls also reported increased autonomy, including around study, household work, career choice and mobility, while knowledge of the Child Helpline rose from 78 to 82 per cent.

In 2025, UNFPA India designed and piloted an Evaluation Framework to Assess Social and Gender Norm Change at Gram Panchayat level, completing a baseline study across 30 Gram Panchayats with women, men and boys, adolescent girls, and elected representatives. The findings suggest that the programme is addressing the right normative levers and that further progress is possible with targeted refinements. Most notably, the study found evidence of pluralistic ignorance: although 89 per cent of adolescent girls believe women should marry after 18, and most adults support girls completing graduation, girls perceive much lower community support for girls' higher education. This indicates that positive attitudes already exist but are underestimated, and that norm change efforts should focus on making them more visible and socially legitimate. The study also found strong intrinsic agency among girls: 88 per cent of unmarried girls under 18 said they would seek help if facing child marriage, though only 65 per cent knew where to get support. In addition, sanctions around child marriage were seen as coming mainly from the village community rather than the household, validating the programme's focus on Panchayats, elected representatives, religious leaders and other local influencers as key norm gatekeepers.



At the same time, the baseline highlights persistent barriers. Many women still see domestic work as a woman's primary role, more than a third believe child marriage reduces financial burden, and most girls view education outside the village as unsafe. These findings point to the need for continued engagement with community and religious leaders, stronger visibility of support systems, safer mobility options for girls, and clearer referral pathways.

More broadly, the programme appears to be gaining stronger traction on supply-side enablers such as systems strengthening, service readiness and partnerships than on the "social permission" and structural constraints shaping girls' mobility, autonomy and relationships. Progress remains slower where legal and social realities collide, particularly under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), which criminalizes all sexual activity under 18 and can reinforce stigma, limit adolescent SRH access, and make marriage appear the only socially legitimate pathway for relationships. Norms around sexuality, honour and "marriage as protection," along with poverty, school-to-work transitions, unsafe transport, livelihood insecurity, climate shocks, and insufficient engagement of boys and men at scale, continue to constrain change.

CHANGES TO PROGRAMME STRATEGY AND DESIGN

Although there was no official change in strategy in 2025, the Global Programme in India is shifting away from broad, geographically based community interventions towards strategic interventions that prioritize prevention and leverage at-scale reach. In light of funding constraints, government partnerships and platforms will be leveraged and strengthened to unlock public financing, mainstream the discourse on ending child marriage, and strengthen systems for adolescents, particularly education, including life skills education; health, including sexual and reproductive health; social protection; and economic empowerment pathways. The programme will continue to have a strong focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. For example, instead of relying on event-based interventions, this approach uses vulnerability (high prevalence and high burden hotspots) mapping to identify high-risk locations, families, out-of-school adolescents and migration-prone households, enabling earlier and more targeted protection support especially by state counterparts to help prevent child marriage.



COUNTRY PROFILE

India

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage