Ending Child Marriage

**Issue**

More than 700 million girls and women alive today were married as children. This is a human rights violation on a vast scale and a major obstacle to sustainable development. While the practice of child marriage has slowly been declining, particularly for girls under age 15, additional, more concerted efforts are needed to accelerate the pace of change. If there is no reduction in child marriage, up to 280 million more girls alive today are at risk of becoming brides before they turn 18. The effects of population growth mean that this number will approach 320 million by 2050. If current trends continue, the total number of women alive today that were married in childhood will grow from more than 700 million to almost 1 billion women and girls by 2030.

**Action**

The global momentum and opportunities to make significant progress on ending child marriage have never been more favourable. The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage offers a framework promoting the right of girls to delay marriage, addressing the conditions that keep the practice in place, and caring for girls already in union.

The programme will focus on enabling girls at risk of child marriage to choose and direct their own futures, supporting households in demonstrating positive attitudes towards adolescent girls, and strengthening the systems that deliver services to adolescent girls. It will also seek to ensure laws and policies protect and promote adolescent girls' rights, and highlight the importance of using robust data to inform policies relating to adolescent girls.

The programme targets adolescent girls (ages 10-19) at risk of child marriage or already in union, in 12 selected countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia. The countries were selected according to four criteria deemed important for additional United Nations investment and accelerated global progress—high prevalence of child marriage, large projected burden, government engagement and regional distribution.

**Impact**

The Global Programme envisions progress in three phases. The initial phase, or the first four years of the programme, will strengthen critical institutions and systems in select localities and countries to deliver quality services and opportunities for girls. It will also lay the foundation for attitudinal change among families and communities for a longer-term shift in behaviours and norms. Governments will be supported in developing strategies to deliver on the SDGs target on child marriage, including through action plans on child marriage. Regional and global momentum on child marriage will be ensured through partnerships with regional bodies such as the African Union and the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children, and global actions at UNGA and HRC.

Over the midterm (5-10 years), the Strategic Objective is to use the demonstration and catalytic power of this critical mass of strengthened systems, communities and girls to further accelerate progress at significant scale. It is expected that by this phase, a broader range of governments and donors would enhance investments in and support for married and unmarried girls as the corresponding benefits become more visible.

The programme is engaging a broader number and range of key actors—including entrepreneurs, the
Generous early support to individual projects, and to the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage has been provided by the Governments of Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom as well as the European Union.