

end
child
marriage

A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE



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2024 Annual Results Report

Uganda

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage

Canada



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation



Government of the Netherlands

Norway



ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL
BROUWER
FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS



unicef
for every child



“

After the life skills training,
I have gained more confidence
to overcome the stigma from
my peers that almost made me
drop out of school because of insults
and name-calling.

Eimani Gift,
a 16-year-old girl
with a physical disability

”



COUNTRY SITUATION


There are 5.5 million girls and women living in Uganda today who were married before age 18, 1.6 million of whom were married before they were 15.¹ Currently, 33 per cent of young women aged 20 to 24 married before age 18, and 6 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 married before they turned 15.²

In remote and hard-to-reach communities, deeply entrenched cultural practices and societal norms continue to drive child marriage. In regions such as West Nile and Karamoja, religious and traditional beliefs, coupled with economic hardship, contribute to persistently high rates of child marriage. Poverty remains a key driver of child marriage, with 16 per cent of the population living below the absolute poverty line (US\$1 per person per day)³, leading vulnerable families to resort to marrying off daughters in exchange for dowries. Enforcing laws against child marriage remains difficult due to community resistance. Marriages now often occur without traditional ceremonies, as parents adopt discreet methods such as exchanging dowry in markets or marrying off girls in distant communities. This makes it harder for local surveillance systems to identify cases of child marriage.

Uganda hosts 1.6 million refugees – 57 per cent of them children – mainly from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, and Sudan, straining resources and deepening vulnerabilities. Economic hardship and food insecurity drive child marriage, while many girls, especially new arrivals, remain out of school. Limited access to health services and the Mpox outbreak further weaken protection systems. In 2024, floods, droughts, and storms damaged schools and health facilities, disrupting education, widening gender inequalities and increasing girls' risk of being married off by their families.

In 2024, child marriage was recognized as a key barrier to development in Uganda's Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV) under the Human Capital Development pillar. The government committed US\$1.64 million⁴ over five years to expand education, shift harmful norms, and improve girls' health – marking progress towards gender equality and youth empowerment, and increasing government accountability. Meanwhile, the Sexual Offences Bill and Marriage Bill were introduced in Parliament but faced strong resistance, delaying approval due to entrenched social norms that perpetuate gender inequality, including delays in adopting the Out-of-school Sexuality Education guideline. Enforcement of existing child marriage laws remains weak due to conflicting legal provisions, unclear definitions, and slow, complex reform processes.

Prevalence of child marriage in Uganda*

0  100

Prevalence

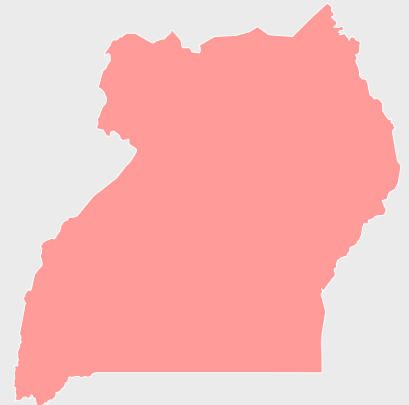
34%

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

Absolute number

5.5 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 Uganda.

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 Child Marriage Data Portal, Uganda country profile, <https://childmarriagedata.org/country-profiles/uganda>

² Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2022.

³ Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS), 2023/24, www.ubos.org/dissemination-of-the-uganda-national-household-survey-2023-24-report/

⁴ Figure based on analysis of allocations in NDP IV (Programme Implementation Action Plans), yearly allocations across different programme interventions contributing to ending child marriage.

2024 UGANDA GLOBAL PROGRAMME KEY RESULTS

33,308 adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 were engaged in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas



18,914 adolescent girls aged 10 to 19 were supported by the Global Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school



91,067 boys and men were engaged in educational discussions addressing harmful masculinities and gender norms



2,500 local actors such as traditional, religious, and community leaders were engaged in meaningful dialogues and consensus-building efforts to end child marriage



234,726 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



167,814 boys and girls in programme areas benefited from prevention and protection services



PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Table 1: Summary of output indicators performance for 2024

	2024	
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	398,613	33,308
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the Programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	38,31	18,914
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	125,357	91,067
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	577,483	234,726
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	5,813,362	238,235
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	3,353	2,500
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 mobilisation and capacity-building efforts	24	5
Indicator 2102: Number of girls and boys in programme areas who accessed prevention and protection services	159,066	167,814
Indicator 2111: Number of primary/ secondary/ non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	600	231
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	160	67
Indicator 2201: Number of girls (10-19) benefiting from social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes	27,921	232
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services	40	10
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support	2	3
Indicator 3121: Number of subnational plans with evidence-informed interventions to address child marriage implemented	5	5
Indicator 3122: Number of policy and budget analysis documents developed and disseminated to inform budgeted multisectoral gender-responsive planning to address child marriage	2	0
Indicator 3201: Number of evidence and knowledge products addressing child marriage which have been used in policy decisions, programme design and advocacy	5	0



MAIN PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024

★ Empowering adolescent girls to create positive change in their communities:

In 2024, comprehensive education initiatives provided 33,308 girls with gender-transformative life skills, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), vocational training, and training on entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. Lotome's story highlights how beneficiaries of the Global Programme apply the life skills they gain to contribute to positive change in their communities. A 15-year-old from Nakapiripirit District in the Karamoja region, Lotome dropped out of school in early 2024 and faced the risk of child marriage due to financial struggles. With programme support, she received life skills training and joined a government small-scale irrigation initiative with peers, accessing seeds to grow vegetables for sale in local markets. Her earnings paid for school materials and tuition, enabling her to return to school. She advanced to the next class and now wants to advocate for girls' education in her community. The horticulture group's income-generating efforts also helped 57 children (20 boys, 37 girls) return to school, providing hygiene kits, school supplies, and uniforms. They are now raising community awareness about child marriage and violence and referring at-risk children to health, education, and protection services.

★ Amplifying girls' voices in policymaking:

To build girls' capacity to identify risks, hold duty bearers accountable, and become change agents in their communities, young girls from selected districts participated in a three-day training to establish two Children's Reference

Groups (CRGs) with 60 members. The CRG is Uganda's first institutionalized platform enabling children and adolescents to engage in structured decision-making at both local and national levels. It offers an inclusive and sustainable way for adolescents to participate across the government programming cycle, from planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The CRG was instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of child marriage in district plans and budgets. Established in 2022 by the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD) under the National Child Participation Strategy and the National Child Policy (2020), the CRG is supported by local governments to help members fulfil their roles. In 2024, three more CRGs were created in Amudat, Kween, and Abim to amplify children's voices on child marriage, female genital mutilation, and other issues affecting them.

★ Community engagement and advocacy to end child marriage:

In 2024, the Global Programme engaged over 2,500 community leaders, including traditional, religious, and district leaders, in dialogues and advocacy to end child marriage. These leaders were sensitized on the harmful impacts of child marriage and related social norms, equipped with key messages, and are now actively leading community engagements on child marriage and teenage pregnancies in their constituencies. One success story illustrates the importance of community leader engagement in creating change and inspiring others: In Makoka Parish, Namwendwa Subcounty, community leader John Byekwaso is leading a grass-roots campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of child marriage. He regularly

visits the homes of vulnerable families with adolescent girls at risk and uses public gatherings, including weddings, funerals, and other community events, as platforms to engage both children and parents on the risks of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and the importance of responsible parenting. His dedication has contributed to a significant reduction in child marriage cases in his community, which reported no cases in 2024. John has become a role model for other leaders and men in the region.

★ Improved access to reproductive health services for adolescents:

by setting up adolescent-friendly service delivery points in 38 health facilities and implementing community activations and outreach initiatives, reaching over 59,286 adolescents with comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. These services included the provision of age-appropriate information, counselling, awareness-raising, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This reach is also attributed to the orientation of 110 health workers across target districts on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services, as well as harmful practices of child marriage and female genital mutilation. This initiative was led by the Ministry of Health. One success story illustrates the empowering effect of providing adolescent-responsive health services: Sarah, a 17-year-old girl from Kitgum District in the Acholi region, accessed reproductive health services at one of the programme's health centres. She received counselling and contraceptives, which helped her avoid an unintended pregnancy and stay in school. Sarah is now a peer educator, helping other girls in her community access the services they need.



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★ Strengthening multisectoral coordination and accountability for ending child marriage at both national and sub-national levels:

In 2024, efforts to strengthen the enabling environment focused on advocacy and multisectoral coordination at national and district levels. Recognizing that ending child marriage requires cross-sectoral engagement, the Global Programme partnered with the Ministry of Health to address the stagnating, high levels of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. This led to the creation of a 17-member Think Tank, including experts from health, gender, academia, religion, and a young woman from youth networks, to support ongoing dialogue and enhance technical assistance for the prevention of, and response to, child marriage.

★ Private sector engagement:

The Global Programme started advocating with private sector companies (especially those that undertake local government construction contracts) to provide apprenticeships and jobs for young mothers who have dropped out of school and cannot continue with education, so that they can earn a living and support their children while gaining some vocational skills. These partnerships with local businesses helped create internships and job placements, empowering girls economically and reducing the likelihood of early marriage, but more importantly serving to raise the private sector's interest in ending child marriage and teenage pregnancies, as these two issues impact the skilled human resources needed for the development of the local and national economy.



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PROGRAMME CHALLENGES

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

Child protection system constraints:

Uganda's child protection system is evolving, with all structural components in place, though their capacity varies. The system faces significant constraints due to limited human, financial, and infrastructural resources. Inadequate funding and an overstretched, understaffed social service workforce, often lacking sufficient logistical support, undermine timely implementation of planned interventions. As a result, critical actions to address drivers of child marriage are frequently deprioritized or left unfunded.

Reduced funding and delayed fund disbursement:

Limited results and unmet targets in 2024 are linked to reduced funding and delayed fund disbursement, which hindered the timely implementation of programme activities. Additionally, some targets set for the Global Programme were overambitious; these will be reviewed and adjusted in 2025 with support from headquarters.

Security constraints:

Insecurity in some programme areas, particularly in North Karamoja due to ethnic conflicts and armed cattle raids, hindered access and disrupted implementation efforts.

Child marriage normalized by adolescents:

Community resistance is also evident among adolescents themselves. In some areas young people, particularly those

aged 16–17, have come to view child marriage or early unions as normal, making it difficult to report such cases to law enforcement without encountering opposition from the community.

LESSONS LEARNED

Key lessons learned in 2024 include:

To achieve meaningful empowerment for girls, investment in structured life skills training and mentorship is essential.

These foundational efforts are key to unlocking broader outcomes, including amplifying girls' voices, fostering their participation in decision-making, and encouraging engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Experience has shown that when young people are equipped with life skills, social accountability, and advocacy training, they develop a deeper understanding of governance structures and begin engaging with duty bearers to demand improved services and inclusion in decisions that affect their lives. It is therefore vital that duty bearers are informed, responsive, and committed to meaningful engagement with youth.

Advocacy and multisectoral collaboration are essential for influencing and leveraging resources from government ministries, departments, and agencies to improve girls' well-being and respond effectively to child marriage.

Enforcing laws against child marriage is a complex, multifaceted effort. Access to justice is often a lengthy process, and in the absence of adequate resources, key stakeholders,

such as the police, probation officers, and social welfare officers, may abandon cases before they are concluded, leading to case closures without justice being served.

THE WAY FORWARD

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

- **Scaling up ongoing initiatives and strengthening efforts to link out-of-school girls and young mothers to government social protection schemes**, such as the Parish Development Model;
- **Consolidating work with girls, young women, and youth structures in collaboration with the Social and Behaviour Change team** to design structured and targeted radio messages, addressing challenges in reaching the intended mass media audience;
- **Collaborating with the Education and Health sectors to strengthen child marriage and adolescent sexual and reproductive health indicators within government administrative**
- **Strengthening multisectoral collaboration between the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Ministry of Health** to effectively leverage resources and systems to protect and respond to the needs of adolescent girls due to the cross-cutting nature of their needs. The Global Programme will also leverage other initiatives, such as the assessment of youth-friendly services in health facilities and support identified gaps;
- **Strengthening efforts to enforce laws on child marriage and enhance community surveillance and reporting systems** to identify and report girls at risk, as well as cases of child marriage.



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