

# Media Update

3 May 2023

## UNICEF

PRESS RELEASE

### South Asia could eliminate child marriage only in 55 years – UNICEF

*In South Asia, 1 in 4 young women are still married before 18th birthday, with climate catastrophes, economic shocks and the ongoing fallout from COVID-19 threatening to reverse hard-earned gains*

**KATHMANDU, Nepal, 3 May 2023** – South Asia continues to drive global reductions in child marriage and is on pace to eliminate child marriage in about 55 years, according to a new analysis issued by UNICEF South Asia today.

Child marriage has declined steadily in South Asia. In the last decade alone, a girl's likelihood of marrying in childhood in South Asia has dropped by nearly half, from 46 per cent to 26 per cent. This progress is driven largely by India, with notable declines in Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan.

However, the region remains home to nearly half (45 per cent) of the world's child brides. While India has recorded significant progress in recent decades, it still accounts for one-third of the estimated child marriage cases globally total. Already, an estimated 640 million girls and women alive globally today were married in childhood – of which 290 million are in South Asia, according to the latest estimates included in the analysis.

Despite a steady decline in child marriage in the last decade, multiple crises including climate catastrophes, economic shocks and the ongoing fallout from COVID-19 are threatening to reverse hard-earned gains in South Asia. The COVID crisis has made it difficult for girls to access health care, education,

social services and community support.

"The world is engulfed by crises on top of crises that are crushing the hopes and dreams of vulnerable children, especially girls who should be students, not brides," said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell. "Health and economic crises, escalating armed conflicts, and the ravaging effects of climate change are forcing families to seek a false sense of refuge in child marriage. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that their rights to an education and empowered lives are secured."

In South Asia, levels of child marriage vary considerably across the region, from over 50 per cent in Bangladesh to 2 per cent in the Maldives. Within countries, there is further disparity: in Afghanistan, for example, there is a tenfold difference in prevalence across provinces.

However, overall, child brides in South Asia are more likely to live in poor households, have less education and reside in rural areas. For example, 1 in 4 child brides in Pakistan have never been to school.

Girls who marry in childhood face immediate and lifelong consequences. They are less likely to continue in school, and face an increased risk of early pregnancy, in turn increasing the risk of maternal complications and mortality. The practice can also isolate girls from family and friends and exclude them from participating in their communities, taking a heavy toll on their mental health and well-being.

"We've proven that progress to end child marriage is possible. It requires unwavering support for vulnerable girls and families," added Russell. "We must focus on keeping girls in school and making sure they have economic opportunities."

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### **Notes to editors:**

*Estimates of the global and regional prevalence of child marriage are calculated on the basis of national estimates in the UNICEF global databases, comprised of nationally representative data from over 100 countries. National data on child marriage are primarily drawn from household surveys, including the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and the USAID-supported Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). Demographic data*

are drawn from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. The latest estimates go up to the year 2022.

The South Asia report as well as country profiles for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan are [available here](#). Download photos [here](#).

## About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

UNICEF's [Regional Office for South Asia](#) (ROSA) works with UNICEF Country Offices in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to help to save children's lives, defend their rights, and help them fulfil their potential. For more information about UNICEF's work for children in South Asia, visit [www.unicef.org/rosa](http://www.unicef.org/rosa) and follow UNICEF ROSA on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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## UNESCO

PRESS RELEASE

### On World Press Freedom Day UNESCO Facilitates Stakeholder Consultation to Identify Media Development Priorities

**Islamabad** – The consultation was organized in collaboration with European Union Delegation to Pakistan, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Embassy of Sweden in Pakistan, High Commission of Canada in Pakistan, and Friedrich Naumann Foundation. More than 50 participants from civil society, government agencies, parliamentarians, digital media professionals, academia, international organizations, and missions participated.

Under this year's global theme of World Press Freedom Day "Shaping a Future of Rights" - Freedom of expression as a driver for all other human rights diverse group of experts focused on identifying priorities for media development. It is a follow up of recent research that took place in Pakistan based on UNESCO's global tool Media Development Indicators developed to assess media landscape in countries. During the event, media as a fundamental right, the significance of its freedom and media ethics, sustainability, and financial viability and themes such as disinformation, hate speech online especially in relation to election reporting were also discussed in detail.

The inaugural panel discussion highlighted the importance of safeguarding press freedom and promoting media diversity. UNESCO Director and Representative, Youssef Filali - Meknassi highlighted UNESCO's significant role in leading the debate to ensure that media freedom remains intact despite growing challenges such as disinformation or hate speech. Ms. Leslie Scanlon, High Commissioner reaffirmed Canada's unwavering support for media freedom globally highlighting the role of media as a cornerstone of a robust democracy.

During the expert panel discussion titled "Lessons learned from media development indicators and ensuring sustainability", the participants shared commitment to improve the media sector especially in dealing with generating revenues, countering disinformation and online hate speech to restore the credibility of information and quality of reporting. Zafar Abbas, editor DAWN and convenor of editors' safety forum highlighted the need for sustainability in media for more independent and responsible reporting. Mahim Maher, convenor of Pakistan Digital Editors Alliance suggested to invest more in digital platforms to create a credible news platform. Haroon Rashid, Managing Editor, Independent Urdu, and Jahanzaib Haque Digital Strategist DAWN proposed to make newsrooms more economically sound and sustainable, and ensuring and sharing best practices. The session was moderated by Asad Beg, Media Matters for Democracy.

Ms. Gharida Farooqi moderated the panel "Implementing Democratic Safeguards in the Media Space". Parliamentary Standing Committee Chair Naz Baloch acknowledged the challenges facing the media industry, especially by the women journalists and the need to adapt to rapidly changing technologies. The panel consisted of Mr. Afzal Butt (PFUJ) who also highlighted the need the urgency to implement the newly enacted law for journalists. Asad Beg, co-founder Media Matters for Democracy talked reducing the layers of legislations and shape holistic policies for future.