# India’s Plan to End Child Marriage

## Why in news?

The UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage team is on a visit to India to witness state interventions which have helped reduce the prevalence of child marriage.

## What is the situation of child marriage in the world?

- **Data** - According to data from UNICEF, the total number of girls married in childhood stands at **12 million per year**.
- The UNFPA-UNICEF estimates that 10 million children could become child brides as a result of the pandemic globally.
- **Concerns** - Although, the risk of marrying before the girl turns 18 has dropped by more than a third in South Asia, the progress has been uneven.
- The consequences of child marriage not only violates children’s rights, but also because results in more infant and maternal deaths.
- Children born to adolescent mothers have a greater possibility of seeing stunted growth as they have low weight at birth.

## Where does India stand?

- **Overall picture** - In India, child marriage reduced from 47.4% in 2005-06 to 26.8% in 2015-16, registering a decline of 21% points during the decade.
- In the last five years, it declined to **23.3% in 2020-21**, according to the latest National Family Health Survey-5 data.
- **Status of the States** - Among the bigger States, West Bengal and Bihar have the highest prevalence of girl child marriage.
- States with a large population of tribal poor have a higher prevalence of child marriage.
    - For instance, in Jharkhand, 32.2% of women in the age bracket 20-24 got married before 18, according to NFHS-5.
- Several States are pegged just below the national average.
- In Kerala, women who got married before the age of 18 stood at 6.3% in 2019-20 whereas it is 12.8% for Tamil Nadu.

*Odisha now has over 12,000 Child Marriage Free Villages.*

## What laws and policy interventions are available?

- **Legislations** - The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, aim at protecting children from violation of

rights.

- **Amendment of personal laws** - The government is keen on amending the personal laws governing marriages to stop the practice of child marriage.
- **Standing committee** - A parliamentary standing committee is weighing the pros and cons of raising the age of marriage for women to 21.
- **Helplines** – The government has introduced a CHILDLINE with short code **1098,** a 24X7 telephone emergency outreach service for children in crisis.
- **Commissions** - The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) undertakes various activities and programmes on the issue of child marriages and related matters.
- **Awareness** - Several thousand child marriage prohibition officers have been notified in Karnataka and 90,000 local gram panchayat members have been oriented to spread awareness on child marriage.
- **Schemes** - Schemes like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Shagun Scheme Aashirwad, etc. assist in reducing the percentage of child marriage in the state.

## What needs to be done?

- A lot more needs to be done on factors closely linked to child marriage, including
  - Eradication of poverty
  - Better education and public infrastructure facilities for children
  - Raising social awareness on health, nutrition, regressive social norms and inequalities
- There needs to be a focus on an all-pronged approach to end the practice - strong laws, strict enforcement, preparing an ideal situation on the ground to ensure that the girl child gets an education.
- The recommendations of the **Shivraj Patil Committee report 2011** that have helped bring down the percentage of child marriages in Karnataka can be incorporated in other states too.

### References


1. The Hindu│ How is India planning to end child marriage?
2. PIB│ Measures to Prevent Child Marriages
3. UNICEF│ UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage


## Quick fact

### UNPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage

- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)–United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage has been implemented since 2016 across 12 countries in Africa, Middle East and South Asia.

- It promotes the rights of adolescent girls to avert marriage and pregnancy, and enables them to achieve their aspirations through education and alternative pathways.
- It also addresses the underlying conditions that sustain child marriage, advocating for laws and policies that protect girls' rights.

## National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

- NCPCR was set up in 2007 as a statutory body under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005.
- It is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
- Under the NCPCR, the child is defined as a person in the 0 to 18 years age group.
- The Commission’s mandate is to ensure that all laws, policies, programmes, and administrative mechanisms are in consonance with the perspective as enshrined in the Constitution of India and also the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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