

Half.

That's the share of pregnancies that women and girls do not deliberately choose, worldwide.

This share is startlingly high. Nothing is more fundamental to bodily autonomy than the ability to decide whether or not to become pregnant. And yet, for far too many people, especially women and girls, this most life-altering reproductive choice is no choice at all.

Choosing whether to have children or not, and to decide on their number and spacing is a basic human right. So many unplanned and unwanted pregnancies raise questions about how much the rights and potential of women and girls are prioritized and valued.

We are happy to be parents for the first time. I supported my wife so that no other family members dare to dictate how many children we have.

-Vansy and El, Champasack

Many adolescent girls are getting pregnant. Very few youth are going to health facilities, so we need to make the services attractive to them.

-Sypaseuth, Savannakhet

I have four children, I decided to get an implant. I don't want more children in the coming years and I was looking for a contraception method that doesn't require me to travel often.

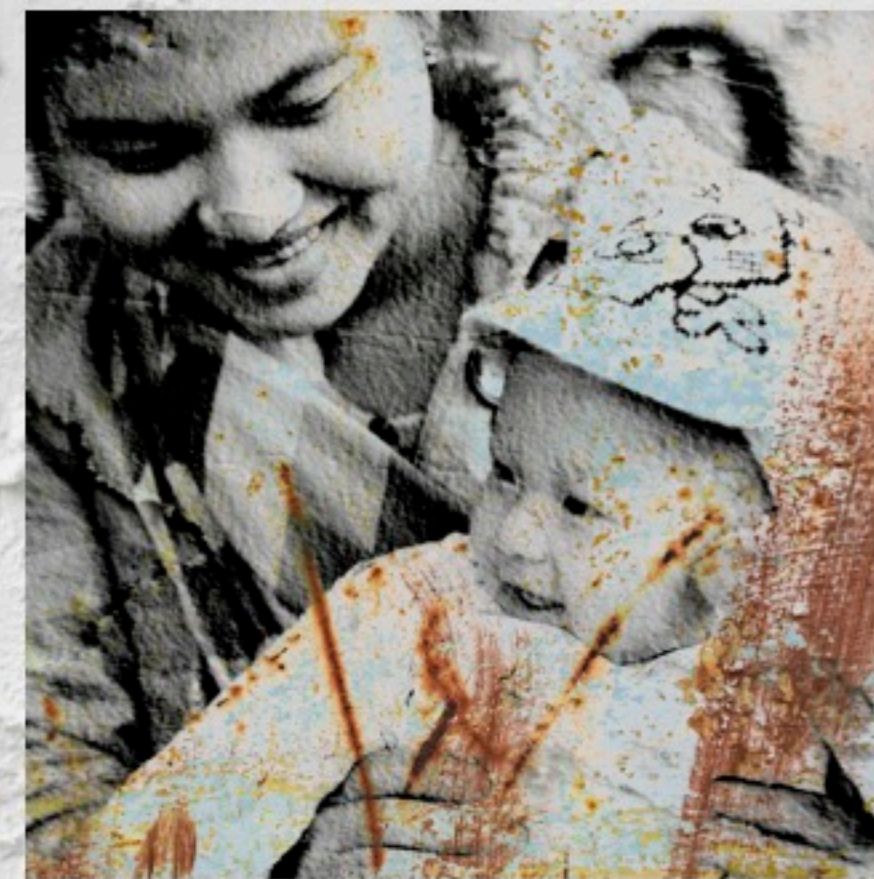
-Anonymous

Since midwives came to our village after the storm, women are feeling better. Those who are pregnant get care and those who do not want to have pregnancies can receive family planning services.

-Kham, 19, Attapeu



Ensuring rights and choices for all



## PREGNANCY BY CHOICE, NOT BY CHANCE

Unintended pregnancies in Lao PDR: factors, facts and response

<https://lao.unfpa.org> UNFPA Laos @UNFPALaoPDR UNFPA LaoPDR

The ICPD program of action, a foundational document endorsed by 179 countries including Lao PDR calls on all states and partners to "use the full means at their disposal to support the principle of voluntary choice in family planning"

Lao PDR commitments to **ICPD25** that support ending early and unintended pregnancies include:

### The use of Population Data

**Ending Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** by increasing the modern contraceptive prevalence rate to 70% and ensuring every health facility has a midwife.

**Ending unmet need** for family planning among adolescent girls through allocation of increased resources and expansion of quality youth friendly services including SRH information and Family planning services for women, men and unmarried young people country wide as well as in humanitarian response. Aiming to increase modern Contraceptive Prevalence Rate for young people aged 15-19 years to 45% by 2025.

**Ending Gender Based Violence (GBV)** and harmful practices, focusing on early marriage among adolescents through the revised National Action Plan for Prevention and Elimination of VAW 2021-2026 and the implementation of the Essential Service package for women and girls subjected to GBV.

**Fully integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education** in school curriculums nationwide through age-appropriate curriculum in primary, secondary and technical and vocational education and training institutions.

And increasing investments for adolescents and youth, especially young women through "Noi Framework" and "Noi Ecosystem".



UNFPA Lao PDR

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# Benefits of investing in family planning in Lao PDR

## Full scaling-up of family planning will help:

- Avert 1,044,888 unintended pregnancies.
- Avert 1077 maternal deaths.
- Generate US\$ 661.5 million in economic benefits by 2030.
- For each US\$ 1 invested in family planning, there is a return in investment of US\$ 7 on health, social development, education, employment, and economic growth.



## Protecting rights and choices requires immediate and long term actions

### Education System:

- Provide accurate information about reproduction and contraception in schools and for those out-of-school.
- Educate and empower young people and enable them to articulate their goals and choices.

### Health System:

- Ensure adolescent and youth-friendly services are available without disruption.
- Ensure access, availability and affordability of contraceptives everywhere, for everyone including men and boys, without discrimination.
- Address the stigma and discrimination that deprive youth from accessing sexual and reproductive health services and care.

- Invest in research and data to better understand unintended pregnancies and early childbearing, adjust services in response to the findings.
- Recognize the strong linkage between the investments on family planning as a game changer with returns on income, maternal and child health and nutrition.
- Development programs on education, nutrition and employment must include family planning.
- Long term whole of government and society shift: change the norms and cultural beliefs to protect the rights and safety of women and girls.
- Promote gender equality, equity and encourage men who typically hold more power to share power, decision making and respect the rights of female partners.

## Strengthen partnerships with the private sector so:

1. Private health service providers provide quality access to sexual and reproductive health information, care and support and include the data they generate in national reporting.
2. Factories employing young people ensure adequate mechanisms promoting employees' wellbeing and reproductive rights are protected.
3. Banks, hotels and other companies promote women, girls and youth rights through in-service programmes.

# The root causes and consequences

Unintended is not always unwanted. Many unintended pregnancies will be celebrated. Others will end in abortion or miscarriage.

Unsafe abortion is one of the leading causes of maternal death globally.

A share of pregnancies will remain unwanted, but carried to term, and many will be met with ambivalence. These pregnancies take place when an individual lacks bodily autonomy, the possibility to fully make decisions about themselves especially for sexual and reproductive health and pregnancy.

In many cases, unintended pregnancies happen because women do not have the ability to decide, they do not have full bodily autonomy, as they are:

- Unable to say no to sex (forced, coerced, raped, married while still a child, a survivor of violence)
- Unable to make decisions about their own health care
- Not able to choose whether to use contraception or which method
- Victims of cultural power, such as decisions made by their families and in-laws on the use of contraceptives and the number of children to have
- Not aware of contraception and family planning programmes because they drop out of school very young
- Not able to reach a health facility to receive sexual and reproductive health care
- Contraceptive failure; mistakes in use of contraception; or poor instructions on use of method

# UNFPA supports the Government of Lao PDR to protect sexual and reproductive health rights by:

- Advocating for increased leadership by the Lao Government to provide universal coverage of sexual and reproductive health services, particularly availability of family planning commodities.
- Providing policy advice and generating data and evidence on adolescents, family planning and other relevant topics.
- Supporting critical data including: the Population and Housing Census 2025, the ConVERGE initiative for civil registration to count everyone and ensure every citizen has access to services and care, the LSIS III for key social indicators.
- Strengthening health system and services through training counselors, health workers and midwives to provide family planning and adolescent youth-friendly services.
- Strengthening Education system for teacher training and delivery of comprehensive sexuality education in primary and secondary schools as well as in vocational training, universities and out-of-school.
- Providing essential life skills to those out-of-school through Nang Noi Girl's Groups.
- Social change by engaging men and boys to take an active and positive role in the promotion and access to family planning, by educating them on how to support women's choices and by involving village chiefs to promote positive masculinities.
- Engaging youth to speak up about their rights through the campaign: "Me, My Body, My Planet, My Future".
- Providing accurate information to youth through youth-friendly services, such as mobile vans, special rooms for youth at clinics, outreach and helplines, on methods and institutional health facilities for sexual and reproductive health care.
- Use of technology and innovation; developing Noi Yakhoo, a free mobile app on sexual and reproductive health; supporting hotlines for mental health and psychosocial support, sexual and reproductive health: 1361/females and 137/males, GBV, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Human Trafficking: 1362; Mental Health and Psychosocial Support: 1554.

# Leaving No One Behind



23.5% of adolescent girls (15-19) in Laos are married or in union

Hmong-Mien: 41.3%  
The poorest: 36.1%



45.9% of married women of reproductive age don't use any contraceptives

Hmong-Mien: 66.3%  
The poorest: 56.6%

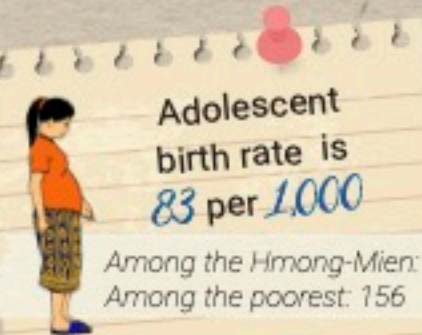
Worldwide, 45% of abortions are unsafe



13.4% of adolescent girls had a live birth

16.2% in rural areas

with roads: 15.3%  
without roads: 21.4%



Adolescent birth rate is 83 per 1,000

Among the Hmong-Mien: 192  
Among the poorest: 156



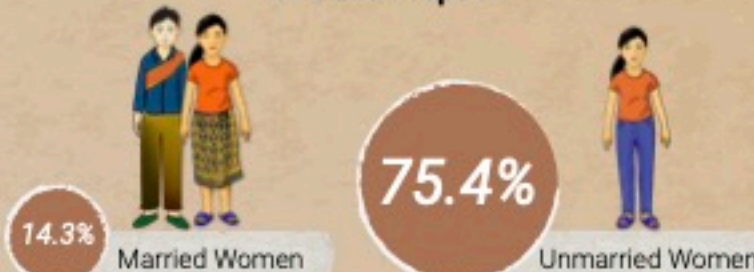
41.8% of girls aged 15-17 are out of school

Among the Poorest: 76.4%

Unmarried women of reproductive age, sexually active not using contraception: 85.5%  
Unmarried adolescent girls, sexually active, not using contraception: 85.9%

68% of married adolescent girls don't use contraception

## Unmet Need For Modern Methods Of Contraception



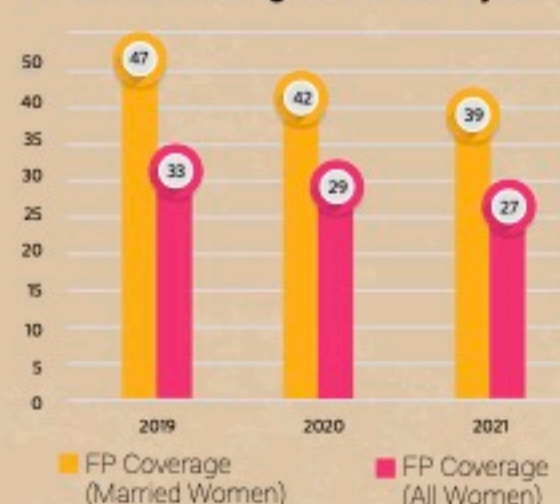
## Contraceptive Coverage and Unsafe Abortion



## Complications Due To Unsafe Abortion



## FP service coverage in the last 3 years



Unintended pregnancies per 1000 women aged 15-49: 51

## Unintended pregnancies are closely linked to:

- Loss of schooling
- Loss of income
- Gender inequality and vulnerability to gender-based violence, stigma, discrimination
- Poor health especially if mother is too young
- Lower development and fewer opportunities

