



Learning series session: The latest evidence on child marriage – trends in prevalence and burden around the world

Notes, actions and related resources, July 2023

Current trends

- **Globally, prevalence (percentage) and burden (absolute numbers) of child marriage^a are going down, but not fast or equitably enough** to meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of ending the practice by 2030.¹
 - Global prevalence is **19%**, down from 23% a decade ago.
 - **640 million** girls and women alive today were married before age 18.
 - At current rates of progress, it will take **300 years** to end child marriage.
- **Progress has been uneven within and across countries and regions**, and this is masked by reliance on national averages. Countries with lower levels of **gender inequality** have made the most progress on child marriage. Progress has been slow or negative among girls from the **poorest households**.
- **South Asia has seen the greatest declines in prevalence, but still has the greatest burden**. Nearly **half** (45%) of all girls and women who married before age 18 live in South Asia. A **third** live in India alone.²
- **Prevalence is stagnant and above the global average in West and Central Africa (WACA, 33%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC, 23%)**. Most girls who marry or enter a union here also give birth before age 18.³
 - **7 of the 10 countries** with the highest prevalence are in WACA, where ongoing crises are putting more girls at risk.
 - In the Sahel, prevalence is around **70%**. Around **95%** of married girls are out of school and **9 in 10** give birth before age 20.⁴ Between March and May 2022, about 26.5 million people in the region were in crisis with regards food security and nutrition.⁵
 - **2 of the 10 countries** with the highest burden are in LAC (Brazil and Mexico), where child marriage often takes the form of **informal unions, which are largely normalised**; data and evidence are not widely used to illustrate and advocate for change.
- **Multiple and interconnecting conflicts and crises – or a “polycrisis” – are threatening progress.**

^a The term “child marriage” refers to all child, early or forced marriage or unions where at least one party is under the age of 18.

- The polycrisis has pushed **75 to 95 million** additional people into extreme poverty.⁶ An estimated **575 million** people will be living in extreme poverty by 2030.⁷
- **10 million** more girls are expected to marry by 2030 due to the **COVID-19** pandemic alone.⁸
- A 10-fold increase in **conflict** deaths is related to a **7%** increase in child marriage.⁹ By the end of 2020, about 2 billion people were living in conflict-affected countries.¹⁰
- 10% change in rainfall due to **climate change** is related to a **1%** increase in child marriage.¹¹ Climate crisis could internally displace up to 216 million people by 2050.¹²

What needs to happen

Progress needs to happen nearly **20 times faster** to reach the SDG target.¹³ This means addressing the root causes of child marriage by:

- **Focusing on the girls who have been most marginalised** – including those who are, or have been, married or in a union – and advancing their rights, opportunities to organise and (collective) leadership.
- **Engaging families and communities**, including boys and men, religious and traditional leaders, teachers and health workers to promote positive masculinities and transform social norms.
- **Prioritising laws, policies and services within an ecosystem that centres human rights and respects evolving capacities.** This includes providing stigma-free and affordable sexual and reproductive health and rights, and 12 years' quality education, gender-equitable poverty reduction and women's participation in the formal labour force.
- **Generating and using new data and evidence – with and for girls and adolescents** – to show trends, fill gaps and design gender-transformative advocacy and programmes that respond to context. This includes investing in longitudinal surveys and collecting age-disaggregated data to show changes in the median age of marriage.

Related resources

- *Girls Not Brides*, 2020, [Child marriage in humanitarian contexts](#).
- The CRANK, 2022, [CRANK global convening: Learning from the latest evidence – efforts to address child marriage and support married girls](#), *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.
- The CRANK, 2023, [Evidence review: Child marriage interventions and research from 2020 to 2022](#), *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

- The CRANK, 2023, [CRANK research spotlight: Addressing child marriage and supporting married girls in conflict- and crisis-affected settings](#), *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.
- The CRANK, 2023, [CRANK research meeting: Child marriage in conflict- and crisis-affected settings – Learning from the latest evidence](#), *Girls Not Brides* and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.
- UNICEF, 2023, [Is an end to child marriage within reach? Latest trends and future prospects](#).
- UN, 2023, [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a rescue plan for people and planet](#).

¹ UNICEF, 2023, [Is an end to child marriage within reach? Latest trends and future prospects](#).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UNICEF, 2020, [Child marriage in the Sahel](#), UNECEF, New York.

⁵ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), 2023a, [Global sustainable development report.2023](#).

⁶ UN DESA, 2023b, [World economic situation and prospects 2023](#), New York, UN DESA.

⁷ UN, 2023, [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a rescue plan for people and plane](#).

⁸ UNICEF, 2023, op. cit.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ UN DESA, 2023a, op. cit.

¹¹ UNICEF, 2023, op. cit.

¹² UN DESA, 2023a, op. cit.

¹³ UNECEF, 2023, op. cit.