

# Child Marriage in Georgia (Overview)



**If I could, I would have changed everything except giving birth to my first child. I would have given more time to my career. I would have given more time to myself.**

—Child spouse, Tbilisi

## Child marriages

Early or child marriage is the union, whether official or not, of two persons, at least one of whom is under 18 years of age.<sup>1</sup> By virtue of being children, child spouses are considered to be incapable of giving full consent, meaning that child marriages should be considered a violation of human rights and the rights of the child. Child marriage is not a rare occurrence in Georgia and is linked to gender inequality, among other factors. In addition, the factors that trigger child marriage are not homogenous and vary according to religious, ethnic, and regional differences.

Child marriage is a gendered phenomenon that affects girls and boys in different ways. Overall, the number of boys in child marriages around the world is significantly lower than that of girls. Girl child spouses are also vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse within relationships that are unequal, and if they become pregnant, often experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not ready for childbearing. Upon marrying, both boys and girls often have to leave education to enter the workforce and/or take up domestic responsibilities at home.

Various international treaties, conventions, and programmes for action address child marriage. These include: the 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (which followed the UN Fourth World Conference on Women). These international instruments cover the abolishment of harmful customs and traditions, violence against the girl child, marriage consent, marriageable age, registration of marriage, and the freedom to choose a spouse.

This fact sheet provides information about child marriage in Georgia and offers recommendations aimed at addressing the issue. It includes a review of national legislation and the country's ratification of the various international standards relevant to the issue, analysis of current practices and attitudes towards child marriage, and statistical information about the prevalence of the practice. The methodology for this study involved a review of the existing legal framework and literature related to child marriage in Georgia, and interviews and focus groups with child spouses, community members, and experts.

*For a girl, marriage can mean the end of her education, can set aside her chances of a vocation or career, and can steal from her foundational life choices.*

—Dr. Babatunde  
Osotimehin, Executive  
Director, UNFPA



## Recommendations

- Set 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage. Exceptions should only be permitted in cases of pregnancy, and only if the would-be spouse has reached the age of 16.
- Conduct a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative research study into the issue of child marriage and its consequences. Information that is representative of the country as a whole is indispensable for the development of policy and intervention strategies.
- Integrate the issue of early marriage into the national policies and action plans related to gender equality and youth development, to ensure the implementation of international and national instruments related to children's and women's rights in Georgia.
- Organise a nationwide campaign to raise awareness about the issue of child marriage and its adverse manifestations. In particular, such a campaign should focus on the most affected areas of the country where there are higher rates of child marriage, and abortion, among girls under the age of 18. Partner with UNFPA offices in neighbouring countries to conduct such campaigns among the ethnic minority groups, using materials in local languages that are culturally and socially appropriate.
- The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia should develop comprehensive 'reproductive health and rights' education lessons appropriate to the cultural context and the students' ages, and introduce these into the school curriculum. In addition, special training programmes should be provided for teachers. The training programmes should include modules on gender equality and girls' rights to education and family planning.
- Provide training on girls' rights and gender equality to primary healthcare and reproductive healthcare providers to enable them to provide counselling to mothers of adolescent girls, and introduce youth-friendly reproductive health services at the primary healthcare level.
- Adopt effective initiatives to integrate ethnic minority communities into the wider society.

### Legal and national context

Georgia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1994. In theory, these international initiatives, along with national

legislation – namely, the Civil Code, Criminal Code, and the Law on Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection, and Assistance of Domestic Violence Victims (2006) – should ensure the protection of children's rights. In practice, as the interviews carried out for this study revealed, the lack of implementation mechanisms, strategies, and monitoring mean that these instruments do not function effectively.

*“Georgia has ratified the CRC. This makes the government responsible. Even if the national legislation was not adequate, the CRC is more important, and we should refer to it. In the national legislation, the minimum age for marriage is 18, but there are exceptions when 16 is the age one can marry. This is inadequate because a 16-year-old child becomes ‘emancipated’. This implies that the child acquires the rights and responsibilities of an adult.”* (Expert)

In addition, there are exceptions and inconsistencies in the legislation that make it problematic and ineffective. For instance, according to the Civil Code, an individual is legally considered a child until the age of 18. However, there are two exceptions by which someone ceases, legally, to be a child and becomes an adult: if she or he gets married at the age of 16, or has to lead a specific enterprise.

Experts and research participants interviewed for this study noted that the issue of early marriage is not taken seriously at either the state or the societal level. In addition, child marriage is not currently a priority for either child rights or women's rights organizations. Child marriage is addressed by a few organisations only as it relates to other issues. For example, experts noted that women's organisations working on domestic violence may address early marriage indirectly while working with domestic violence victims.

*“In the children's welfare strategy, this problem is not even ... mentioned. Nobody talks about this problem. They talk about children's poverty, street children, etc., but from the age of 16, if a girl is married, she is not considered a child.”* (Expert)

### Who can contract a marriage?

Article 1108 of the Georgian Civil Code states that the minimum legal age for marriage is 18; however, the law allows exceptions, such as marriage with parental consent from the age of 16. If the intended child spouse is between the ages of 16 and 18 and does not have parental consent, they can appeal to the court to allow them to contract a marriage.<sup>2</sup> Experts noted that the court grants permission in case of exceptional circumstances, such as pregnancy.

Article 140 of the Criminal Code stipulates that cohabitation with a child under the age of consent, which is 16, shall be punished by deprivation of liberty for up to three years.<sup>3</sup> In cases of illegal marriages involving girls under 16, the police should take action against the culprit. However, a former policeman interviewed for this study stated that when it comes to such marriages, police are reluctant to intervene and ‘break up anyone’s family’.

At present, there is no criminal legislation specifically addressing forced marriage.

*“The marriage exists only from when it is registered. A marriage cannot be registered if the couple is [under] the age of 16. If we mean the case when 12, 13, and 14-year-old individuals get married, it is against the law. ... To solve this problem, the government’s only mechanism is the authority regulating parental care, which can say that parents are not taking basic care of their children and can restrict their parental rights.”* (Expert)

According to the Constitutional Treaty between the Georgian state and the Georgian Orthodox Church, the state should recognise marriages performed by the Orthodox Church. However, in reality only civil marriages registered in the office of the Civil Registry of Georgia are legally recognised.

Research analysing the impact of minimum age for marriage laws in 115 in low- and middle-income countries between 1989 and 2007 reveals that countries whose laws adhered strictly to the international standards (by setting the minimum age for marriage at 18) were the most effective at reducing rates of adolescent fertility. However, countries that set the minimum age for marriage

at 18, but permit some exceptions such as marriage with parental consent, were indistinguishable from countries that had no such legal minimum age for marriage.<sup>4</sup> This suggests the need to amend the current legislation and to set the minimum age for marriage at 18 without any exceptions, in order to bring about real change in combating the grave consequences of child marriage.

*“If there were a law prohibiting marriage before the age of 18, people would obey the law. There would be only a few exceptions.”* (Expert)

### Family planning and reproductive rights

In Georgia, the Law on Health Protection and the Law on the Rights of the Patient guarantee the right of all citizens to have access to medical services.<sup>5,6</sup> Article 41 (2) of the Law on the Rights of the Patient states that ‘health services shall be provided to a minor under 16 only [with the] consent of his/her parents or legal representative’.<sup>7</sup> However, Article 40 (2) provides some exceptions for adolescents aged 14 to 18, who can consult healthcare providers for ‘the treatment of sexually transmitted disease[s] or drug abuse or for counselling about nonsurgical methods of contraception or for abortion’.<sup>8</sup> In this case a patient has an important right of informed consent and is allowed to obtain reproductive health services confidentially.

*“Medical assistance without parental consent is legal from the age of 16. Sixteen is the age when emancipation happens. If a girl gets married at the age of 16, she ceases to be a child.”* (Expert)

In Georgia obstetricians, gynaecologists, and ‘reproductologists’ (trained physicians) can provide services and counselling for family planning. This research shows, though, that girls belonging to ethnic minorities may face some additional barriers in accessing medical facilities; for instance, language barriers.

The law also permits termination of pregnancy within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. It should be performed by a doctor in a licensed medical facility with the written consent of the woman. The law imposes additional legal requirements for an abortion after 12 weeks.<sup>9</sup> Data from the 2010 Reproductive

“Girls [from ethnic minority groups] can't go alone to the doctor because they don't know Russian, they don't speak Georgian, [or know] how should they communicate with the doctor. The elders know a little Russian and a little Georgian.”

(Child spouse, member of an ethnic minority)

Health Survey Georgia indicate a higher abortion rate among ethnic minorities as well as a higher level of fertility among Azeri women aged 15-19 (143 per 1,000) than among Georgian women aged 15-19 (30 per 1,000) — for example, 3.3 abortions per woman belonging to the Azeri ethnic group compared to 1.5 abortions per ethnic Georgian woman.<sup>10</sup>

According to the same Reproductive Health Survey, awareness of any method of contraception is lowest in the Kvemo Kartli region and highest in Tbilisi. In addition, the survey shows that ethnic Georgian women use modern methods more often and traditional methods less often than do ethnic Azeri and Armenian women.<sup>11</sup>

The Reproductive Health Survey also found that some 76.6 per cent of married women aged 15 to 19 years used no method of modern contraception.<sup>12</sup> The main reasons that women gave for not using contraception were related to pregnancy, fertility, or sexual activity.<sup>13</sup> Other reasons for this may be found in the absence of exposure to contraceptive counselling and family planning. The survey also found that access to contraceptive counselling is higher among Georgian women than among women of other ethnic groups.<sup>14</sup>

In Georgia, education on reproductive health issues is not part of the school curriculum. Only some elements of reproductive biology have been incorporated into high school biology and anatomy classes, which do not provide substantive knowledge on this matter. The Reproductive Health Survey Georgia found that only 3 per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 stated that they had learned about contraception at school before they reached age 18. Moreover, the most important sources of information about sexual matters among young women aged 15 to 17 were friends (31 per cent) and parents (26 per cent), according to the survey.<sup>15</sup>

Very few of the child spouses who were interviewed knew anything about reproductive health and family planning when they married. Most of the

girls interviewed revealed that they became pregnant immediately or soon after getting married. The experience of child spouses shows that there is no question of using contraception until they have given birth, because they are under pressure to fulfil social expectations to get pregnant as soon as possible.

“If the girl does not conceive a baby immediately after marriage, it is considered a problem, and the in-laws start searching for doctors to treat their daughter-in-law. That she should conceive immediately after the marriage is not even a question.” (Expert)

### Child marriages in Georgia

Until now no comprehensive research has been conducted in Georgia regarding the scale, motives, and consequences of child marriage. The reasons behind this vary from the invisibility of the problem until recent years, to the lack of complete statistical data. The existing limited data is a side product of research conducted into reproductive health and human rights.

The existing data shows that up to 17 per cent of Georgian women were married before the age of 18. Georgia has one of the highest rates of female marriage under age 18 among European countries, along with Moldova (19 per cent) and Turkey (14 per cent).<sup>16</sup> However, the data is not complete because most child marriages are not officially registered. Information about the number of registered marriages by age group is not sufficient to examine trends in child marriage, because marriages of people up to age 16 cannot be officially registered.

The existing data for Georgia and the research findings from this study indicate that the situation with regard to child marriage is not homogenous, but rather varies according to ethnic, religious, and regional factors. It would appear that child marriages occur more frequently among certain ethnic and religious groups, namely, religious minorities in the mountainous areas of Adjara, and ethnic minorities in Kvemo Kartli region. According to a recent research report, in Kvemo Kartli region, 32 per cent of married women among ethnic minorities were married before the age of 18, while 5 per cent of married women got married at the age of 13 or 14, and 16 per cent at the age of 15 or 16.<sup>17</sup>



“The problem is that the government may not know about early marriages, because the marriages are unregistered, especially in villages. If a woman is called ‘married’, that’s enough for society, and nobody bothers to deal with the government. That’s why the government hardly knows whether this type of early union occurs.” (Expert)

Child marriage is associated with a number of grave consequences for girls, such as social isolation, absence of reproductive control, and dropping out of school. While early school dropout may be linked to poverty, a report by the Georgian Public Defender found a strong relationship between girls leaving education and child marriage. The report states that between 2011 and January 2013, 7,367 girls left school early. A review of the few available reports suggests that the school dropout rate is especially alarming in the Kvemo Kartli region and in Tbilisi.<sup>18</sup> The Centre for Children’s Rights of the Public Defender of Georgia organised a campaign to raise awareness about children’s rights in the Kvemo Kartli region in 2013. During this project, several schoolteachers were interviewed who revealed that girls had dropped out of school because of child marriage. The report showed that during the last five years, 341 students dropped out of schools in Marneuli (a city in Kvemo Kartli) in order to get married.<sup>19</sup>

“Society still does not consider early marriage a big problem. There are regions heavily characterised by early marriages. ... Regions [in Georgia] populated with Muslims often practice early marriage, especially in the Kvemo Kartli and Adjara regions, because it’s [seen as] very natural and ordinary.” (Expert)

The findings of the interviews with experts, child spouses, and community members carried out for this study support the argument that there is a strong link between school dropout and early marriage. In some regions, there is little value attached to girls’ education, and to their role in society. Especially in socially disadvantaged families, girls drop out

of school, and then the only option left for them is marriage. Alternatively, they may drop out when they become engaged, but before they actually marry; only if the future husband ‘allows’ it can a girl who is engaged continue her education.

“When a girl is born, she is always told that she will get married, she should learn how to cook, how to clean and wash; nobody tells her that she should read or write.” (Child spouse, ethnic minority)

Parents failing to send their children to school face administrative penalties. Article 172 of the Georgian Code of Administrative Offences states that parents guilty of ‘non-fulfilment of the obligation of upbringing and educating children’ should receive a warning or be required to pay an administrative fine.<sup>20</sup> However, in practice, these penalties are rarely enforced. It is considered inappropriate to interfere in the family even in cases of violation of the law. As one respondent noted: ‘Parents say that “she is my daughter and I will do whatever I want, nobody can interfere.”’ Societal support for views such as this has serious implications for girls, because it takes for granted and reinforces inequalities and injustice within the household.

Respondents in the region among ethnic and religious minorities stated that teachers as well as the local society in general are not aware of the negative aspects of early marriages, and they are even involved in the process of arranged marriages. That’s why the constructive actions to be taken by the Ministry of Education are important to prevent students from dropping out of school.

“In one of the articles, the Ministry of Education states that ‘if parents make their children leave school, we cannot do anything’. The convention [CRC] states that parents may violate a child’s rights, but the government should defend his or her rights. The problem arises when the government’s representative speaker says they cannot do anything about this problem.” (Expert)

This research only covered a small region of the country; these limited findings indicate that early marriages take place across Georgia, in both urban and rural areas, but that the characteristics of the practice, as well as the factors triggering it, vary. For instance, early marriages arranged by parents seem to be more widespread among ethnic and religious minorities, especially in the regions.

First and foremost, both in the capital and in the regions covered, this research found that early marriage is associated with poverty and low social status. Early marriage for daughters is a desirable solution for families in economic hardship. In addition, tensions and difficulties at home may mean that girls see early marriage as a way out of a precarious situation.

*“The marriage is actually a big responsibility and ‘burden’, which is very difficult to carry. At that time I did not realise this. Actually, I did not know at all what’s happening with me. Now I also link this with the tense environment in my family of origin. I think I ran away from their problems. I closed myself off in my new family and did not want even to go out.”* (Child spouse)

Secondly, this research found that in some regions, early marriages outside of Tbilisi are justified by unwritten traditions and norms, which support the practice. According to community members participating in this study, these traditions are actually relatively new, and can be traced back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the unemployment and social and economic instability that accompanied it. Experts interviewed also observed that there was a rise in the number of early marriages in the 1990s after the break-up of the Soviet Union, when unemployment and socioeconomic hardships became common in the country.

In the 1990s, early marriage across the country was linked with bride kidnapping. Respondents stated that in order to prevent their daughters from being kidnapped, parents would marry them early to a suitable groom. Bride kidnapping was also linked to school dropout, as parents would remove their daughters from school to protect them from the threat of kidnapping. In the years since bride kidnapping became regulated by criminal law, cases of abduction have decreased tremendously and now rarely occur.

*“The law may change something in this situation. For instance, when I asked, ‘Why don’t you want your children to marry at an early age?’ they replied that nowadays they are not afraid that their girls will be kidnapped. ... Kidnapping is a punishable illegal action regulated by the criminal code. If someone wants to kidnap a bride, now he knows he will be punished by the law. ... Because they were afraid of the law, the practice of bride kidnapping has almost stopped.”* (Expert)

Experts interviewed for this study cited other reasons for child marriage, including lack of integration of some ethnic and religious minorities into the wider society. Many girls and young women from these communities don’t speak Georgian adequately, which makes their isolation more profound and does not provide them with many options in terms of a career. This reinforces gender roles and triggers early marriage as the only alternative and ‘unavoidable destiny’ for girls.

*“I think the Ministry of Education must intervene in this issue. Education is needed, and awareness must be raised. This should not be aggressive but entertaining and interesting for the local population. There is no other way. I asked what the girls liked and what hobbies they had. It was very difficult to get answers from them. They don’t know because they just watch TV shows at night and don’t visit friends. There are no events to go to. Above all, they don’t speak Georgian, and there is no interaction with the state. ... They don’t feel that they are your co-citizens. They are a very isolated and closed community.”* (Expert)

Experts also noted that this problem has another dimension with regard to ethnic and religious minorities, when the state does not want to interfere in matters of local customs, in the name of ‘respecting their traditions’.

“At the trainings and discussions I attended, the police and concerned authorities stated that the issue is very sensitive and complex when it comes to the important traditions of ethnic minorities. That’s why early marriage is a very sensitive issue.” (Expert)

Further, the research suggests that in Tbilisi as well as in the regions, early marriage may be related to control of women’s sexuality. The findings of the Reproductive Health Survey 2010 confirmed that traditional norms are strong and sexual abstinence before marriage is a common practice.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, tradition implicitly triggers early marriages by leaving no alternative relationship, other than marriage. Girls are not always forced to marry: it may be their ‘choice’ resulting from their desire to conform, or fear of social stigma. Another factor is a lack of information about sexual and reproductive health, which leads to a higher probability of girls becoming pregnant, which in turn is one of the reasons for early marriage. According to the respondents in this study, pregnant adolescents are more likely to marry to ‘legitimise’ their pregnancies and avoid social disapproval. In 2012, babies born to adolescent mothers aged 15-19 accounted for approximately 10 per cent of all births in Georgia.<sup>22</sup>

“Early marriage [disrupted] my personal development. I was a very good student at school, but after the marriage I could not attend school. After a few years I enrolled in college, but after graduation my husband did not allow me to work. We had no financial need. It made me very dependent on my husband; I was very vulnerable.” (Child spouse, Tbilisi)

The findings of the Reproductive Health Survey Georgia suggest that women who married before 18 were most likely to have not completed secondary or higher education.<sup>23</sup> All the child spouses interviewed for this study expressed regret that they married before the age of 18. They felt special remorse over their inability to continue their studies, and that marrying early had reduced their educational and career prospect.

“I was 16 years old when I got married. I did not agree, but my parents wanted me to get married. I did not love him and I did not think about marriage. I thought that the marriage was the end of my life. I wanted to study, but I could not study because of my parents. They thought I should marry and there is no necessity for me to study.” (Child spouse, member of an ethnic minority)

Child spouses interviewed for this study lived with their parents-in-law at the beginning of their marriage. Some experienced a great deal of stress and pressure from the mother-in-law, and after some time managed to ‘escape’ and live separately with their husbands. The only advantage child spouses highlighted in regard to early marriage was their children. For some respondents, it was only their children who gave meaning to their lives.

## Responses to child marriage

Experts interviewed for this study stated that so far, the state, in general, has not recognised early marriage as an issue and has not taken prompt actions to eliminate this practice. In addition, the issue is not considered a priority by women’s and children’s rights NGOs in the country, and there have been no targeted responses.

**Reaching out to young people.** Informal education has been used to improve access to reliable information on reproductive health and rights issues among young people in Georgia. UNFPA is a leader in piloting and disseminating a youth peer education concept in the country, creating a highly effective and sustainable model that is being widely utilised to bring information and education messages to young people. Aspects of the programme include youth forums, active participation of media, youth information-education sessions at summer camps, a wide range of educational materials, and other initiatives. Young people have been the special target group for awareness-raising activities. More than 600 peer educators have been trained on gender equality, HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health and rights. More than 55,000 young people, including those from vulnerable groups, such as IDPs and minorities, have been reached since 2006. However, integration of these issues into the formal education system is essential to ensure sustainable changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour among young people.

## Key points

According to the Civil Code, the minimum age for marriage is 18 years, but marriages can take place from age 16 with parental consent or in special circumstances. This makes the law practically ineffective.

Despite the fact that legislation stipulates what should be done in the event of marriage under the age of 16, these laws are not properly applied.

Reproductive health and rights education is not part of the school curriculum. As a result adolescents lack appropriate information on this subject. Due to this lack of knowledge of reproductive health issues and the social expectations pressuring girls to become pregnant immediately after marriage, child marriages result in early motherhood in Georgia.

Early marriage is a nationwide social problem, but the reasons that trigger child marriage are not homogenous and vary according to religious, ethnic, and regional factors. Traditions and patriarchal values intersecting with poverty and lack of education are the main trigger behind child marriage in regions populated by ethnic and religious minorities.

Neither the state nor the public recognises child marriage as a problem. As a result, child marriage is not well researched.

Child marriage is not a priority for child rights defence organisations or women's rights organisations. It is only indirectly addressed by women's NGOs and as a side-product of other issues, namely domestic violence.

Child marriage is one of the main reasons leading girls to curtail their education. After getting married or engaged (in the case of some ethnic minorities in some parts of the country), girls drop out of school.

## Quotes

*If there were a law prohibiting marriage before the age of 18, people would obey the law. There would be only a few exceptions.* (Expert)

*National legislation is in accordance with international legislation. The only problem is that of implementation. The parental care regulatory authority is not active enough.* (Legal expert)

*I think it is very necessary to have reproductive health education in school. ... The abortion rate is so high because there is a lack of information on this issue.* (Expert)

*Of course, the socioeconomic factor is important, but there [in Kvemo Kartli], this practice has become the norm, and they don't see it as abnormal. When we asked them and mentioned that marriage younger than age 16 is illegal, they did not understand the meaning.* (Expert)

*The society does not consider early marriage as a problem. However, if you show them the real aspects of it and explain, then they start seeing it as a problem... First, we should recognise that it's a problem and then we can think about a solution.* (Expert)

*... [The Centre for Children and Women's Rights at the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia] and UNFPA are the only ones working on this issue. It's being missed everywhere.* (Expert)

*In 12th grade there are 25 boys and only five or six girls. In the 1st grade the number of boys and girls is equal, but after 9th grade girls drop out of school, because of their family or other life circumstances.* (Teacher, member of an ethnic minority)



## Data overview

<b>Total population (2012):</b>	4,497,600 <sup>24</sup>
<b>Life expectancy at birth as of 2011:</b>	70.2 (males); 78.6 (females) <sup>25</sup>
<b>Population under age 15 (2012):</b>	17.6% <sup>26</sup>
<b>Unemployment rate (2009):</b>	16.9% <sup>27</sup>
<b>Youth literacy rate:</b>	100% (both males and females) <sup>28</sup>
<b>Health expenditure per capita per year (2009):</b>	US \$564 <sup>29</sup>
<b>Main ethnic groups:</b>	Georgians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Armenians, Russians, Azerbaijanis, Yezidis, Kists <sup>30</sup>
<b>Main religions:</b>	Orthodox Christian (official), Islam <sup>31</sup>
<b>Main languages:</b>	Georgian (official), Russian, Armenian, Azeri <sup>32</sup>
<b>Number of marriages in 2012:</b>	30,412 <sup>33</sup>
<b>Average age at first marriage (2010):</b>	21.9 <sup>34</sup>
<b>Age-specific fertility rate for ages 15-19 (2010):</b>	39.0 births per 1,000 women <sup>35</sup>
<b>Total fertility rate for ages 15-49 (2010):</b>	2.0 <sup>36</sup>

## Child marriage statistics

**Table 1.** Marriages by bride's age and groom's age (2012)<sup>37</sup>

Total number of marriages	Bride's age (years)		Groom's age (years)	
	Under 16	16-19	Under 16	16-19
30,412	n/a	4137 (14%)	n/a	842 (3%)

**Table 2.** Live births by mother's age (2012)<sup>38, 39</sup>

Total number of live births	Mother's age (years)					
	Under 15	15	16	17	18	Total under 18
57,031	26 (0.05%)	114	425	977	1,602	3,144 (5.5%)

Age-specific data on stillbirths and number of abortions was not available.

**Table 3.** Percentage of girls aged 15-19 married or in union, by level of education (2005) (data not available for men)<sup>40</sup>

Level of education	% women 15-19 years married/in union
Primary	34.0
Secondary – not completed	N/A
Secondary or higher	7.1
No education	49.1

N.B. up-to-date statistics are not available.

**Table 4.** Percentage of women who were first married before the age of 18, by wealth quintile (2005) (data not available for men)<sup>41</sup>

Wealth quintile	% women married before age 18
Lowest	29.1
Second	21.0
Middle	18.3
Fourth	11.3
Highest	12.6

N.B. up-to-date statistics are not available.

## Notes and references

- 1 A child is 'every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier'. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), available at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> (accessed 29 May 2012).
- 2 Georgian Civil Code. Article 1108.
- 3 Georgian Criminal Code. Article 140.
- 4 Kim, M., Boyle E.H., Longhofer W., and Brehm, H.N. (2013) 'When do laws matter? National minimum-age-of-marriage laws, child rights, and adolescent fertility, 1989-2007', *Law and Society Review*, 47(3), pp.589-619.
- 5 The Law on Health Protection. Article 6.
- 6 The Law on the Rights of the Patient. Article 5.
- 7 The Law on the Rights of the Patient. Article 41 (2).
- 8 The Law on the Rights of the Patient, Chapter VIII, Article 40.
- 9 The Law on Health Protection. Article 140. Georgian Criminal Code. Article 133.
- 10 Georgia Centre for Disease Control (NCDC); Georgian Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs (MOLHSA); Division of Reproductive Health-Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2012), *Reproductive Health Survey Georgia 2010: Final Report*, Tbilisi: UNFPA, UNICEF, USAID, p.52.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, p.150.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.257
- 16 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012) *Marrying Too Young*, New York: UNFPA.
- 17 Institute of Social Studies and Analysis (2013) *Revealing the Needs and Priorities of Ethnic Minority Women in Kvemo Kartli*, Tbilisi: UN Women.
- 18 Public Defender of Georgia (2012) *Annual Report*, Tbilisi: Public Defender of Georgia.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.710.
- 20 Georgian Code of Administrative Offences. Article 172.
- 21 NCDC, MOLHSA, and CDC (2012), *op. cit.*
- 22 GEOSTAT (2012) Fertility rates according to age group for the year 2012, [http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p\\_id=1090&lang=geo](http://www.geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=1090&lang=geo) (accessed 20 November 2013).
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- 25 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2011) Countries in Figures, Georgia. Available at: <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/profiles2011/Georgia.pdf> (accessed 20 November 2013).
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## Key messages

When a girl delays marriage, everyone benefits. A girl who marries later is more likely to stay in school, work, and reinvest her income into her family. Crucially, a girl who marries later is more empowered to choose whether, when, and how many children to have. When investments in girls are made, everyone benefits: their families, communities, and most importantly, the girls themselves.

There is a huge cost to inaction on child marriage. It is time for policy-makers, parliamentarians, communities, families, and young people to address this issue head on. Let's deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled. Let girls be girls.

Child marriage violates girls' rights, denies them of their childhood, disrupts their education, jeopardises their health, and limits their opportunities. No cultural, religious, or economic rationale for child marriage can possibly justify the damage these marriages do to young girls and their potential. A girl should have the right to choose whom she marries and when. Parents want the best for their children, and need to support their girls' choices and decisions to marry.

UNFPA is working with governments and partners at all levels of society to deliver comprehensive programmes addressing the needs of vulnerable and married girls, and providing access to livelihoods, social support and health programmes, including reproductive health. The ultimate aim is to end child marriage in this generation and to shift cultural attitudes to protect girls' rights.

## What must be done to break the silence on child marriage?

Bring greater attention to the situations faced by married girls and girls at risk of child marriage, and advocate strongly for their rights. Child marriage is not good for girls or development. The world cannot afford to see the rights, health, and potential of thousands of girls each day being squandered.

Promote investments that build up adolescent girls' capabilities and skills, especially education. Girls' education, particularly post-primary and secondary, is the single most important factor associated with age at marriage. Girls especially need social support and access to programmes that provide life skills, literacy, livelihoods, and reproductive health information and services, such as family planning and life-saving maternal health services.

## Invest in adolescent girls!

Investments should provide platforms for vulnerable girls to develop life skills and critical health knowledge, obtain access to social services including reproductive health and HIV prevention, gain vocational and employable skills for work, and have access to friends and mentors.

Married girls need special targeted strategies that provide access to education, life skills, and health including SRH and HIV prevention, and opportunities to participate fully in society. Maternal health programmes need to be reoriented with dedicated outreach for the youngest, first-time mothers, to enable them to use antenatal, essential and emergency obstetric care, and post-delivery services.

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