

ACCELERATING
EFFORTS TO
ELIMINATE
CHILD
MARRIAGE
IN AFRICA



Overview of child marriage in Africa

Across Africa, 125 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday.

Overall, over one in three young women in Africa were married in childhood, and one in ten before their 15th birthday.

The percentage of young women married before age 18 is above 30 per cent in Central, Southern, and Eastern Africa and above 40 per cent in Western Africa, where child brides are also younger: this region has the highest prevalence of marriage before age 15 in the world.

The prevalence of child marriage among young women varies across countries in Africa, from as low as 2 per cent in Tunisia to as high as 76 per cent in Niger. Eight of the ten countries in which child marriage is most common worldwide are located in Africa.

Child marriage levels have decreased slightly compared to earlier generations. Twenty-five years ago, nearly half were married before age 18 and about one in six were married before age 15.

Today, seven countries have levels of child marriage below 10 per cent (Tunisia, Algeria, Swaziland, Djibouti, South Africa, Rwanda and Namibia), compared to just one country 25 years ago (Namibia).

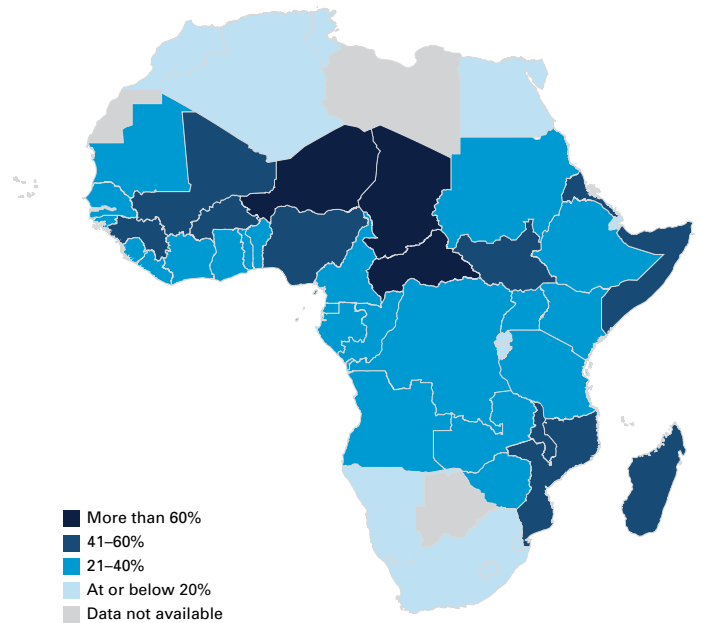
Of the seven African countries with a child marriage prevalence above 50 per cent, four show no signs of decline (Central African Republic, Chad, Burkina Faso and South Sudan).

Progress in reducing child marriage in Africa is insufficient and at the current rate, it would take at least a century to eliminate the practice.



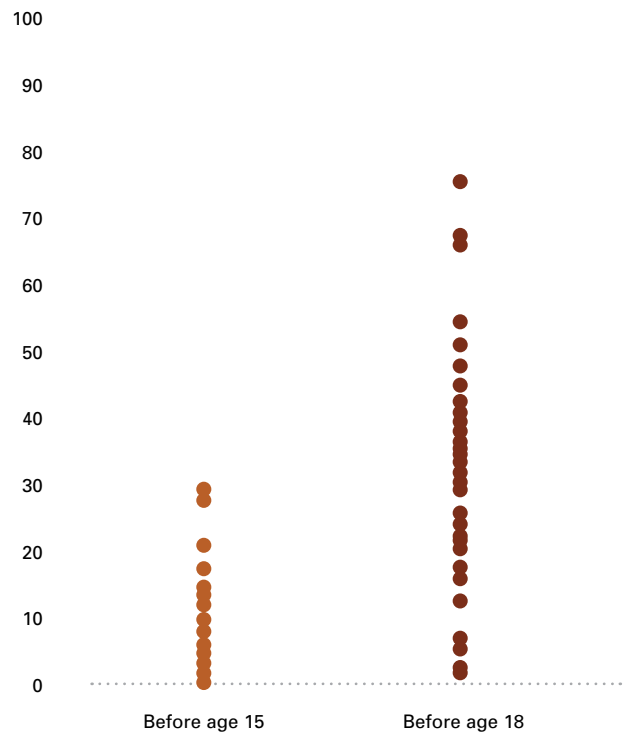
One in three young women in Africa were married or in union before age 18; levels vary widely by country

Women aged 20–24 who were married or in union before age 18



Note: This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The final boundary between Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area has not yet been determined.

Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 15 and 18

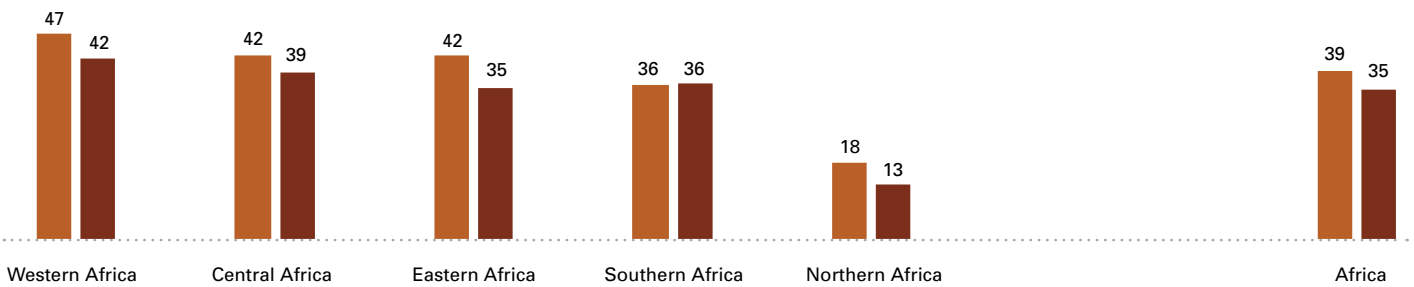


Note: Each dot represents an African country

Child marriage has become less common across Africa in the past 15 years

Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, 2000-2015

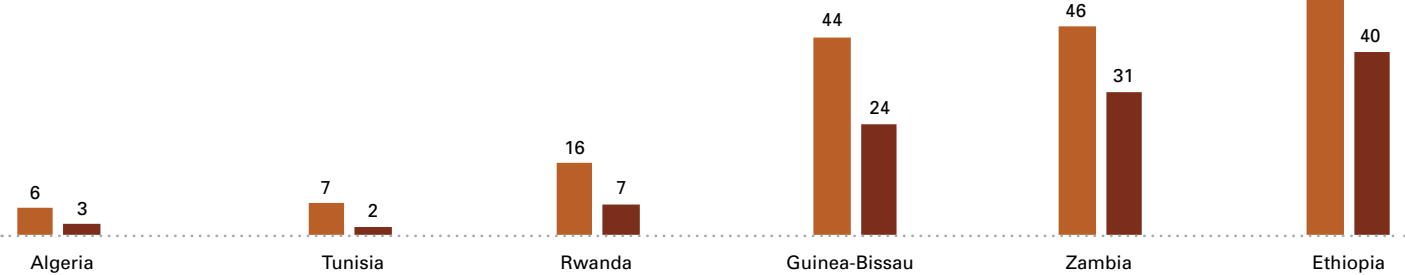
■ Around 2000 ■ Around 2015



There are examples across Africa of great progress in reducing child marriage, even from high starting levels

Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, 2000-2015

■ Around 2000 ■ Around 2015



All regions of Africa would need substantial acceleration in order to eliminate child marriage by 2030

Average annual rate of reduction in the prevalence of child marriage

■ Observed over last 15 years ■ Required for elimination by 2030



SDG context

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents a new level of ambition in social, economic and environmental development. The international community's adoption of this Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents both a commitment to complete the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and an expansion into areas like combating inequality, building peaceful societies, protecting human rights and ensuring protection of the planet.

Goal 5 of the SDGs seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, acknowledging that gender inequality is a persistent reality and an impediment to global progress.

Within Goal 5, Target 5.3 aims for the elimination of all harmful practices. This is one of the new aspirations introduced in the SDGs which was not addressed in MDGs. The target of elimination by 2030 is an ambitious goal for a practice as widespread and persistent as child marriage, and indicates that there is no tolerable level of child marriage.

The elimination of child marriage is named as a target of the Sustainable Development Goals; progress towards this target will represent not only a gain for children's rights and wellbeing, benefiting those who delay marriage, but could also advance progress towards the other SDGs. A selection of goals which stand to see the greatest effect from the elimination of child marriage are highlighted below:



Notes: Aggregate estimates are based on a subset of 45 countries with available data from 2010-2016, covering 90 per cent of the female population in Africa. The African sub-regions are based on the regional classification of the African Union. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the female population.

Data sources: UNICEF global databases, 2017, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other nationally representative surveys, 2003-2016. For detailed source information by country, please see data.unicef.org. Population data are from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, DVD Edition.

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