



Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage UNFPA Fact Sheet^[1]

WHAT IS CHILD MARRIAGE?

Child marriage is a formal or customary union where one or both partners are under 18. While boys are affected, child marriage impacts girls in greater number and constitutes a grave threat to young girls' lives and future prospects.

While marriage would normally be a time to celebrate the union of two people, for millions of girls, marriage is anything but safe and anything but consistent with their best interests. It is a human rights violation that denies a girl of her childhood, disrupts her education, limits her opportunities, increases her risk of violence and abuse, and jeopardizes her health.

KEY GLOBAL FIGURES:

- In 2010, one in three young women aged 20-24 (34 per cent, or 67 million) globally were married as girls. Half were in Asia, one-fifth in Africa. About 12 per cent of them were married by age 15.
- If present trends continue, 142 million girls will be married by their 18th birthday in the next decade (by 2020). This translates into 14.2 million girls married each year, or 39,000 girls married each day.
- By 2030, the number of girls married by their 18th birthday will rise to 15.1 million a year, if nothing is done to end child marriage in this generation.
- While child marriages are declining among girls under age 15, 50 million girls could still be at risk of being married before their 15th birthday in the next decade, if no action is taken to take solutions to scale.

DID YOU KNOW? REGIONAL DATA AND TRENDS

- Child marriage is found in all regions of the world, but most married girls, in both proportions and numbers, live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- In South Asia, nearly half (46 per cent) of young women aged 20-24 were married by their 18th birthday in 2010. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in the region (66 per cent). Approximately 130 million girls in South Asia will be married as children by 2030, if present trends continue.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, nearly two out of five (37 per cent) of young women aged 20-24 were married by their 18th birthday. Niger (75 per cent) has the highest prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 70 million girls in sub-Saharan Africa are at risk of being married in the next two decades (by 2030).
- Over a quarter (29 per cent) of young women aged 20-24 in Latin America and the Caribbean were child brides. Approximately 45.5 million girls in this region will be married by 2030.

DID YOU KNOW? KEY FACTS

- The world has made little progress towards ending child marriage in the last 10 years, although some countries have reduced marriages of girls under 15.
- Although the minimum legal age at marriage without parental consent is 18 years or higher in most countries, many women are still marrying at younger ages.

^[1] Data, facts and figures from UNFPA (2012). *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*. UNFPA: New York.

- Child marriage has long been the custom in many societies. Rural girls are twice as likely to be affected compared to girls in urban areas.
- It affects the poorest girls with the least education. Girls with no education are three times more likely to be married before their 18th birthday, compared to girls with some secondary education.

GRAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR MARRIED GIRLS

- Child marriage jeopardizes girls' rights, such as the right to education, health, survival and to develop to one's fullest. It excludes girls from decisions, such as the timing of marriage and choice of spouse.
- For a girl, marriage usually means an end to her education. It can set aside her chances of a vocation and steal from her life choices.
- Girls as young as 5 or 6 can be married. It marks a violent and abrupt initiation into sexual relations. Bridegrooms are often older than the girls they marry, and sometimes much older.
- Married girls face life-threatening health consequences. About 16 million girls aged 15-19 give birth each year. In nine out of ten of these cases, the girl is already married. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19.
- Married girls are at risk of sexually-transmitted infections, including HIV, passed on by their husbands who typically are much older and sexually-experienced.
- Child brides have limited access to and use of contraception. In developing countries overall, 22 per cent of adolescent girls (aged 15-19) who are married or in union use contraceptives, versus 61 per cent of married girls and women aged 15-49 years.
- Stillbirths and deaths during the first week of life are 50 per cent higher among babies born to adolescents than among babies born to mothers in their twenties.

ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE CAN CHANGE THE LIVES OF GIRLS EVERYWHERE.

NOW IS THE TIME TO:

- Enact and enforce national laws to raise the age of marriage to 18.
- Use data to identify the girls most at risk and target geographic "hot spots"—sub-national areas with high proportions and numbers of girls at risk of child marriage.
- Improve equal access to good quality primary and secondary education.
- Mobilize girls, boys, parents, leaders and communities to change discriminatory gender norms, address root causes, and create alternative social, economic and civic opportunities for girls.
- Empower girls by providing them with schooling options, sexual and reproductive health information and services, including HIV prevention, livelihood skills, and recourse to violence.
- Mitigate the harmful impact on married girls, including access to social support, livelihood opportunities, and life-saving family planning and maternal health services.
- Invest in improved data on monitoring and evaluation in order to strengthen programmes for girls at risk and married girls.

UNFPA works with governments and civil society partners to promote and protect the human rights of girls. We support the development of girls' education, economic, and health assets, including by enabling the provision of sexual and reproductive health information and services. We draw attention to the risks associated with child marriage and support community-owned solutions. UNFPA also advocates steps to enable the most vulnerable girls to defer marriage and more fully access their human rights to make an appropriate and gradual transition into adulthood.