The prevalence of child marriage across Africa is starkly demarcated. In all other regions of the world, a greater rate of reduction means there will be fewer child brides with each passing year.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the rate of reduction of child marriage is insufficient to reduce the number of child brides.

This progress, though, has not been equally high. Of the child marriage rates in the present times persisted, while the trend in the practice has been examined at the level.

The prevalence of child marriage in Africa continues, though, to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children. Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance.”

– Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel

**KEY FACTS**

- More than 75 million young women aged 20 to 24 years, a quarter of them in Africa, entered their first marriage or union before they celebrated their 18th birthday.
- In all other regions of the world, a greater rate of reduction means there will be fewer child brides with each passing year.

**PHOTO CREDITS:**

Cover: © UNICEF/ETHA_20150247/Bindra; Interior Photo: © UNICEF/809B5161/Holt

**SUGGESTED CITATION:**


**DATA SOURCES:**

World Population Prospects: The 2015 revision

**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 2015 revision – Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other nationally representative surveys, 2003-2014. For detailed source information, please contact data@unicef.org.

**NOTES:**

- Women and girls from the richest areas of the population are twice as likely to marry as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest segment of the population are twice as likely to marry as girls from the richest areas.
- Women and girls from rural areas are more likely to marry before age 18 than girls in urban areas. More than one in three women in rural areas and girls born before 1995 were married or in union before age 18.
- African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among 20 per cent segment of the population.

**A PROFILE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA**

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the rate of reduction of child marriage is insufficient to reduce the number of child brides.
- Similarly, girls from rural areas are twice as likely to marry as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest segment of the population are twice as likely to marry as girls from the richest areas.
- African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among 20 per cent segment of the population.

- More than one in three women in rural areas and girls born before 1995 were married or in union before age 18.
- Girls in rural areas are more likely to marry before age 18 than girls in urban areas. More than one in three women in rural areas and girls born before 1995 were married or in union before age 18.
The prevalence of child marriage across Africa is slowly declining.

This progress, though, has not been equally high across the continent. While the trend has persisted, child marriage has been reduced in some countries, while others have seen little change or even an increase. Data from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) show that the prevalence of child marriage varies widely across the region.

"Child marriage happens because adults believe they have the right to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children. Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance." — Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel

In all other regions of the world, a greater range of reduction means there will be fewer child brides with each passing year.

In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the rate of reduction has been insufficient to reduce the number of child brides. As a result, in 2015, more than 125 million young women aged 15 to 19 were married, with the vast majority of these women (97%) being in the region of sub-Saharan Africa. In 2050, child marriage will affect 125 million young women, with almost half of the world's child brides in 2050 being African.

In all other regions of the world, a greater range of reduction means there will be fewer child brides with each passing year.

In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the rate of reduction has been insufficient to reduce the number of child brides. As a result, in 2015, more than 125 million young women aged 15 to 19 were married, with the vast majority of these women (97%) being in the region of sub-Saharan Africa. In 2050, child marriage will affect 125 million young women, with almost half of the world's child brides in 2050 being African.

Child brides are more likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segments of the population.

More than one in five adolescent women — and girls aged 15 to 24 — were married or in union before age 18

In urban areas and in rural areas, child marriage is as likely to happen. Girls from urban areas (18%) are as likely to marry before age 15 as girls from rural areas (42%).

Chooses define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance. — Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel

A Profile of Child Marriage in Africa

UNICEF
United Nations Children’s Fund
New York, NY 10017, USA
Telephone: +1 212 326 7000
E-mail: data@unicef.org

DATA SOURCES:
UNICEF global databases, 2015, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and household-level administrative registers.

PHOTO CREDITS:
© UNICEF/ETHA_20150247/Bindra
© UNICEF/809B5161/Holt

SUGGESTED CITATION:

For additional information, please contact data@unicef.org.

This brochure was produced by the Data and Analytics Section of UNICEF’s Division of Data, Research and Policy.
The prevalence of child marriage across Africa is slowly decreasing. Adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who are currently married or in union, as well as women of any age who were first married or in union as children. On the page titled 'Future', the text reads, “Child marriage happens because adults believe they have the right to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children. Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance.” – Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel

A Profile of Child Marriage in Africa

In all other regions of the world, current rates of reduction mean there will be fewer child brides with each passing year.

This progress, though, has up to now been relatively high levels of child marriage remains the norm in some countries. While the trend in the prevalence have been tracked in the school, the median age at marriage across Africa is decreasing.

In sub-Saharan Africa, this decrease in the rate of reduction has been slow enough to reduce the number of child brides.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Child marriage happens because adults believe they have the right to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children. Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance.” – Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.

More than one in four child brides are under 15 years old. In sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage affects girls and young women. Girls aged 15 to 19 who were married or in union before age 18 are three times as likely to marry as young women of any age.

African child brides are most likely found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 18 as girls from the richest households.
The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of child marriage are in Nations and countries with no education and women who are in a polygynous union, and more likely among the poorest quintiles of wealth and by African sub-region.

One in three married adolescent girls in Africa were married or in union by age 18, with 23 million girls and women from the richest; among the poorest households than among the richest.

The prevalence of child marriage remains at today’s levels: 310 million girls and women who were married or in union before age 18 if observed decline continues.

The fastest progress in reducing child marriage has been in Northern Africa, with 17.8 million girls and women who were married before age 15.

Still, girls remain most affected, and one in five girls in Africa are married in childhood.

The final status of the Abyei area, the final boundary between Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area, the final boundary between Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined.

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.

Note: No data in UNICEF databases for those who had married by age 15.

In some countries, the prevalence of child marriage is 17.6 years.

In 1990, 28 per cent of adolescent girls were married or in union before age 18 and 60 per cent of adolescent girls had a median age at first marriage of 17.8 years. In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of child marriage are seen in Nations and countries with no education and women who are in a polygynous union, and more likely among the poorest quintiles of wealth and by African sub-region.

One in three married adolescent girls in Africa were married or in union by age 18, with 23 million girls and women from the richest; among the poorest households than among the richest.

The prevalence of child marriage remains at today’s levels: 310 million girls and women who were married or in union before age 18 if observed decline continues.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of child marriage are in Nations and countries with no education and women who are in a polygynous union, and more likely among the poorest quintiles of wealth and by African sub-region.

One in three married adolescent girls in Africa were married or in union by age 18, with 23 million girls and women from the richest; among the poorest households than among the richest.

The prevalence of child marriage remains at today’s levels: 310 million girls and women who were married or in union before age 18 if observed decline continues.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of child marriage are in Nations and countries with no education and women who are in a polygynous union, and more likely among the poorest quintiles of wealth and by African sub-region.

The prevalence of child marriage remains at today’s levels: 310 million girls and women who were married or in union before age 18 if observed decline continues.
### Past

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average. The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

#### Number of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final boundary between Sudan and South Sudan has not been defined in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2001 (2010). 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.

### Present

One in three young women in Africa were married or in union by age 18.

#### Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18

- **Guinea**: 80 per cent
- **Nigeria**: 70 per cent
- **Benin**: 60 per cent
- **Swaziland**: 50 per cent
- **Mozambique**: 40 per cent

### Future

- **2030**: 34 per cent
- **2050**: 16 per cent

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average. The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

#### Number of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final boundary between Sudan and South Sudan has not been defined in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2001 (2010). 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.

### Key Points

- **Guinea**: 80 per cent
- **Nigeria**: 70 per cent
- **Benin**: 60 per cent
- **Swaziland**: 50 per cent
- **Mozambique**: 40 per cent

### Data

- **2050**: 16 per cent
- **2030**: 34 per cent
- **2010**: 26 per cent
- **2005**: 26 per cent
- **2000**: 30 per cent
- **1995**: 34 per cent
- **1990**: 42 per cent

### Notes

- Observed decline continues: 310 million
- Assumed decline continues: 215 million
- Prevalence remains at today’s levels: 310 million

### Progress Accelerated

- Even doubling the rate of reduction will not be enough to reduce the number of child brides in Africa.
One in three young women in Africa were married or in union by age 18

Three in five sub-regions of Africa have levels of child marriage higher than the global average

- South Sudan: child marriage is extremely common in the country; nearly 45 per cent of married adolescent girls from the poorest households are married by age 15.
- Chad: child marriage is high, with 37 per cent of married adolescent girls from the poorest households married by age 15. Three in five sub-regions of Africa have levels of child marriage higher than the global average.
- Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, South Africa and Swaziland have high levels of child marriage, with more than 30 per cent of married adolescent girls from the poorest households married by age 18.

Economic costs of child marriage

- Reduced returns to education: child-married girls have lower levels of education than those who married as adults.
- Poverty: child marriage often leads to poverty, as girls are married to men who may not be able to support them.
- Health: child marriage is associated with higher rates of maternal and child mortality.
- Violence: child marriage can lead to physical and sexual violence.

Reduction in child marriage

- Since 1990, the percentage of girls married or in union before age 18, by region
- Western Africa: 60 per cent in 2030
- Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS): 42 per cent in 2030
- Middle East: 34 per cent in 2030
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 28 per cent in 2030
- South Asia: 44 per cent in 2030
- East Asia and the Pacific: 16 per cent in 2030
- Western Africa: 50 per cent in 2030
- Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS): 36 per cent in 2030
- Middle East: 26 per cent in 2030
- Latin America and the Caribbean: 13 per cent in 2030
- South Asia: 16 per cent in 2030
- East Asia and the Pacific: 10 per cent in 2030

The push for progress scenarios

- Progress is accelerated
- Driven by an increase in the number of child marriage prevention programmes and increased international political attention.
- Africa will have the highest number of child brides by 2050.
One in three young women in Africa were married or in union by age 18

Three in five sub-regions of Africa have levels of child marriage higher than the global average.

If progress is accelerated, the prevalence of child marriage in Africa could be halved by 2050.

Even doubling the rate of reduction will not be enough to reduce the number of child brides in Africa.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

The fastest progress in reducing child marriage has been in Northern Africa, with 23 million girls and women who were married before age 15.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.

In Mozambique, the likelihood is seven times higher for girls from the poorest households than for the richest.

In Senegal, levels of child marriage are more than twice as high in rural than in urban areas, and more than double the national average.

In Ethiopia, marriage is 17.6 years.

The child population of Africa is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, putting millions more girls at risk of child marriage.

The prevalence of child marriage has been slowly declining in Africa, but remains higher than the global average.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the lowest levels of prevalence are in South Africa, where marriage is 17.6 years.

In Chad, marriage is 17.6 years.

Still, girls remain most affected, as likely to be married by age 18 as those who were married before age 15.
The prevalence of child marriage across Africa is starkly asymmetrical. Adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who are currently married or in union, as well as women of any age who were first married or in union as children. On the page titled ‘Future’, UNICEF global databases. The term ‘child brides’ is used to refer both to girls under age 18 who are currently married before age 15.

In all other regions of the world, current rates of reduction mean there will be fewer child brides with each passing year.

In sub-Saharan Africa, less than half of the population is literate, which makes it difficult to reduce the number of child brides.

The program, though, has cut rates of child marriage in countries where progress has been slow or stagnant.

It’s a historic change, but one that must continue to be accelerated.

According to the UNICEF’s State of the World’s Children 2010 report, more than 125 million young women aged 20 to 24 years, a quarter of them in sub-Saharan Africa, entered their first marriage or union before they celebrated their 18th birthday. But the trend is changing. A growing child population combined with a slow decline in the prevalence of child marriage has led to an increase in the number of child brides.

For additional information, please contact data@unicef.org.

Key Facts

- Child marriage happens because adults believe they have the right to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children.
- Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance.
- “Child marriage happens because adults believe they have the right to impose marriage upon a child. This denies children, particularly girls, their dignity and the opportunity to make choices that are central to their lives, such as when and whom to marry or when to have children. Choices define us and allow us to realize our potential. Child marriage robs girls of this chance.”
- – Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel

More than one in five of child brides are most likely to marry in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

About 170 million girls and women of any age who were married before age 18 (Nigeria); and median age at first marriage among women aged 25 to 49 (Liberia), and 25 to 29 (Kenya).

Girls in rural areas are twice as likely to marry by age 15 than girls from urban areas. Similarly, girls from the poorest households are twice as likely to marry before age 15 as girls from the richest households.

The number of child brides is most likely to be found in rural areas and among the poorest segment of the population.

Worldwide, more than 75 million young women aged 20 to 24 years, or girls alive today were married before age 15.

Seventeen per cent of these women (26-27 November 2015, Girls’ Summit on Ending Child Marriage, Lusaka, Zambia). The meeting brings together high-level personalities from Member States to share good practices and challenges in ending child marriage; to secure and renew commitments from stakeholders to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage; and to provide a platform for discussion among community leaders, traditional and religious leaders, girls and young women.

The African sub-regions are based on the regional classification of the African Union. Global estimates are based on a subset of 119 countries with available data covering 64 per cent of the female population. The African sub-regions are based on the regional classification of the African Union.

Estimates presented here are based on a subset of 49 African countries with available data covering 97 per cent of the African female population. The terms ‘child brides’ refers to girls under age 18 who are currently married before age 15 and girls and women of any age who were married or in union before age 18 as likely to marry as girls from urban areas.

A Profile of Child Marriage in Africa