

# Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Ethiopia



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FDRE Ministry of Women  
and Children Affairs



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**PHOTO CREDITS:**

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Seventh-grade friends and students at Wengi primary school in Zigem, Amhara region: "Because we have been part of the girls club, we have rescued a girl from marrying this man her family knew." (Left to right) Mekdes Degnew, Ayehush Abera and Tigist Seyoum, all age 14.

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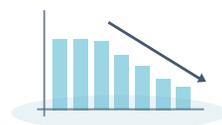
# Key facts

## about child marriage in Ethiopia



**4 in 10 young women  
in Ethiopia**

were married or in union  
**before their 18th birthday.**



**The practice of child marriage  
is less common today than in  
previous generations.**

After decades of relatively steady levels  
of child marriage, there is evidence of  
accelerating progress in the last 10 years.



**A girl's risk of child marriage  
depends on certain background  
characteristics.**

Girls who reside in rural areas or live in  
poorer households have a higher risk, and  
a higher proportion of child brides are found  
among those with little or no education.

**Ethiopia is home to**

**15 million  
child brides**



including currently married girls  
and women who were first  
married in childhood.

**Of these, 6 million were  
married before age 15.**



**The majority of young women  
who married in childhood gave  
birth as adolescents.**

These women were also somewhat  
less likely to receive skilled care during  
their last pregnancy and delivery.



**Ethiopia's progress is strong  
compared to other countries  
in Eastern and Southern Africa.**

Nonetheless, if child marriage is to be  
eliminated by 2030, additional efforts  
will be required.

# Child marriage in the global development agenda

Child marriage is a violation of human rights. Every child has the right to be protected from this harmful practice, which has devastating consequences for individuals and for society. Child marriage is now firmly on the global development agenda, most prominently through its inclusion in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3, which aims to eliminate the practice by 2030.



## GOAL 5

**Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

### TARGET 5.3

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

### INDICATOR 5.3.1

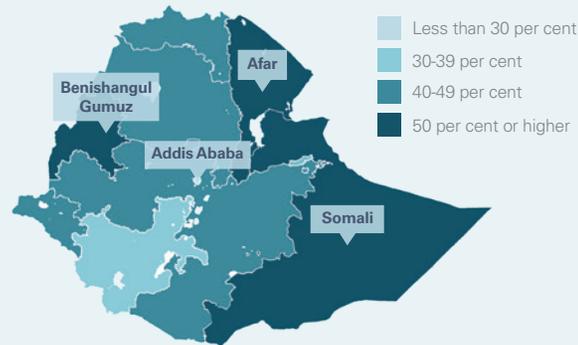
Proportion of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18



# Current levels of child marriage

## Four in ten young women in Ethiopia were married in childhood

Levels vary across Ethiopia. **Fewer than 10 per cent** of young women were married in childhood in Addis Ababa compared to **50 per cent or more** in Afar, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali regions.



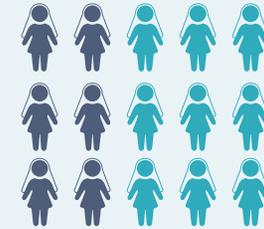
**FIG. 1** Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18

Ethiopia is home to **15 million** child brides

**6 million** **9 million**

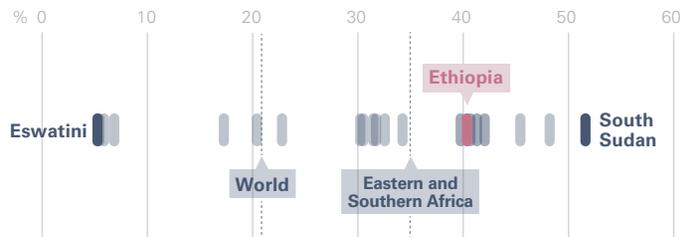
Of these, **6 million** married before age 15.

- Married before age 15
- Married at or after age 15 but before age 18



## Ethiopia ranks among the highest third of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa in terms of child marriage prevalence

**FIG. 2** Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and regional and world averages

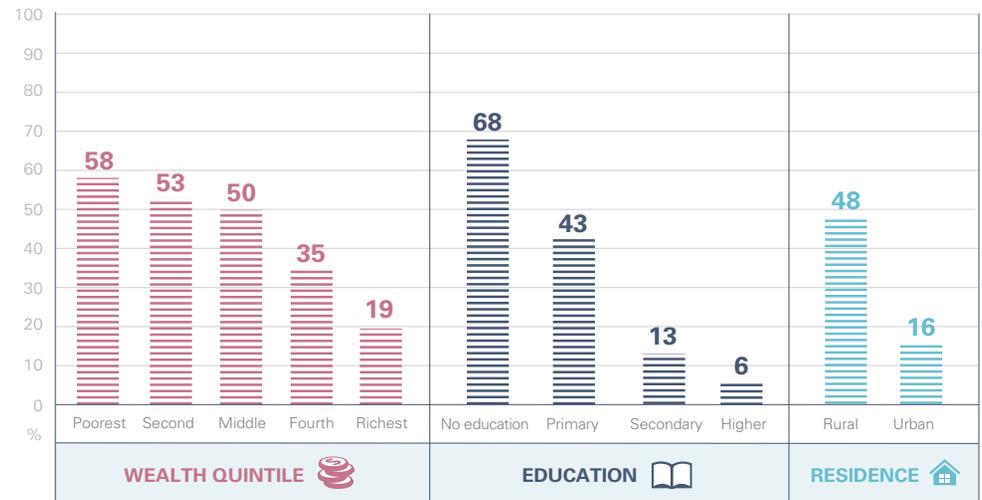


The prevalence in Ethiopia (40%) is slightly higher than the regional average for Eastern and Southern Africa (35%) and about twice the global average (21%).

**NOTE:** Each bar represents a country in Eastern and Southern Africa. Dotted lines represent population-weighted averages for the region and the world.

## Child brides in Ethiopia are more likely to reside in rural areas, live in poor households and have less education

**FIG. 3** Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile, education and residence



# Lives of child brides

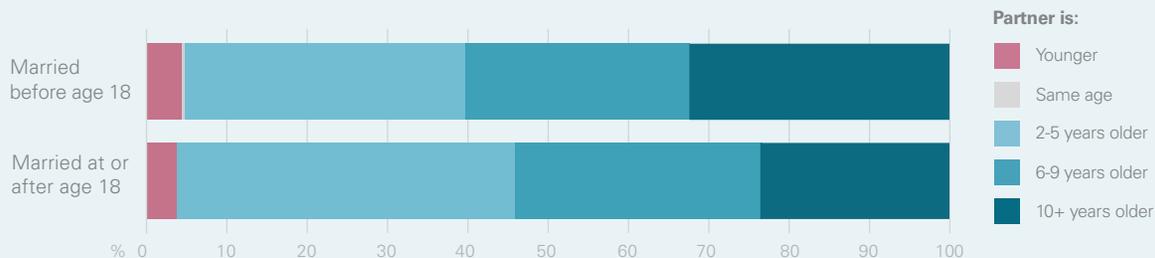
## Marrying in childhood has repercussions across several domains of a girl's life



### SPOUSAL AGE GAP

One in three child brides are married to men who are at least 10 years older

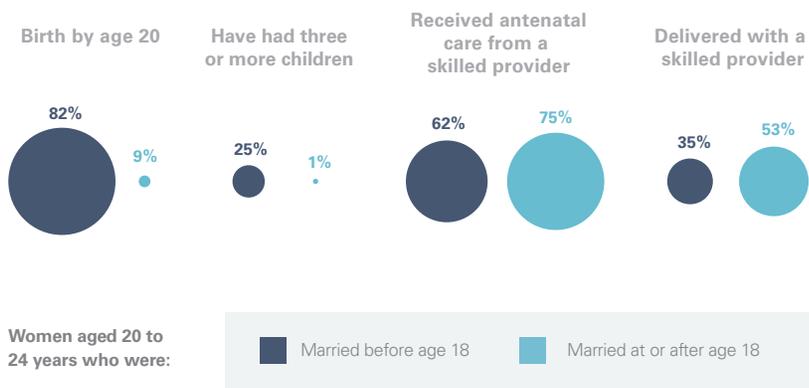
FIG. 4 Distribution of spousal age gap between women and their partners, among ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years, by age at marriage



### REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The majority of young women who married in childhood gave birth before they completed adolescence; these women were somewhat less likely to receive skilled care during their last pregnancy and delivery

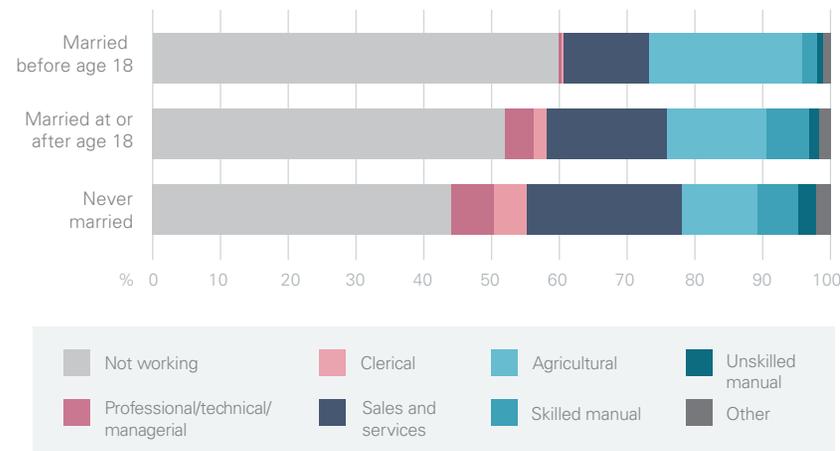
FIG. 5 Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years who gave birth before age 20, who have had three or more children, who received antenatal care from a skilled provider during their last pregnancy, and who delivered their last birth with the assistance of a skilled provider, by age at marriage



### EMPLOYMENT

Young women who married in childhood are less likely to be employed than their peers who married later or not at all; if working, they are more likely to be agricultural labourers and less likely to be in professional occupations

FIG. 6 Percentage distribution of occupation among women aged 20 to 24 years, by age at marriage

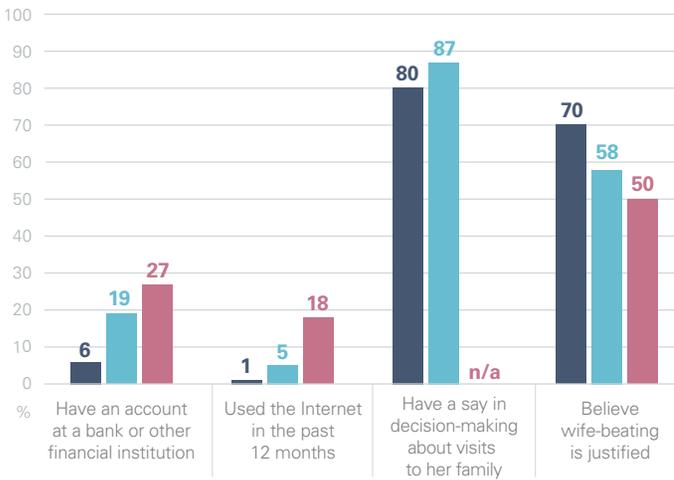




## AUTONOMY, CONNECTION AND EMPOWERMENT

Young women who married in childhood are less likely to have access to financial institutions and the Internet, and more likely to justify wife-beating than their peers who married later or have not married

**FIG. 7** Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who have an account at a bank or other financial institution, who have used the Internet in the past 12 months, who usually decide (alone or with their spouse) about visits to her family, and who believe wife-beating is justified, by age at marriage



Women aged 20 to 24 years who were:

- Married before age 18
- Married at or after age 18
- Never married

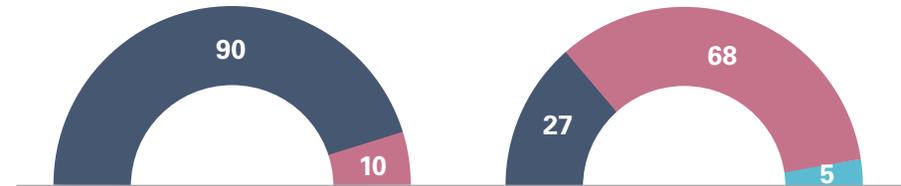


## EDUCATION

Married adolescent girls are substantially more likely to be out of school than their unmarried peers

Currently married or in union

Never married or in union



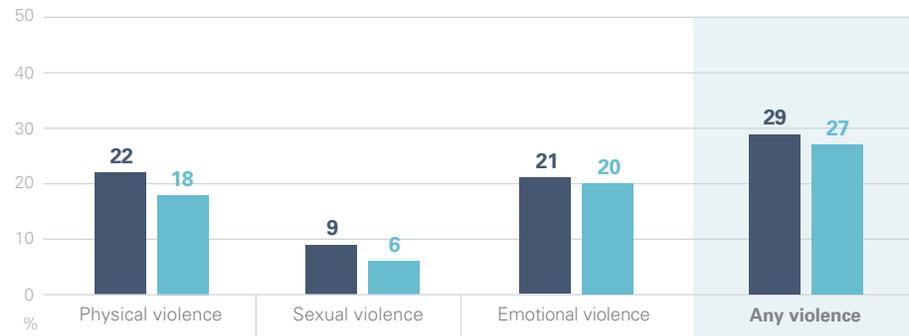
**FIG. 8** Percentage of girls aged 15 to 17 years who are at grade level, behind grade level and out of school, by current marital status

- Out of school
- In school, behind grade level
- In school, at grade level



## VIOLENCE

Nearly one in three ever-married young women experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence in the last year; levels were similar regardless of age at marriage



**FIG. 9** Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years who experienced intimate partner violence in the past 12 months, by type of violence and by age at marriage

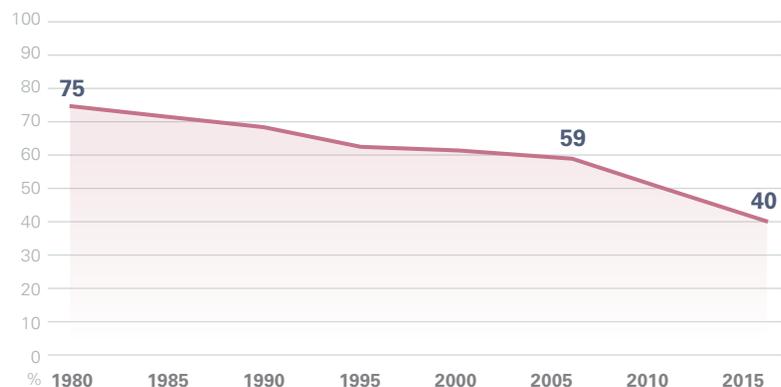
- Married before age 18
- Married at or after age 18

# Generational trends in reducing child marriage

The practice of child marriage in Ethiopia is less common today than in prior generations

After decades of relatively steady levels of child marriage, there is evidence of accelerating progress in the last 10 years

FIG. 10 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18

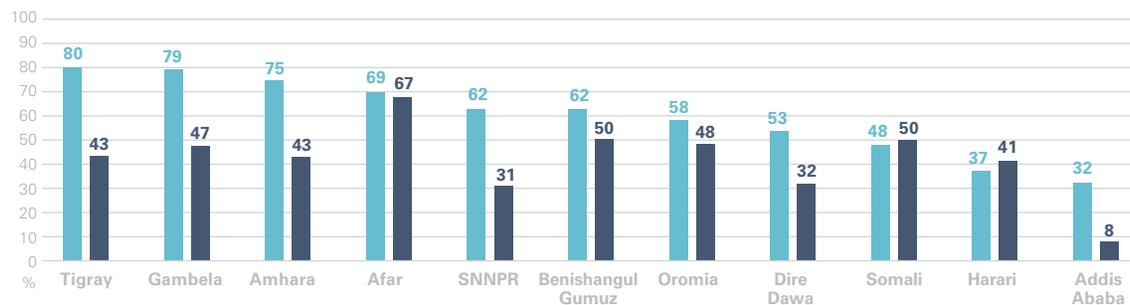


The standard measure for the prevalence of child marriage, as used in the SDG framework, is the proportion of women aged 20 to 24 years who married before age 18. **Levels of child marriage can also be measured among women aged 18 to 19 years; in Ethiopia, prevalence of child marriage among this age group is 31 per cent.** This figure is within the confidence intervals of the prevalence for women aged 20 to 24 years.

NOTE: This trend analysis is based on the prevalence of child marriage across age cohorts, as measured in the DHS 2000, 2005, 2011 and 2016.

The regions that have made the most progress in reducing child marriage are Tigray, Amhara, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), and Addis Ababa

FIG. 11 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



NOTE: The prevalence of child marriage in 1991 is captured in the DHS 2016 results via the percentage of women aged 45 to 49 years who were first married or in union before age 18, as this cohort was aged 20 to 24 years in 1991.

Ethiopia's progress in the past decade is one of the strongest among countries in Eastern and Southern Africa

Fig. 12 Average annual rate of reduction (AARR) and current prevalence of child marriage, the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18

	Average annual rate of reduction of child marriage (%)	Current prevalence of child marriage (%)
Rwanda	6.9	7
<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>40</b>
Eswatini	3.9	5
Zambia	3.5	31
Burundi	2.5	20
Eritrea	2.3	41
Uganda	2.2	34
Kenya	2.2	23
Lesotho	2.2	17
United Republic of Tanzania	2.0	31
Malawi	1.2	42
Sudan	1.0	34
Namibia	0.6	7
Angola	0.1	30
Comoros	-0.5	32
Zimbabwe	-1.2	32
South Sudan	-1.3	52
Mozambique	-1.4	48
Madagascar	-1.6	41

NOTE: Table includes all countries in Eastern and Southern Africa with nationally representative data on child marriage from 2010 or later. Countries are ranked from highest to lowest according to the 10-year AARR. A negative AARR indicates an increase in child marriage prevalence. Caution is warranted in interpreting the rates of reduction, since in some cases the differences in prevalence in the last 10 years may not be significant.

# Looking ahead towards elimination

Compared to the last 10 years, progress will need to be 6 times faster to eliminate child marriage by 2030, and 10 times faster to eliminate it by 2025

## How to read the projections

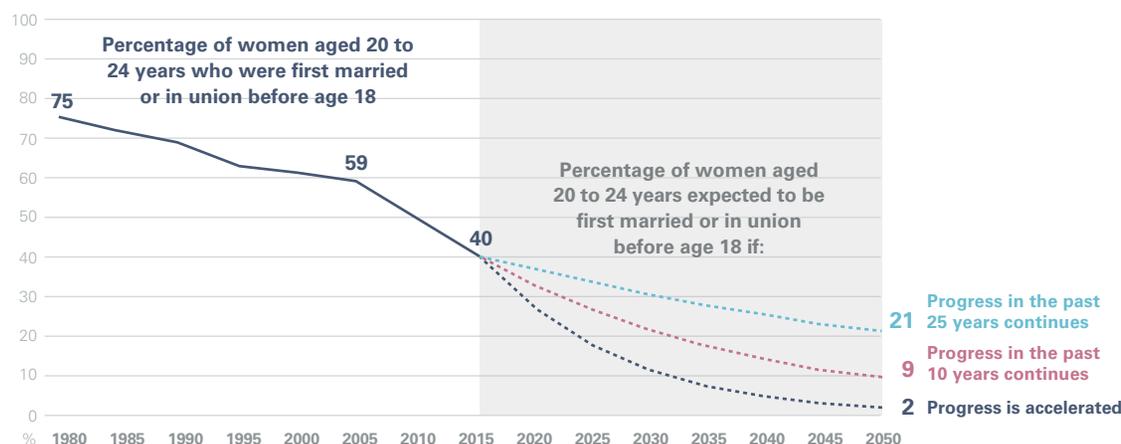
The figures on this page and the following page show how the scale of the practice of child marriage has changed since 1980, in addition to various scenarios that could occur in the future. Figure 13 shows how the percentage of young women married in childhood has changed and could continue to change through 2050. Figures 14 and 15 show progress in terms of the rate of reduction that has been observed and the rates that would be required to meet elimination targets.

The projection scenarios build on existing trends. They show expected values if progress from the past 25 years were to continue (in turquoise), or if progress from the past 10 years were to continue (in pink). It is clear that progress has accelerated over the past 10 years, making this the more ambitious of the two scenarios. A third scenario (in blue) illustrates what could happen if the rate observed over the past 10 years were to double.

The observed average annual rates of reduction (AARRs) quantify the rate of progress in the prevalence of child marriage over each period. A higher AARR indicates faster progress. Required AARRs are calculated to illustrate what rate would be necessary in order to eliminate the practice by 2025 – the Government of Ethiopia’s target – or by 2030, target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. In each case, the rate required to eliminate the practice by 2025 is higher than the corresponding rate for 2030, since a faster rate would be needed to reach the same level in a shorter period.

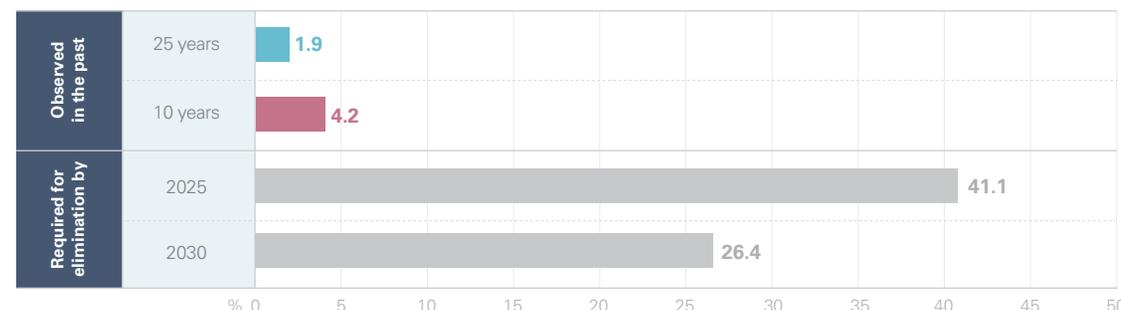
**If the decline seen in the past 10 years continues, the prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia would drop to 20 per cent by 2030 and to less than 10 per cent by 2050**

FIG. 13 Observed and projected prevalence of child marriage



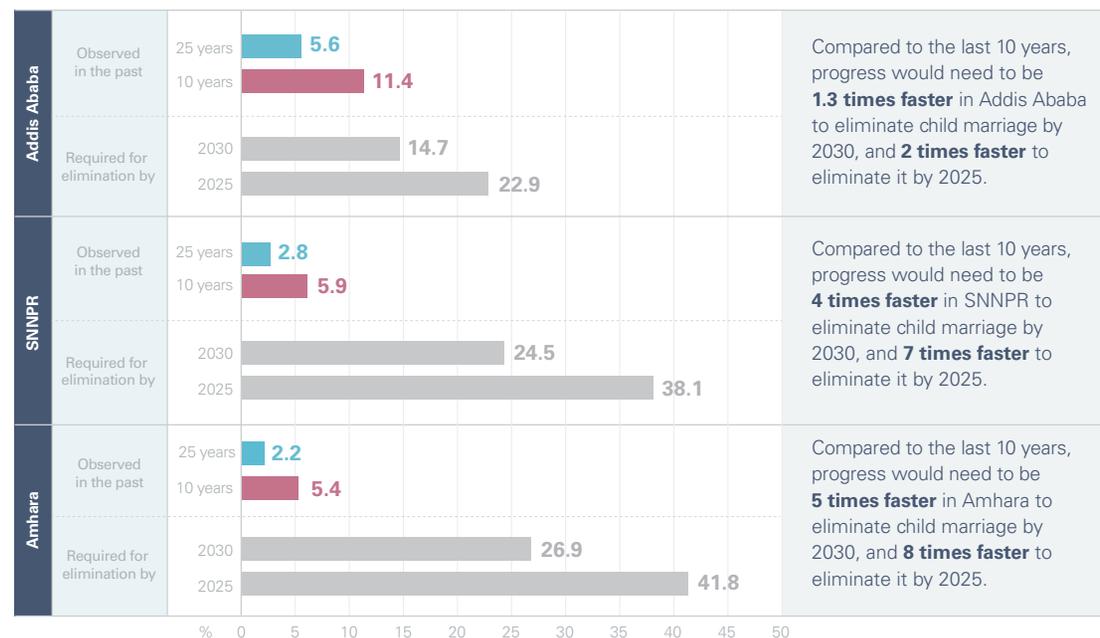
**To eliminate child marriage in time to meet national and international targets, additional efforts will be required**

FIG. 14 Average annual rate of reduction (%) in the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, observed and required for elimination



## Ending child marriage in all regions by 2030 would require an acceleration of progress; however, the least acceleration will be needed in Addis Ababa, SNNPR and Amhara and the most acceleration will be needed in Afar, Somali and Harari

**FIG. 15** Average annual rate of reduction (%) in the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, observed and required for elimination



**FIG. 16** Ranking of the amount of acceleration needed to eliminate child marriage by 2030 in each region of Ethiopia, compared to the region's progress in the past 10 years

**How to read this table:** In Gambela, for example, progress would need to be 11 times faster than the rate observed over the past 10 years in order to eliminate child marriage by 2030.

Region	Acceleration of progress needed to eliminate child marriage by 2030, compared to progress in the past 10 years
Afar	47
Somali	41
Harari	15
Benishangul Gumuz	14
Gambela	11
Oromia	10
Dire Dawa	9
Tigray	6
Amhara	5
SNNPR	4
Addis Ababa	1.3

Most acceleration needed

Least acceleration needed

**TECHNICAL NOTES:** To assess the prevalence of child marriage, this analysis used SDG indicator 5.3.1 – the proportion of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in a union before age 18. All references to 'marriage' or 'child brides' include both formal marriages and informal unions in which women started living together with a partner as if married. The number of child brides is defined as the number of girls under age 18 who have already married plus the number of adult women who were married before age 18.

It is not advisable to treat the percentage of currently married adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 years as indicative of the risk of being married in childhood. Any prevalence measure among girls under age 18 will be an underestimate of the full extent of the practice, as girls who are unmarried at the time of the data collection may still marry before their 18th birthday.

Global estimates are based on a subset of 106 countries with comparable available data from 2010 to 2017, covering 63 per cent of the global female population. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the female population.

Confidence intervals are not shown in this publication. Caution is therefore warranted in interpreting the results since apparent differences among groups may not be significant. Key message titles for these charts were developed in light of the confidence intervals for these values. Thus, in cases where the title indicates that there is a difference among groups, it has been confirmed as statistically significant.

Trends in the national prevalence of child marriage presented in Figures 10 and 13 were calculated taking into account data from the Ethiopia DHS 2000, 2005, 2011 and 2016. Calculations of the average annual rate of reduction over the last 25 years and the last 10 years presented in Figures 15 and 16 relied on an age-cohort analysis based on data from the latest available survey.

Projected values based on a continuation of observed progress apply the average annual rate of reduction in the prevalence of child marriage, or the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, over the past 25 years and over the past 10 years. The acceleration scenario assumes a doubling of the observed annual rate of reduction over the past 10 years. For statistical purposes, 'elimination' is defined here as a child marriage prevalence of less than 1 per cent. Childhood refers to the period from birth until the 18th birthday. Adolescence refers to the period from ages 10 to 19 years.

**DATA SOURCES:** Ethiopia data from Demographic and Health Surveys 2000, 2005, 2011 and 2016. All other data from UNICEF global databases, 2018, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys and other nationally representative surveys, 2004 to 2017. For detailed source information by country, see <data.unicef.org>.

## Ethiopia's programme to end child marriage

Ethiopia's End Child Marriage Programme seeks to respond to the multidimensional drivers and consequences of child marriage and to contribute to the national goal of ending child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) by 2025. The programme is led by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs with contributions from line ministries, civil society, non-governmental organizations and UN agencies. It builds on the country's Constitution and a strong related legal framework to promote and protect girls' and women's rights. The programme is aligned with the **National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia** and its three pillars: prevention, protection and service provision.

The End Child Marriage Programme has reached more than 4.5 million girls, families and community members. A human rights and gender equality approach is at the heart of the programme, which relies on the following evidence-based strategies:

- **Girls' capacities and empowerment:**

Girls are reached through initiatives providing life skills, legal literacy, and information and services related to menstrual hygiene, health, and sexual and reproductive health. These initiatives equip girls with the knowledge and skills to access services and to negotiate and influence decisions at household and community levels. As agents of change, girls are supporting awareness-raising efforts and, in some cases, stopping the practice by reporting potential child marriage arrangements to school officials and law enforcement. Evidence shows that economic support to vulnerable households through income-generating activities helps ensure that girls remain and progress in school.

- **Enhanced knowledge, attitudes and practices of families and communities:**

Families of adolescent girls and community actors (including women's development groups and religious and community leaders) are mobilized through community dialogues and awareness-raising at public gatherings and through the media. To support such grassroots-level efforts, a national campaign was launched in 2017. As a result of previous efforts as well as the campaign, 987 *kebeles* (villages) across seven regions have declared themselves free of child marriage.

- **Capacity building, enhanced quality and friendly service delivery:**

Efforts are under way to ensure that learning, health and other services for adolescent girls are accessible and meet their needs. This contributes to their retention and progression in school as well as improved physical and mental health and well-being.

- **Enhanced coordination:**

The National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM comprises key stakeholders from line ministries, civil society, faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations and UN agencies. Through its Secretariat, the Alliance takes the lead in coordinating national efforts, convening actors involved in data and research, organizing national events such as the annual National Girls' Summit, and supporting the development of a costed plan to end child marriage and FGM.

- **Evidence generation:**

Key initiatives include the analysis of trends and patterns in high prevalence districts and regions, research on the drivers of child marriage, and documentation of good practices. Such evidence informs programme strategies and the identification of target districts and regions. Relevant indicators on key interventions to end child marriage have been included in the checklist used by parliamentarians for monitoring.



**For information on the data in this brochure:**

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