



UNDERSTANDING THE SCALE OF CHILD MARRIAGE

A user guide by Girls Not Brides October 2014

Child marriage is receiving unprecedented international attention. Alongside this, much data is emerging on the numbers of women and girls affected by child marriage, as well as projections for women and girls at risk.

Navigating the data can be confusing, but there are some common statistics that help to emphasise why the need for action is urgent. This note offers a range of commonly used figures to discuss the scale of child marriage and highlights some comparisons that you can make to help make these large numbers meaningful to a wider audience, as well as notes of caution to bear in mind.

GLOBAL TRENDS

- **Progress is happening, but not fast enough.** While there has been a decrease in child marriage over the past 30 years, progress remains uneven across regions.
- **Progress has been most significant among girls under 15 years old.** This is particularly the case in South Asia where the marriage of young girls under 15 years has declined from 32% to 17%.¹
- **Marriage for girls under 18 years is, however, still widespread.** There remain high levels of child marriage in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **We must double our efforts in order to mitigate population growth** and see a reduction in the absolute number of women and girls married in childhood.

The summary draws on data released by UNICEF in July 2014, which includes projections on the number of girls and women who will be affected by child marriage if the international community fails to act.¹

GLOBAL STATS

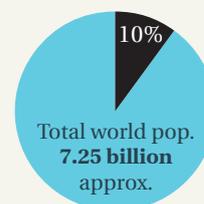


15 million girls
a year marry before the
age of 18.



That's approximately:
41,000 girls per day
28 girls every minute
1 girl every 2 seconds

720 million women
alive today were married or
entered into union before
their **18th birthday** - this
is equivalent to 10% of the
world's population.



If there is no reduction in child marriage,
1.2 billion girls will marry as children by
2050 - equivalent to the entire population
of India.

CHILD MARRIAGE AROUND THE WORLD

**Nearly 900m people globally have been affected by child marriage.¹
That's approximately 13% of the world's population.**

WOMEN AFFECTED BY CHILD MARRIAGE

720 million women alive today were married or entered into union before their 18th birthday.¹ That is the equivalent of 10% of the world's population.

- 250 million women alive today were married or entered into union before their 15th birthday.¹
- In 2010, approximately 70 million young women aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18 years.²

Note on data: the 720m and 250m figures are based on all women of reproductive age. This makes it more useful to illustrate the magnitude and life-long consequences of the problem. The 70m figure depicts more recent trends because it is based on a younger age cohort of women (20-24 year olds).

MEN AFFECTED BY CHILD MARRIAGE

Girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage, and the consequences for their health, education and economic prospects are severe. However, a large number of **boys also marry as children.**

- 156 million men alive today were married before the age of 18.¹
- 33 million men alive today were married before the age of 15.¹

Note on data: UNICEF released global figures on men affected by child marriage for the first time in their Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects report, July 2014. Before this, there was not sufficient data to make global estimates.



GIRLS AFFECTED EVERY YEAR

15 million girls a year marry before the age of 18.¹ If broken down, that's approximately 41,000 girls per day, 28 girls married every minute, that's 1 girl every 2 seconds.

Some equivalents to the 15 million figure:

- The population of people aged under 19 in the UK: 14.9 million
- Countries with populations of around 15 million: Cambodia (15.4), Ecuador (15.9), Guatemala (15.9), Mali (15.7), Senegal (14.5), Zambia (15), Zimbabwe (14.5).

Note on data: Breaking data down into the number of girls married each year, day, second etc. is mainly done for advocacy purposes and must be used with caution as they are approximations and will change as populations change. These figures are not based on the number of marriages which have actually taken place each year.

CHILD MARRIAGE IN PROPORTIONS

- 1 in 3 girls in the developing world are married before the age of 18.³
- 1 in 9 girls in the developing world are married before the age of 15.³
- 1 in 4 girls globally are married before the age of 18.¹

Note on data: The above data are based on the percentage of women aged 20-24 years who married before 15 or 18 years. Since the real extent of child marriage is only known retrospectively - because girls who are single still face the risk of being married before they reach 18 - this is a commonly used indicator. The 1 in 3 and 1 in 9 figures refer to young women who were first married or in union before 18 or 15 in the developing world (excluding China). The 1 in 4 figure is a global estimate.

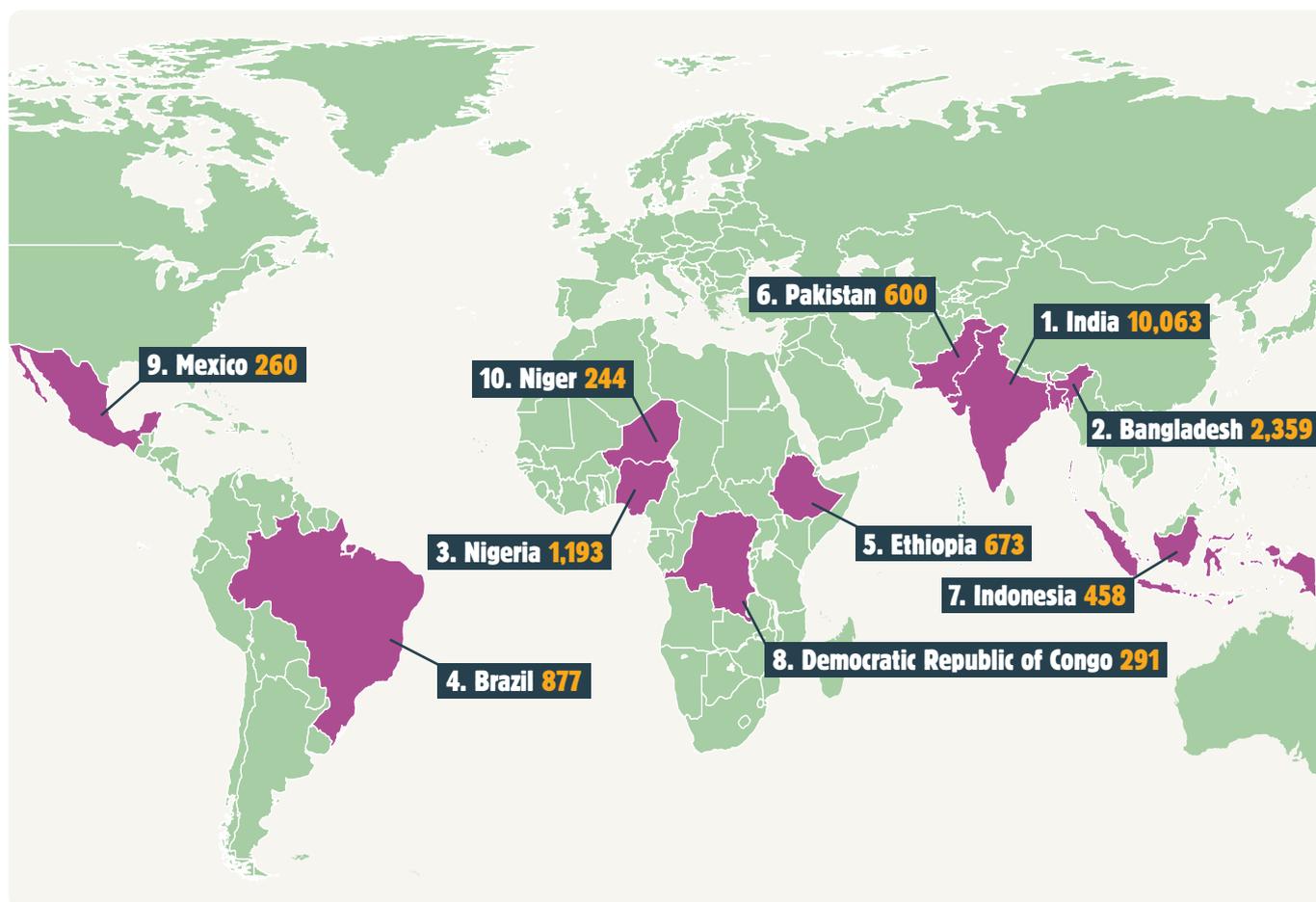
CHILD MARRIAGE BY COUNTRY

Countries with high rates of child marriage are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa but due to population size, the largest absolute numbers of child brides, particularly aged under 15, are found in South Asia. For the most recent data on child marriage in your country, see the statistical table on child protection in UNICEF's latest State of the World's Children report.

Note on data: Data should be used with caution. Data is based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, and reflects information available as of August 2013, but countries only conduct these surveys roughly every five years. It refers to the most recent year available during the period 2005-2012. Data quality is likely to be adversely affected for countries that have recently suffered disasters or conflict affected regions, especially where basic country infrastructures have been fragmented or where major population movements have occurred.

10 countries with the highest rates of marriage before 18: ³	10 countries with the highest rates of marriage before 15: ³
Niger (75%)	Niger (36%)
Central African Republic (68%)	Bangladesh (29%)
Chad (68%)	Central African Republic (29%)
Bangladesh (65%)	Chad (29%)
Guinea (63%)	Eritrea (20%)
Mali (55%)	Guinea (20%)
Burkina Faso (52%)	Nigeria (20%)
South Sudan (52%)	India (18%)
Malawi (50%)	Sierra Leone (18%)
Madagascar (48%)	Ethiopia (16%)

Below: 10 countries with the highest absolute number (in thousands) of girls **married before 15**.⁴



FUTURE PROSPECTS: MAKING THE CASE FOR URGENT ACTION

Globally, the rates of child marriage are slowly declining. However, demographic shifts show an increased youth population in many regions. As a result, the number of child brides in absolute terms will continue to grow as populations increase. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, even if current progress continues, it will not be fast enough to offset population growth and by 2050, the region will overtake South Asia in having the world's highest number of child brides.

POTENTIAL PROJECTIONS CALCULATED BY UNICEF:¹

1. If there is no reduction in child marriage 280 million girls alive today risk becoming child brides by the time they turn 18. This will increase to 320 million girls by 2050. The number of girls married every year will increase from 15 million today, to 16.5 million in 2030 and 18 million by 2050.⁵ The total number of women married in childhood would increase from more than 700 million today, to **950 million by 2030** and a staggering **1.2 billion by 2050** - that's equivalent to the entire population of India.

2. If progress continues at the current rate the proportion of women married as children will decline to **22% by 2030** and **18% by 2050**. However this will be mitigated by population growth so **the number of women married as children will remain the same** - approximately 700 million by 2050 (although 490 million girls will have avoided marriage).

3. Doubling the rate of decline seen over the past 30 years means the number of women married as children would drop to **570 million by 2030** and **450 million by 2050**.

1 UNICEF, *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects*, 2014

2 UNFPA, *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage*, 2012

3 UNICEF, *State of the World's Children: In Numbers: Every Child Counts*, 2014

4 Council on Foreign Relations, *Ending Child Marriage: How Elevating the Status of Girls Advances U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives*, 2013

5 These figures are an update from the UNFPA 2012 report.