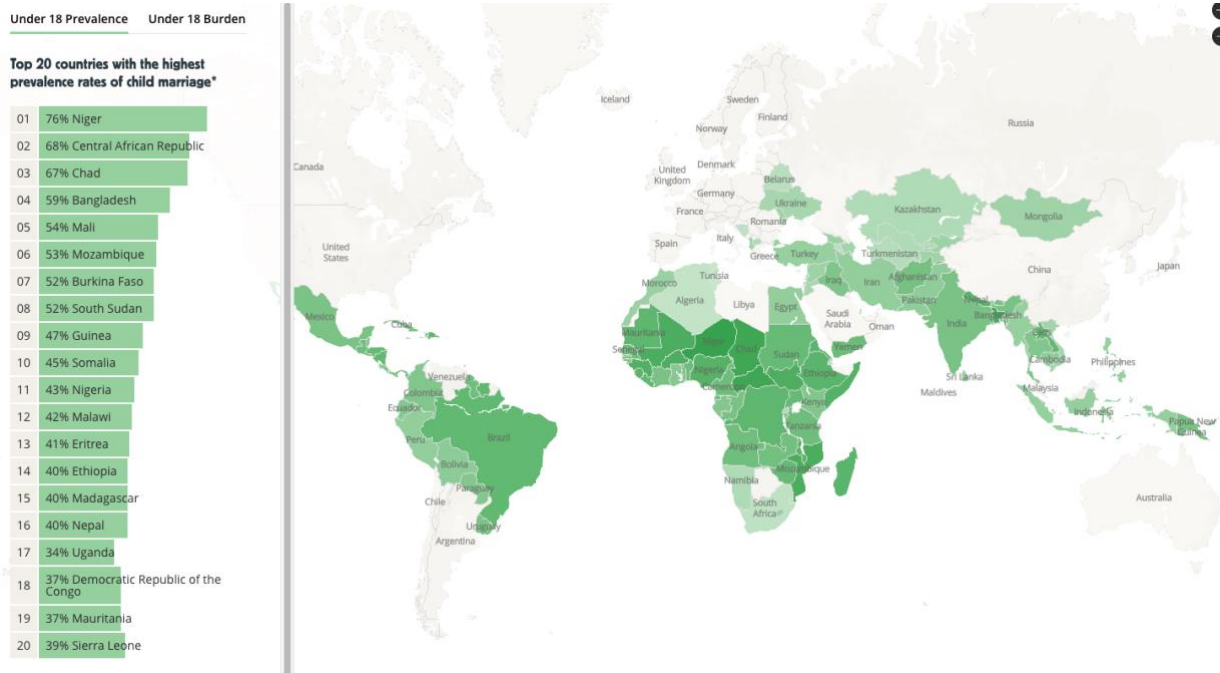




<p>What is Child marriage/ Early Marriage/ Forced Marriage?</p>	<p><b>Child marriage</b> is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. Child marriage and <b>early marriage</b> largely refer to the same thing: marriages in which one or both spouses are under 18 years old. However, early marriage is also sometimes used to describe marriages in which one or both spouses are 18 or older, but with a compromised ability to grant consent (e.g. someone who is not physically or emotionally mature). <b>Forced marriage</b> is a marriage in which one or both spouses do not give full and free consent, regardless of age, or when one or both spouses are unable to end or leave the marriage. Because in most countries children are not considered able to give legal consent, <b>all child marriages are sometimes considered forced marriages</b>. However, there are many instances of two adolescents under the age of 18 marrying each other voluntarily, called “love marriages” in some contexts.<sup>1</sup></p>
<p>How many children are being married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday?</p>	<p>Globally around 21% of young women were married before their 18th birthday; each year 12 million girls under 18 marry.<sup>2</sup> Global child marriage rates are slowly decreasing. The most common ages at which children are married are 16 and 17. Girls who are married off tend to have much older spouses and are more vulnerable to domestic or sexual violence. In circumstances where parents are under enormous pressure to marry off their daughters – e.g. living in extreme poverty or in conflict settings – marriages have been reported among girls around 11 or 12 because girls are seen both as being ready for marriage and at risk of sexual violence. Boys can also be married off, although less often than girls. Only 1 in 25 boys (3.8%) marry before 18, and 0.3% before their 15th.<sup>3</sup></p>
<p>Where does child marriage occur?</p>	<p>South Asia has seen dramatic declines in child marriage over the last decade, and now the global burden of child marriage is shifting to sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup> 37% of young women in sub-Saharan Africa are married before age 18. Top-three countries are Niger (76%), Central African Republic (68%) and Chad (67%).<sup>5</sup> See map on page 2.</p>
<p>Which factors play a role?</p>	<p>Daughters are frequently seen as burdens or commodities because of pervasive gender inequality. Impoverished parents often believe marriage will secure a daughter’s future by making a husband or his family responsible for her care, or a way to protect their daughters from sexual violence— especially in humanitarian crises.<sup>6</sup> Teenage pregnancy may prompt parents to marry off their daughters. Girls may even be forced to marry rapists to spare their families the stigma associated with unmarried pregnancy.<sup>7</sup> It also occurs that adolescents themselves decide to enter a union living with their lover; as a way to exercise independence, leave home or escape difficult circumstances, including poverty or family violence.<sup>8</sup></p>
<p>What are the consequences of child marriage?</p>	<p>Child marriage is a human rights violation and can lead to a lifetime of suffering.<sup>9</sup> Girls who marry before they turn 18 are less likely to remain in school and more likely to experience domestic violence. Young teenage girls are more likely to die due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth than women in their 20s, and their children are more likely to be stillborn or die in the first month of life.<sup>10</sup> Children who are married off are also vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Girls who have dropped out of school are more vulnerable to child marriage and less likely to access information to prevent STIs and unplanned pregnancy.<sup>11</sup></p>
<p>Where is child marriage allowed?</p>	<p>96% of all countries have laws that specify when people can legally marry. Only six countries – Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen – do not specify a minimum age for marriage.<sup>12</sup> In 38 countries out of 198 are different age minimums for men and women; in 37 of these, minimum for girls is lower than for boys. Sudan has the largest gender gap: Girls can marry at 10 and boys can marry at 15 or puberty without parental or judicial permission.<sup>13</sup></p>
<p>Does child marriage occur in Europe? In Malta?</p>	<p>In many countries exceptions are possible, e.g. with parental consent or under religious or customary law.<sup>14</sup> In Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Ukraine, for instance, girls in Romani communities often marry below the legal minimum age.<sup>15</sup> Estonia has the lowest marriage age in Europe (15 years).<sup>16</sup> Malta’s marriage age is 18, or 16 with parental consent.<sup>17</sup></p>

# Thematic Factsheet Child Marriage



Percentage of women 20-24 years old who were first married or in union before they were 18 years old. Source: UNICEF global databases 2020, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and other national surveys. <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/>

- 1 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
- 2 <https://www.unicef.org/stories/child-marriage-around-world>
- 3 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
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- 7 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
- 8 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
- 9 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>
- 10 <https://www.unicef.org/stories/child-marriage-around-world>
- 11 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
- 12 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/12/many-countries-allow-child-marriage/>
- 13 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/12/many-countries-allow-child-marriage/>
- 14 <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
- 15 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/12/many-countries-allow-child-marriage/>
- 16 <https://www.news18.com/news/world/20-in-china-12-in-trinidad-legal-marriage-ages-across-globe-as-india-moves-to-raise-ceiling-for-women-4560701.html>
- 17 <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/MT.pdf>; <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/one-child-year-gets-legally-married-malta.985193>

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This factsheet was compiled by Adri van den Berg for Blue Door Education. Adri worked for many years as a Country of Origin Information (COI) researcher, her final post before retiring being with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Malta.