

# ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE:

A profile of progress in Ghana





### Acknowledgements

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### Methods and data sources

This publication is based on data from the Ghana Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2014, the Maternal Health Survey (MHS) 2017 and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) 2006, 2011 and 2017-2018. Data for other countries are from UNICEF global databases, 2020, based on MICS, DHS and other nationally representative surveys, 2005-2019. For detailed source information by country, see <data.unicef.org>. Demographic data are from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019*, Online edition, 2019. All references to ‘marriage’ or ‘child brides’ include both formal marriages and informal unions in which women started living with a partner as if married before age 18. 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 messages were developed taking confidence intervals into account; in cases where the title indicates a difference among various population groups or countries, it has been confirmed as statistically significant.

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## 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. Although indicator 5.3.1 measures child marriage among girls, the practice occurs among boys as well. Regardless of gender, marriage before adulthood is a breach of children's rights.



**SDG 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



## KEY FACTS

about child marriage in Ghana



Ghana is home to over **2 million** child brides, including currently married girls along with women who were first married in childhood.



**One in five** young women were married or in union before their 18th birthday.



Child marriage often takes the form of an **informal union**, in which a girl lives with a partner as if married.



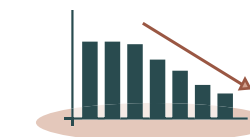
A girl's risk of child marriage is influenced by certain background characteristics. Girls who live in **rural areas** or come from **poorer households** are at greater risk, and a higher proportion of child brides are found among those with **little or no education**.



Over **9 in 10** married girls are **not attending school**.



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



The practice of child marriage **has declined** over the last several decades.

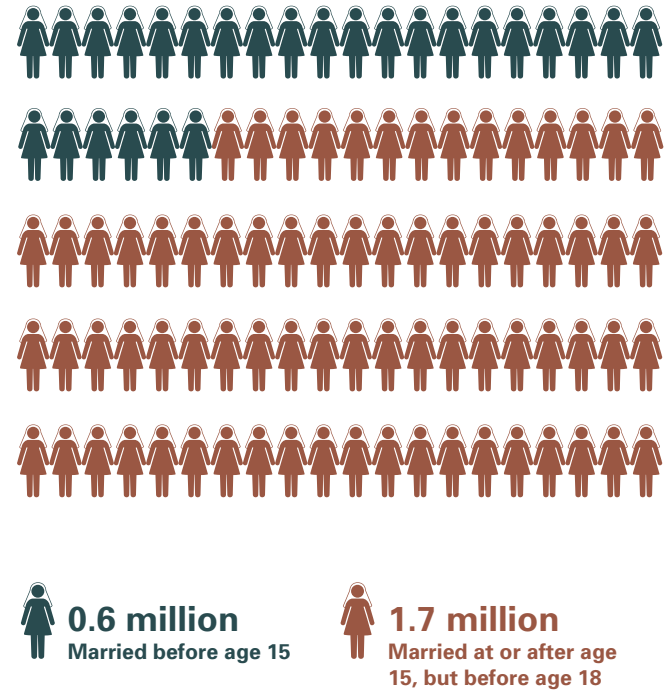
Ghana has made strong progress compared to other countries in West and Central Africa. Nevertheless, eliminating child marriage by 2030 will require **additional efforts**.



# CURRENT LEVELS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

## Ghana is home to over 2 million child brides

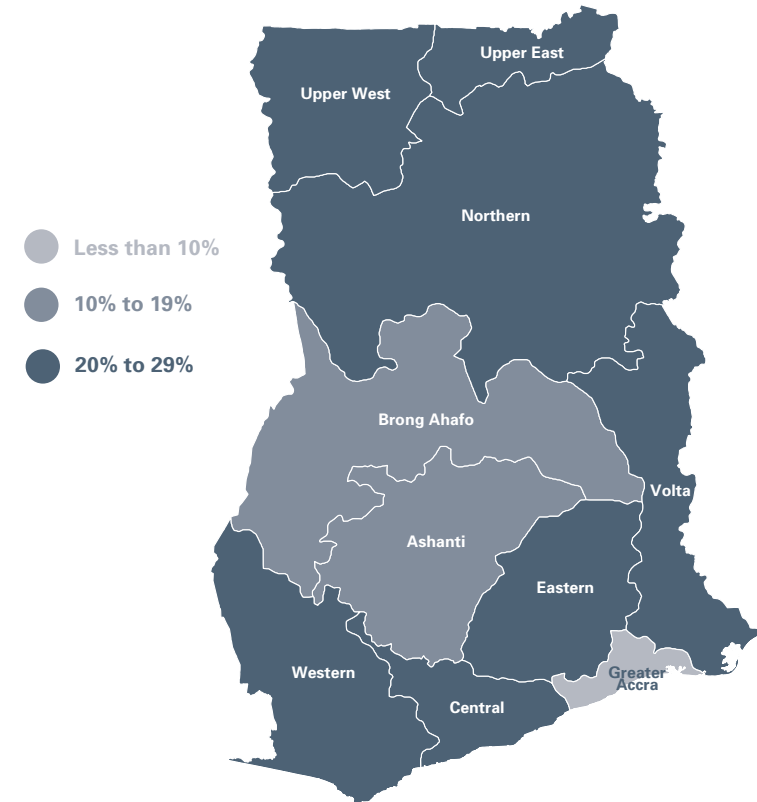
FIG. 1 Number of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18



Notes: Each icon in Figure 1 represents 23,000 child brides. 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. 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. Levels of child marriage can also be measured among women aged 18 to 19 years; in Ghana, the prevalence of child marriage among this age group is 16 per cent. The percentage of currently married adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 years should not be interpreted 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, since girls who are unmarried at the time of data collection may still marry before their 18th birthday. Regions shown in Figure 2 reflect borders at the time of data collection in 2017-2018.

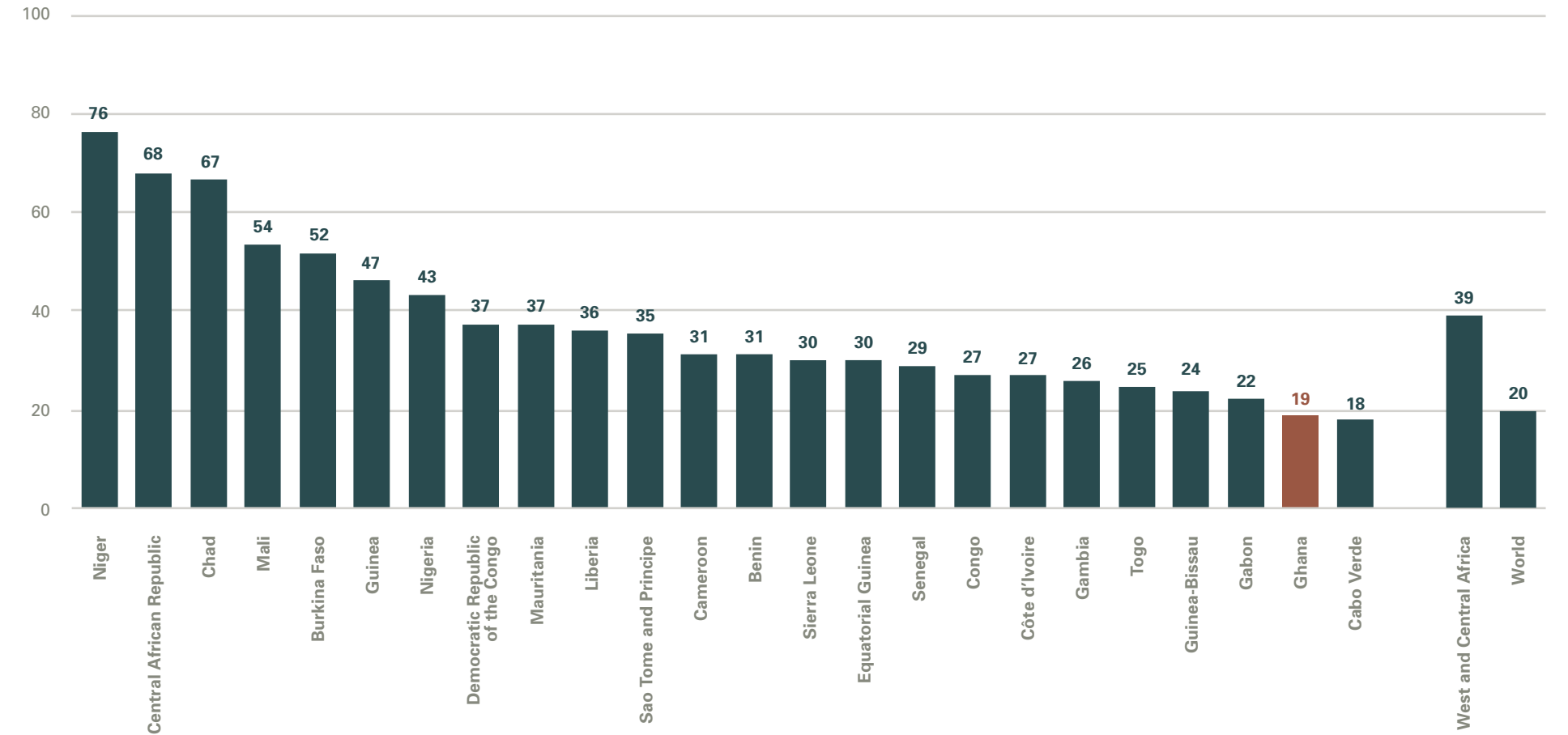
## One in five young women were married in childhood

FIG. 2 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



## The level of child marriage in Ghana is among the lowest in West and Central Africa

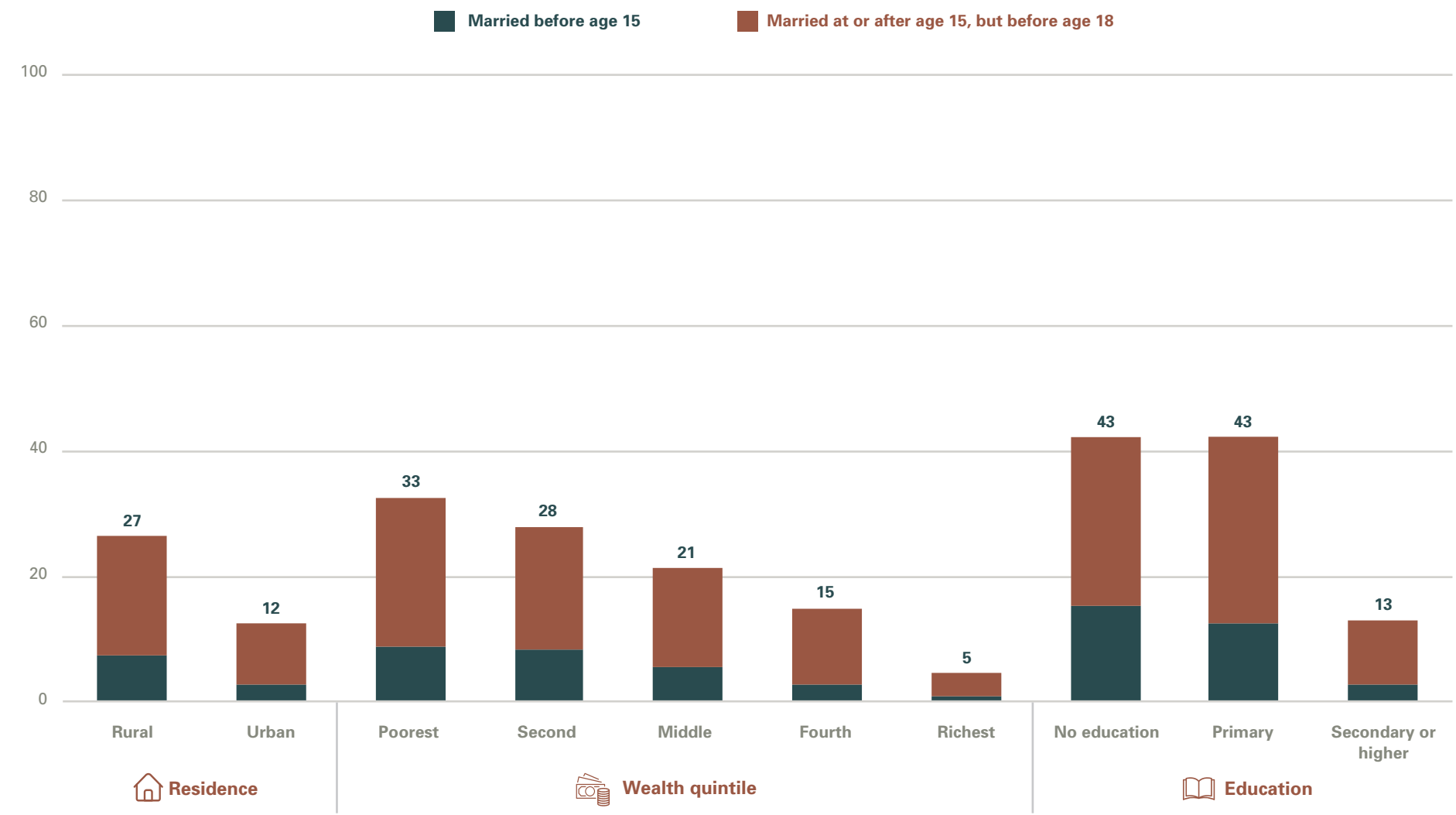
FIG. 3 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: Global estimates are based on a subset of 91 countries with comparable data from 2013-2019, covering 77 per cent of the global population and 90 per cent of the population of West and Central Africa.

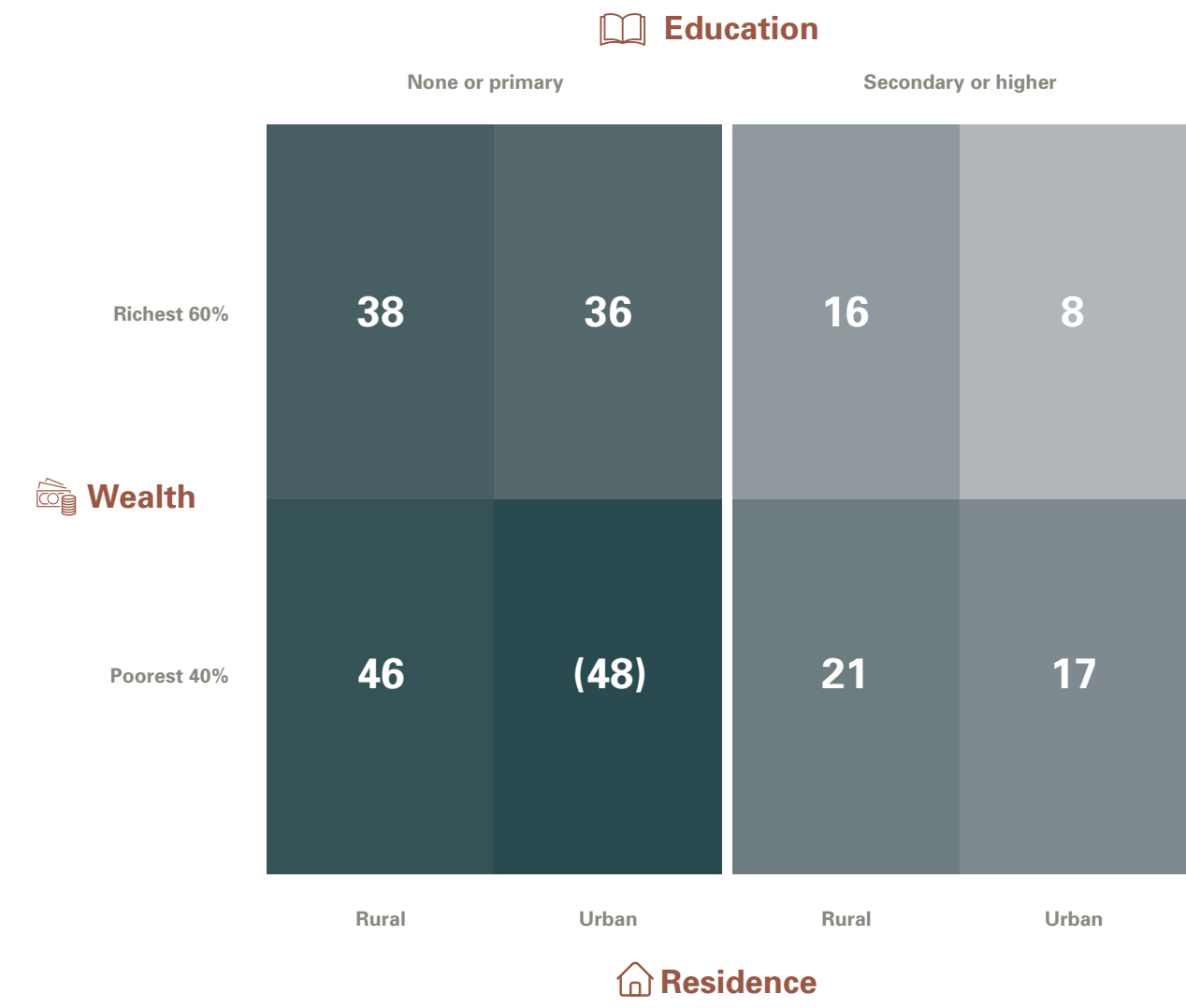
### Child marriage is more common among those who reside in rural areas, live in poor households and have little or no education

FIG. 4 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18



### The highest levels of child marriage are seen among those who are both poor and have little education

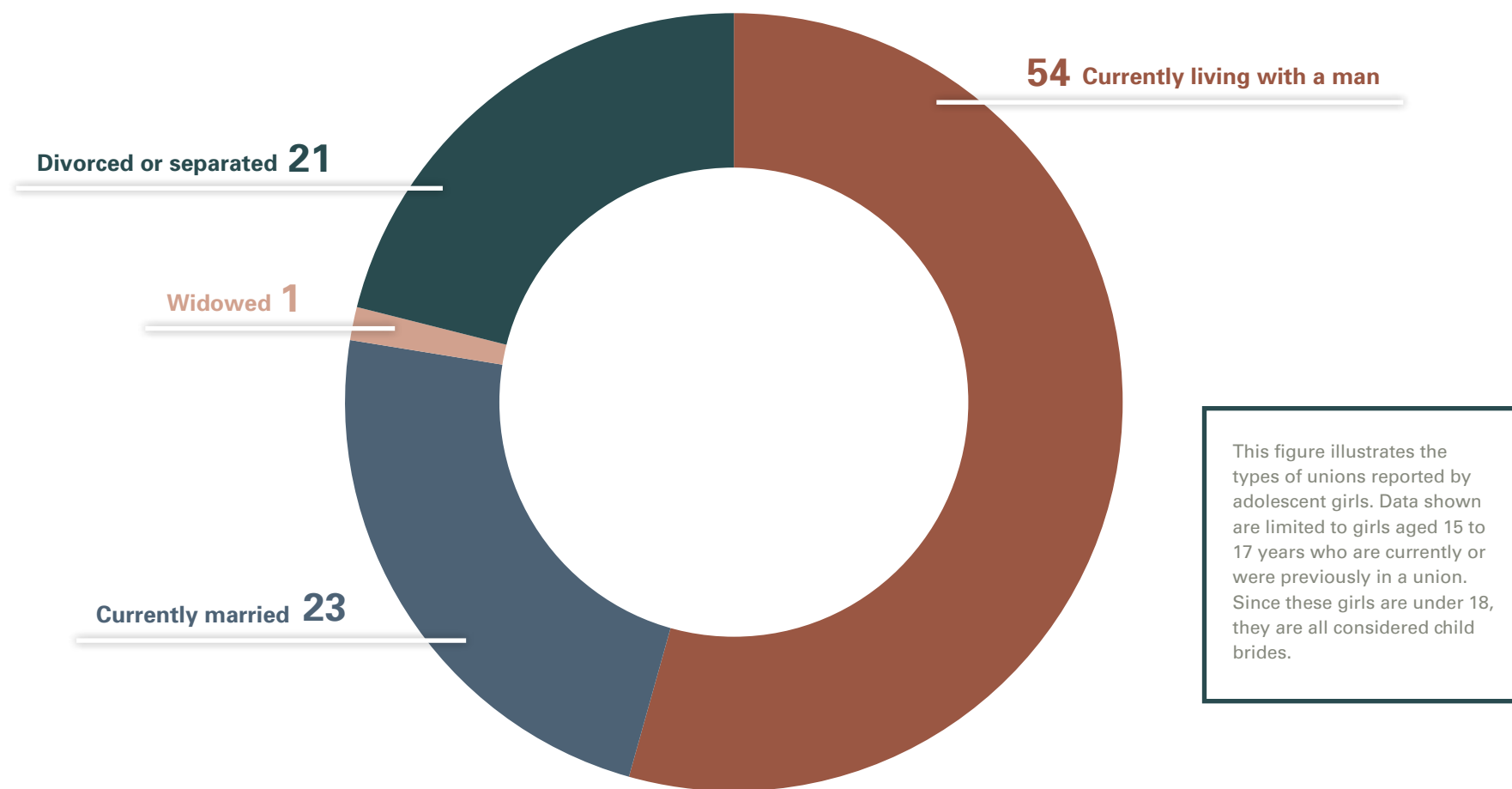
FIG. 5 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: Values presented here are based on at least 25 unweighted cases. Those based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases are shown in parentheses.

## Child marriage often takes the form of an informal union, in which a girl lives with a partner as if married

FIG. 6 Percentage distribution of ever-married girls aged 15 to 17 years by marital status



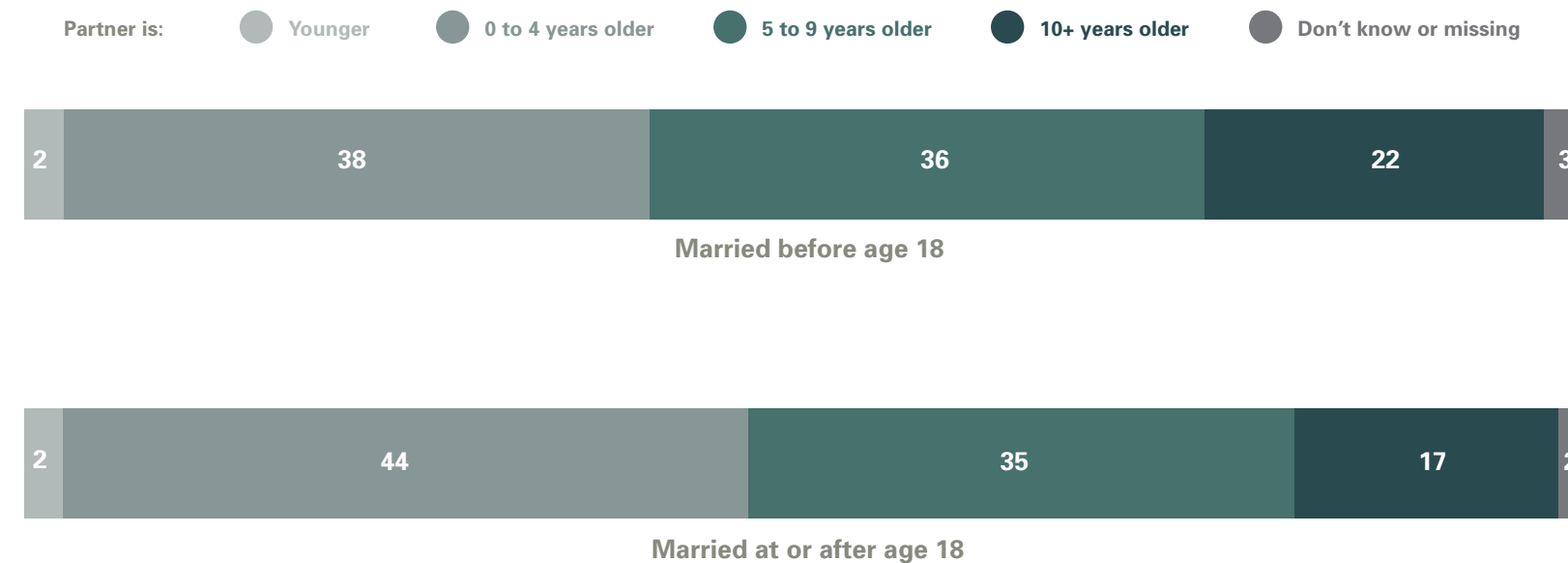
Note: Figures do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

## LIVES OF CHILD BRIDES

### Spousal age gap

Over one in five child brides are married to a man who is at least 10 years older; the proportion is similar among those who married in adulthood

FIG. 7 Percentage distribution of currently married women aged 20 to 24 years by spousal age gap between the women and their partners



Note: Some figures do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

## Early childbearing

Most child brides give birth at a young age, and are more likely than their peers who marry later to have many children to care for as young mothers

FIG. 8 Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years who gave birth before ages 18 and 20

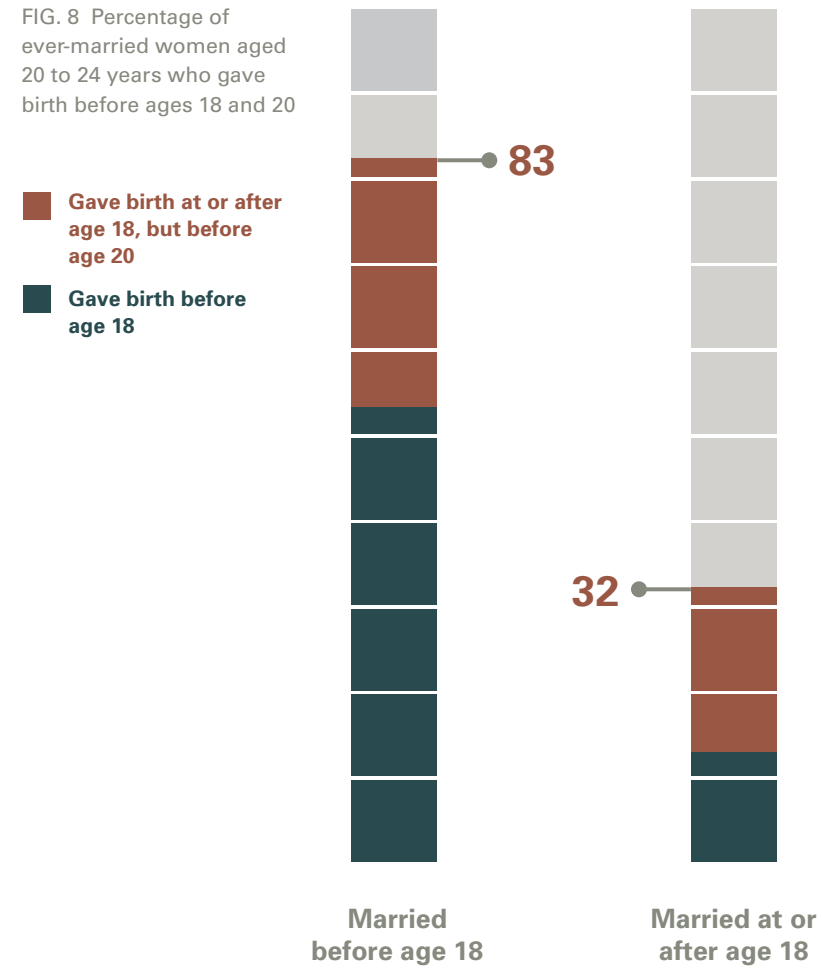
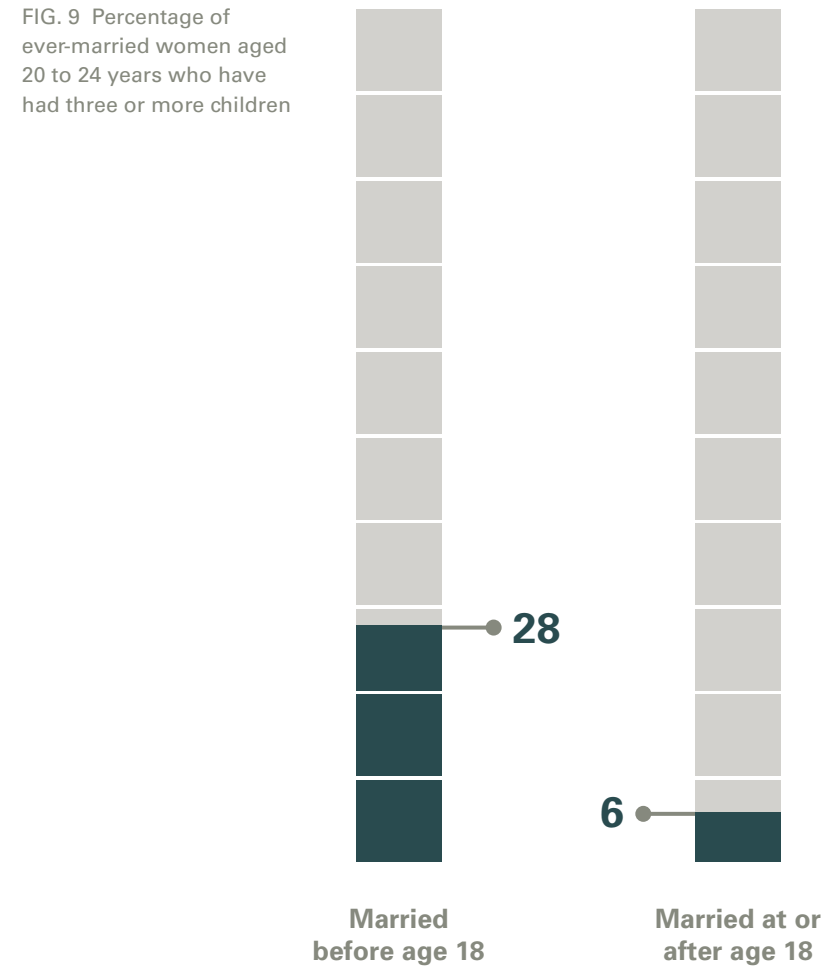
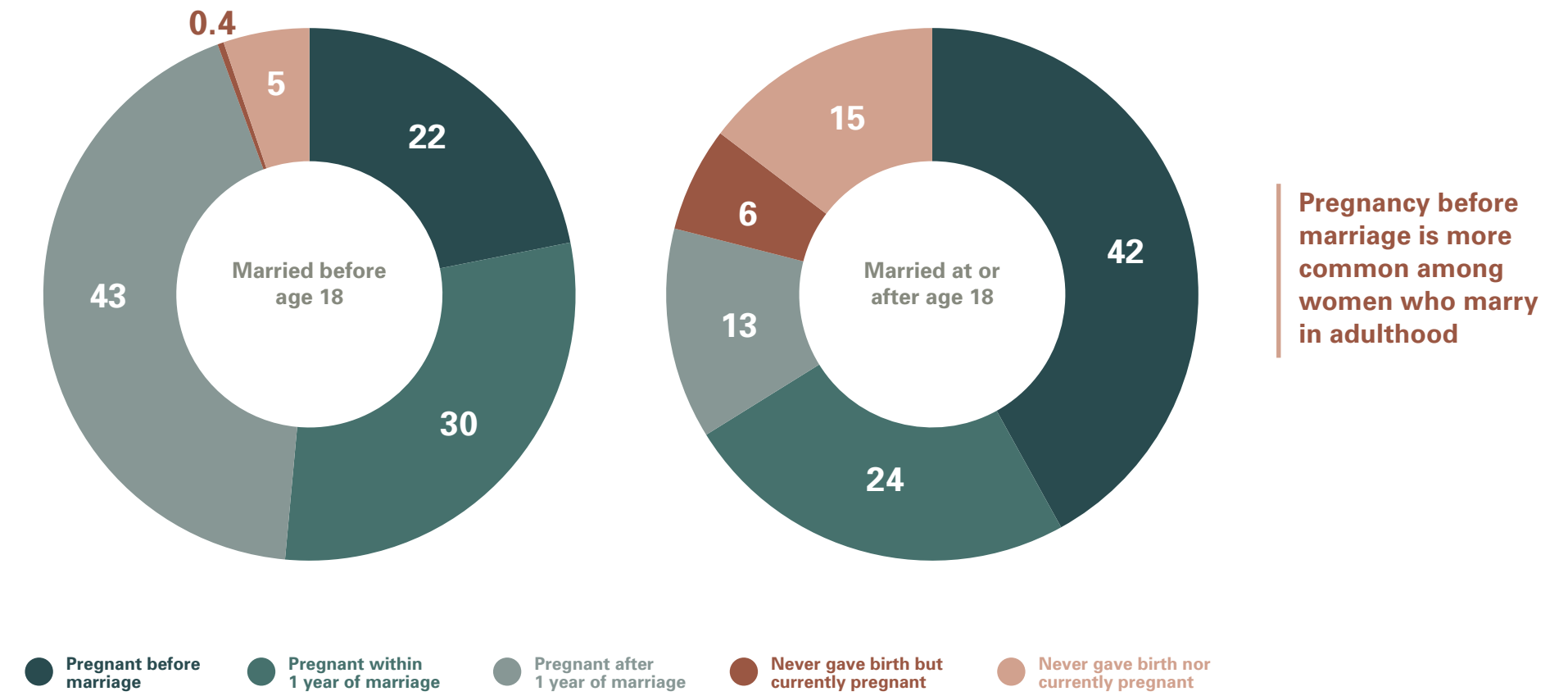


FIG. 9 Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years who have had three or more children



## For 2 in 10 child brides pregnancy precedes marriage, and 3 in 10 become pregnant within the first year of marriage

FIG. 10 Percentage distribution of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years by timing of pregnancy and marriage

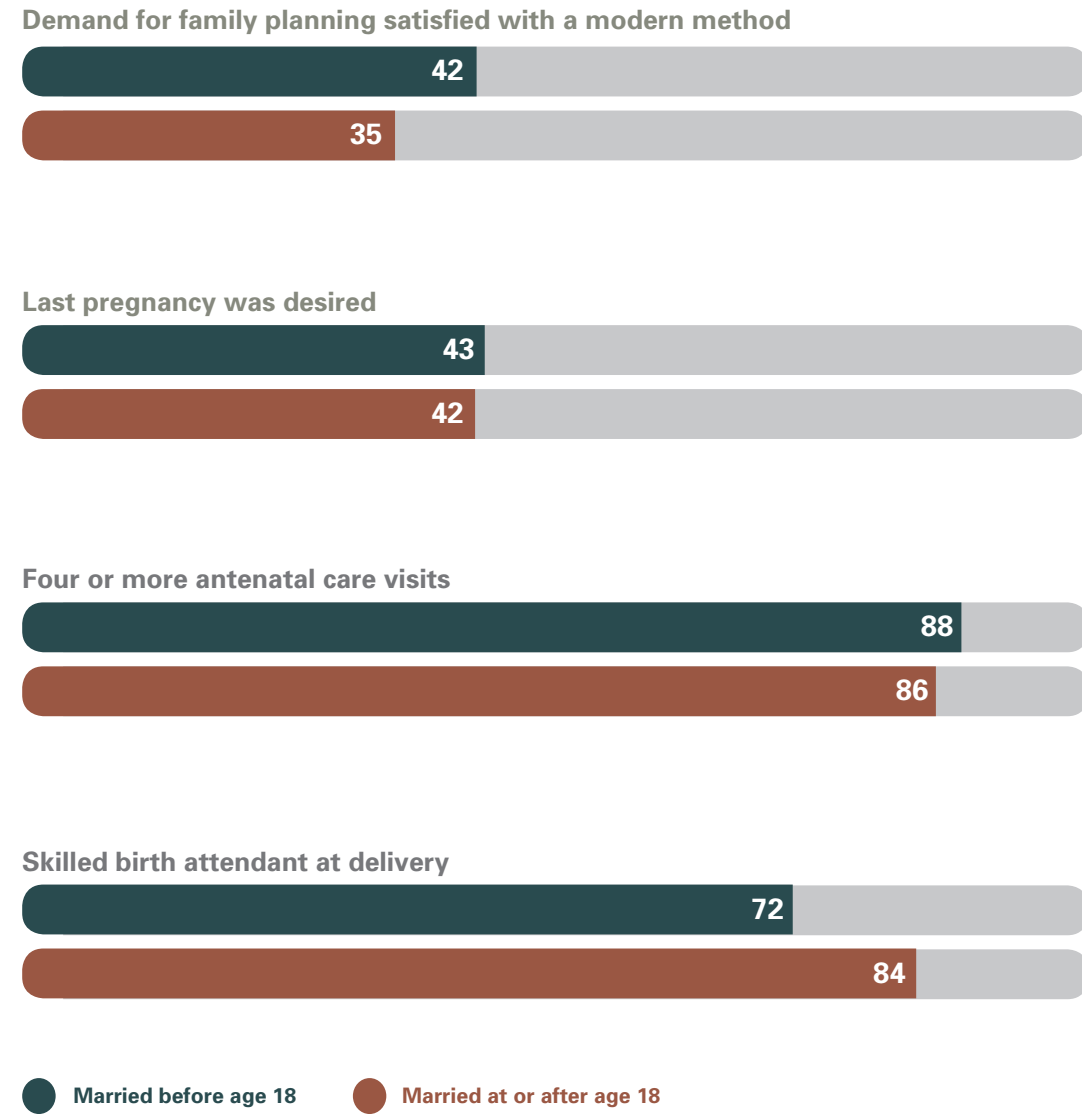


Note: Some figures do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

## Reproductive health

### Less than half of young women have their contraceptive needs met with modern methods

FIG. 11 Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years whose demand for family planning is satisfied by a modern method, whose last pregnancy was desired, who had four or more antenatal care visits during their last pregnancy, and who had a skilled attendant during their last live birth

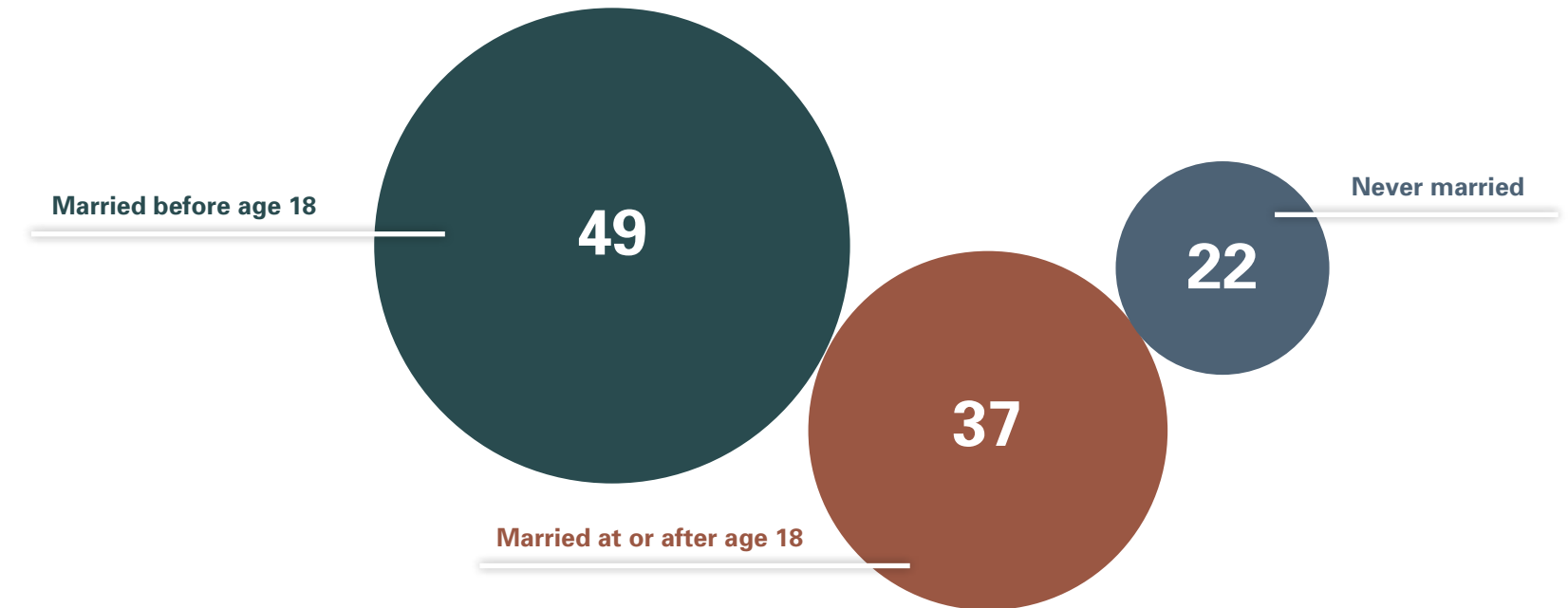


Access to reproductive health care is not universal, regardless of age at marriage

## Justification for wife-beating

### Child brides are more likely to say wife-beating is justified than their peers who are unmarried or who marry later

FIG. 12 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances

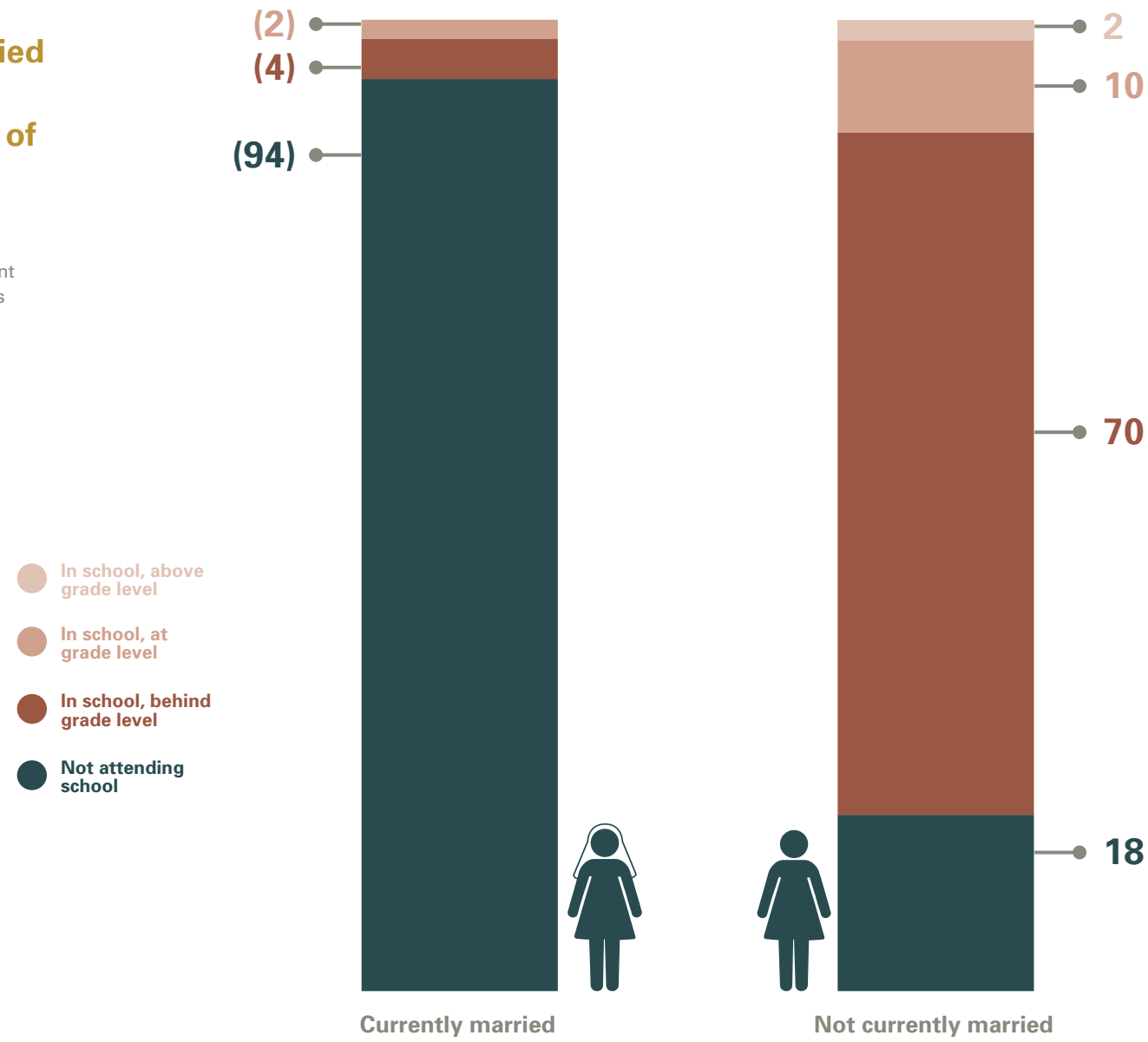




## Education

Over 90 per cent of married girls are out of school, compared to 18 per cent of their unmarried peers

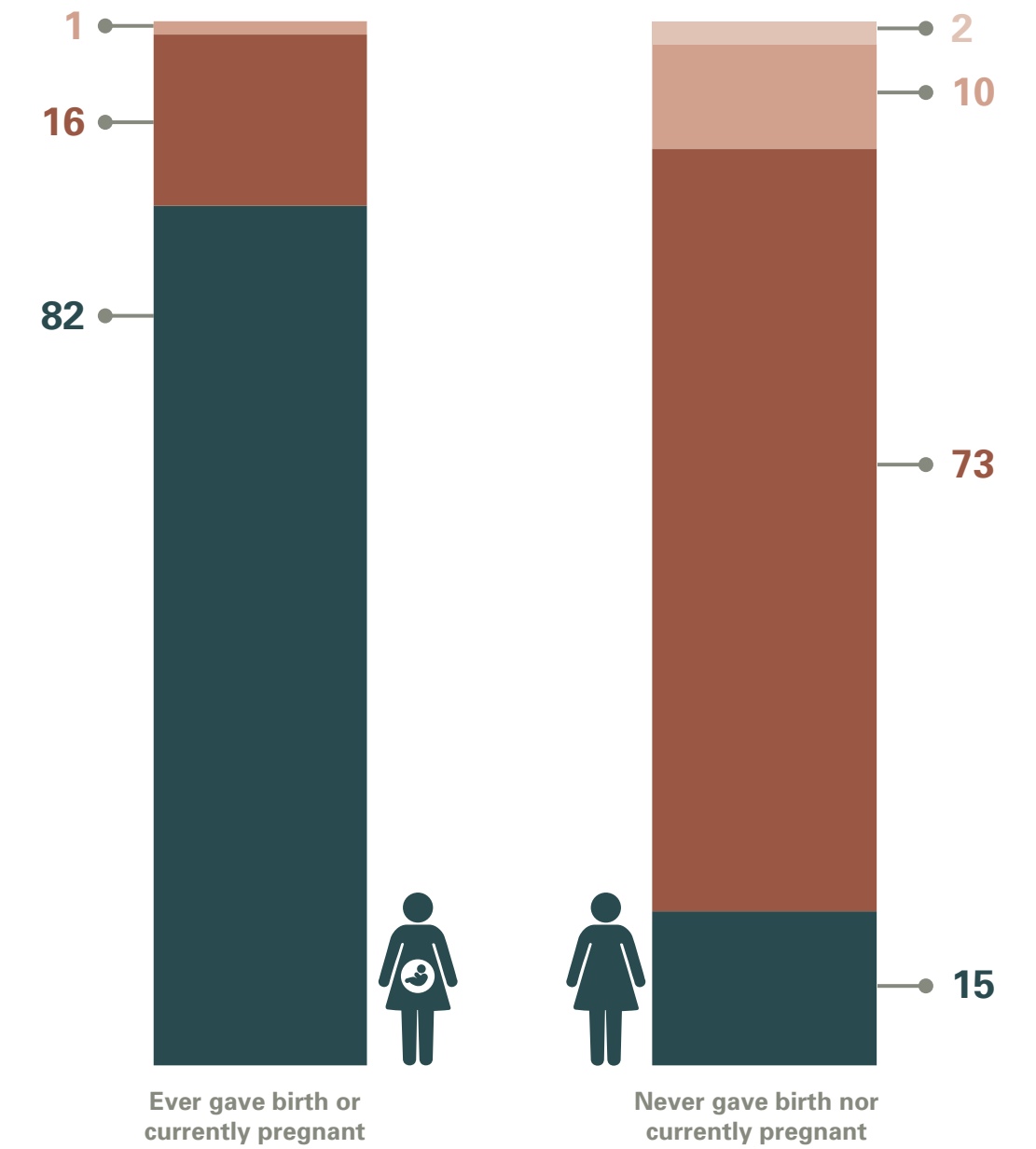
FIG. 13 Percentage distribution of adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 years by schooling status



Notes: Values presented here are based on at least 25 unweighted cases. Those based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases are shown in parentheses.

## Girls who have begun childbearing are more likely than their childless peers to be out of school

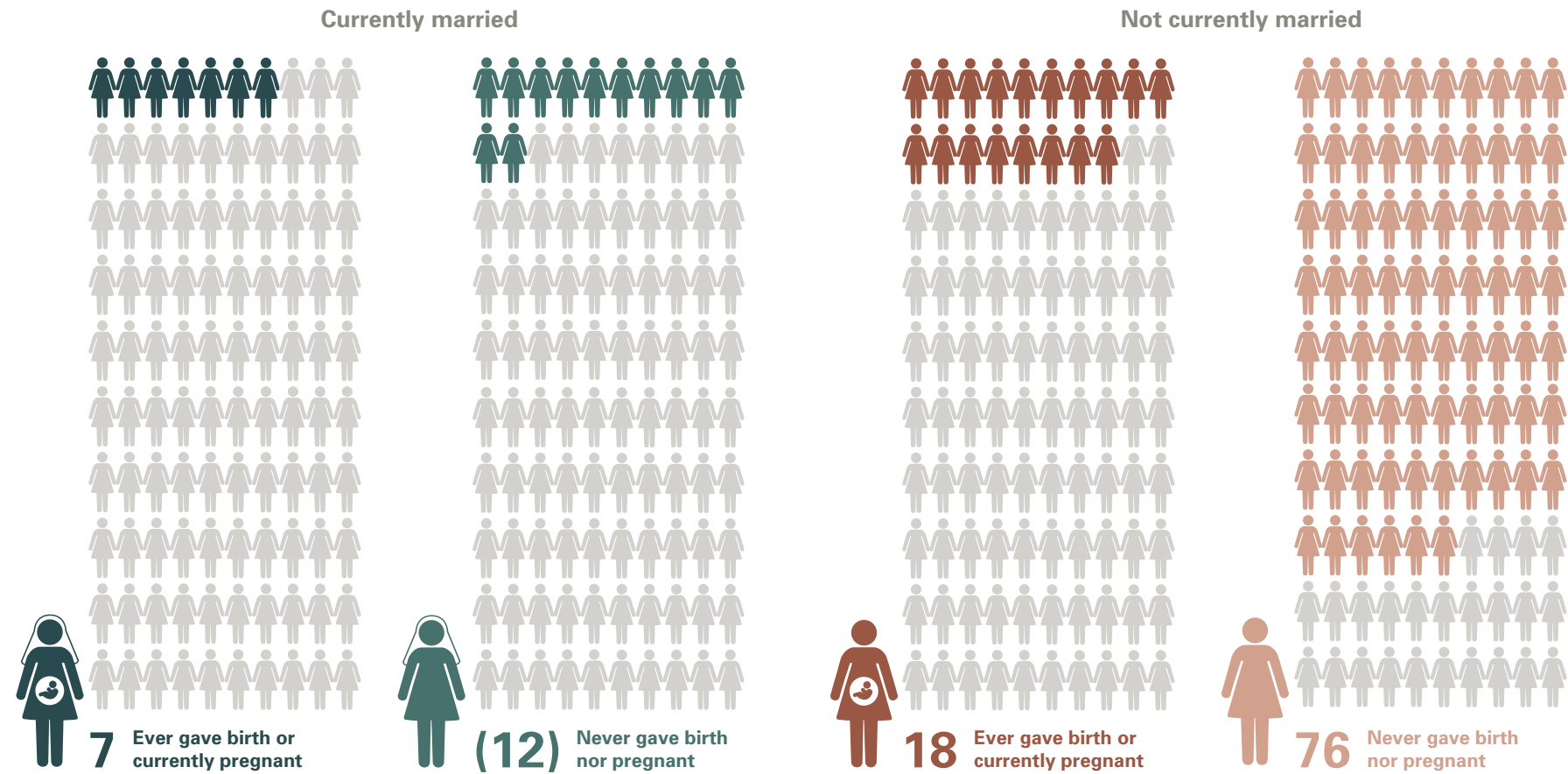
FIG. 14 Percentage distribution of adolescent girls aged 15 to 17 years by schooling status



Note: Some figures do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

## Marriage and pregnancy are both barriers to attending school

FIG. 15 Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who are attending school

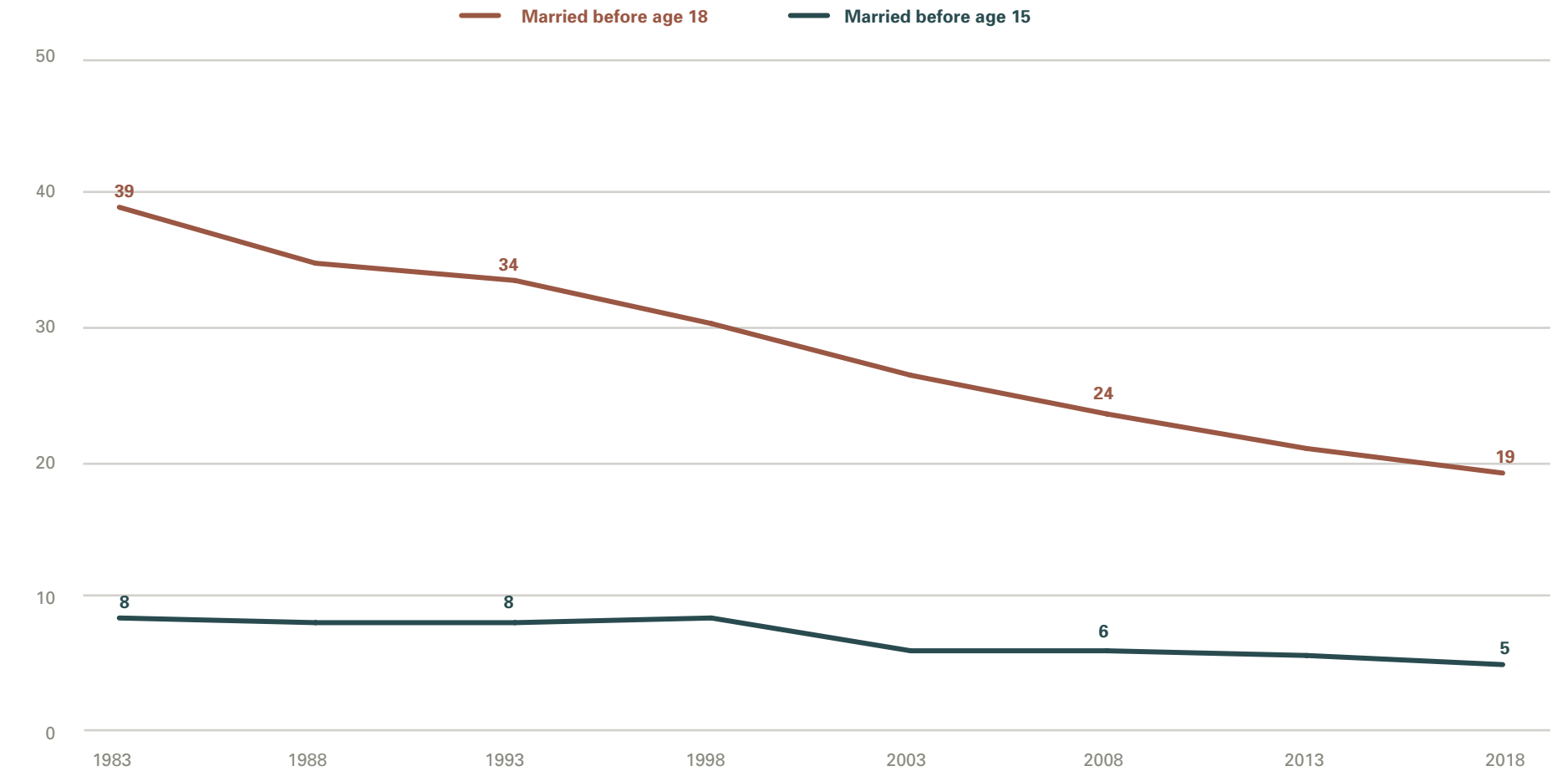


Notes: Values presented here are based on at least 25 unweighted cases. Those based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases are shown in parentheses. Values are not directly comparable to those presented in Figures 13 and 14 due to a difference in age groups. An expanded age group is used here to allow a sufficient sample size for the analysis.

## GENERATIONAL TRENDS

### Child marriage has declined over the last several decades in Ghana

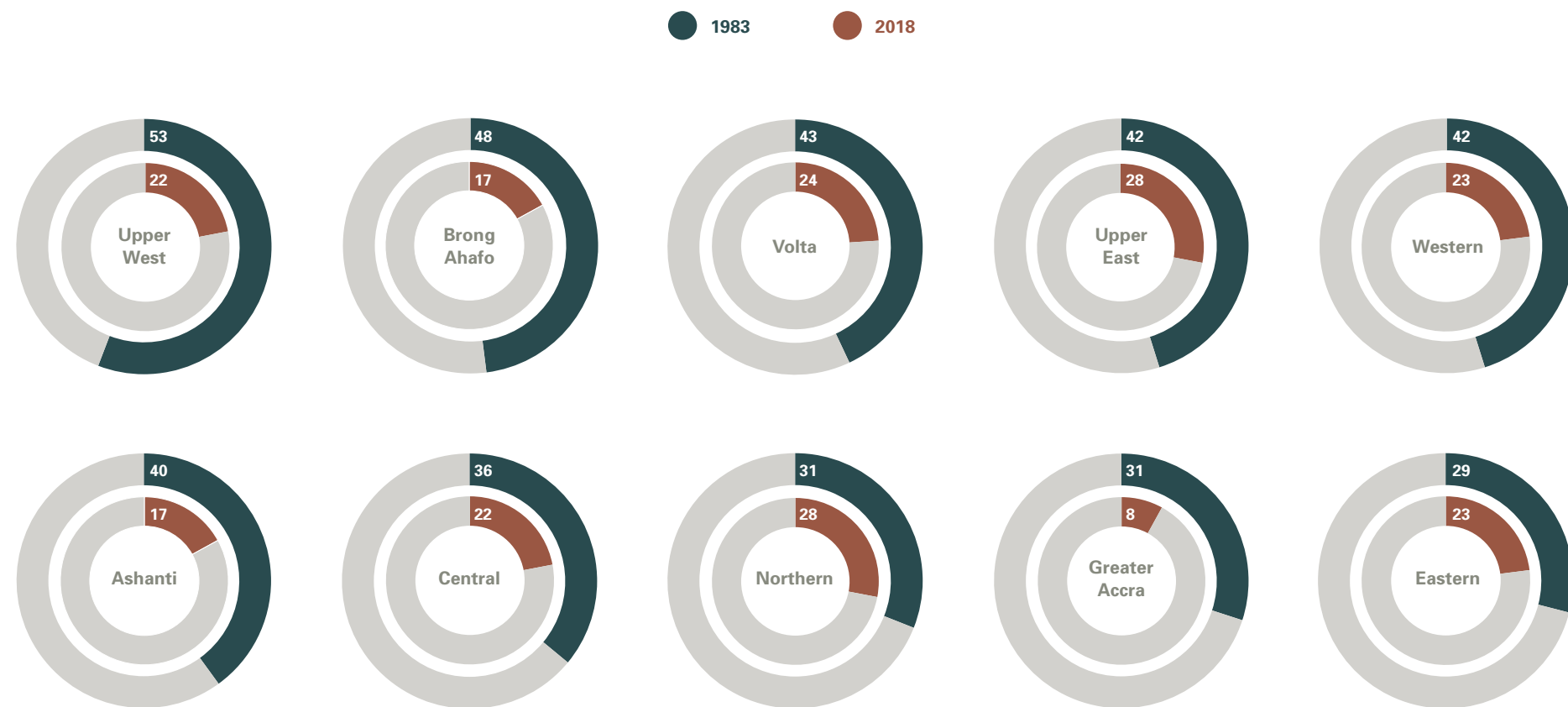
FIG. 16 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18



Notes: Trends in the prevalence of child marriage presented in Figures 16 and 17 relied on an age-cohort analysis taking into account data from the Ghana DHS 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008 and 2014, the MHS 2017 and the MICS 2006, 2011 and 2017-2018. From each survey, data on age at marriage were used not only for the cohort aged 20 to 24 years, but for all respondents through age 49 years, which allowed for a calculation of the prevalence of child marriage up to 25 years prior to the time of data collection. Results were validated across surveys for each cohort of women, and inconsistent results were excluded from the calculation of the final trend lines.

## Regions that have made the most progress in reducing child marriage include Brong Ahafo, Upper West, Ashanti and Greater Accra

FIG. 17 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: See page 19 for details on the calculation of trends. Regions named in this figure represent the populations living in the respective geographic areas as they were defined in 2017-2018.

## Ghana's progress in the past decade is relatively strong among countries in West and Central Africa

FIG. 18 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 (prevalence of child marriage) and average annual rate of reduction (%) in the prevalence of child marriage

Country	Prevalence of child marriage	Average annual rate of reduction in the prevalence of child marriage
Guinea-Bissau	24	4.8
Sierra Leone	30	3.2
Gambia	26	2.5
Benin	31	2.3
Côte d'Ivoire	27	2.3
Cameroon	31	2.1
<b>Ghana</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Senegal	29	1.7
Liberia	36	1.6
Democratic Republic of the Congo	37	1.4
Congo	27	1.0
Chad	67	0.8
Guinea	47	0.6
Togo	25	0.4
Burkina Faso	52	0.4
Gabon	22	0.3
Mali	54	0.1
Niger	76	0.1
Nigeria	43	0.0
Cabo Verde	18	-0.4
Sao Tome and Principe	35	-0.6
Equatorial Guinea	30	-1.0
Mauritania	37	-1.1
Central African Republic	68	-2.0

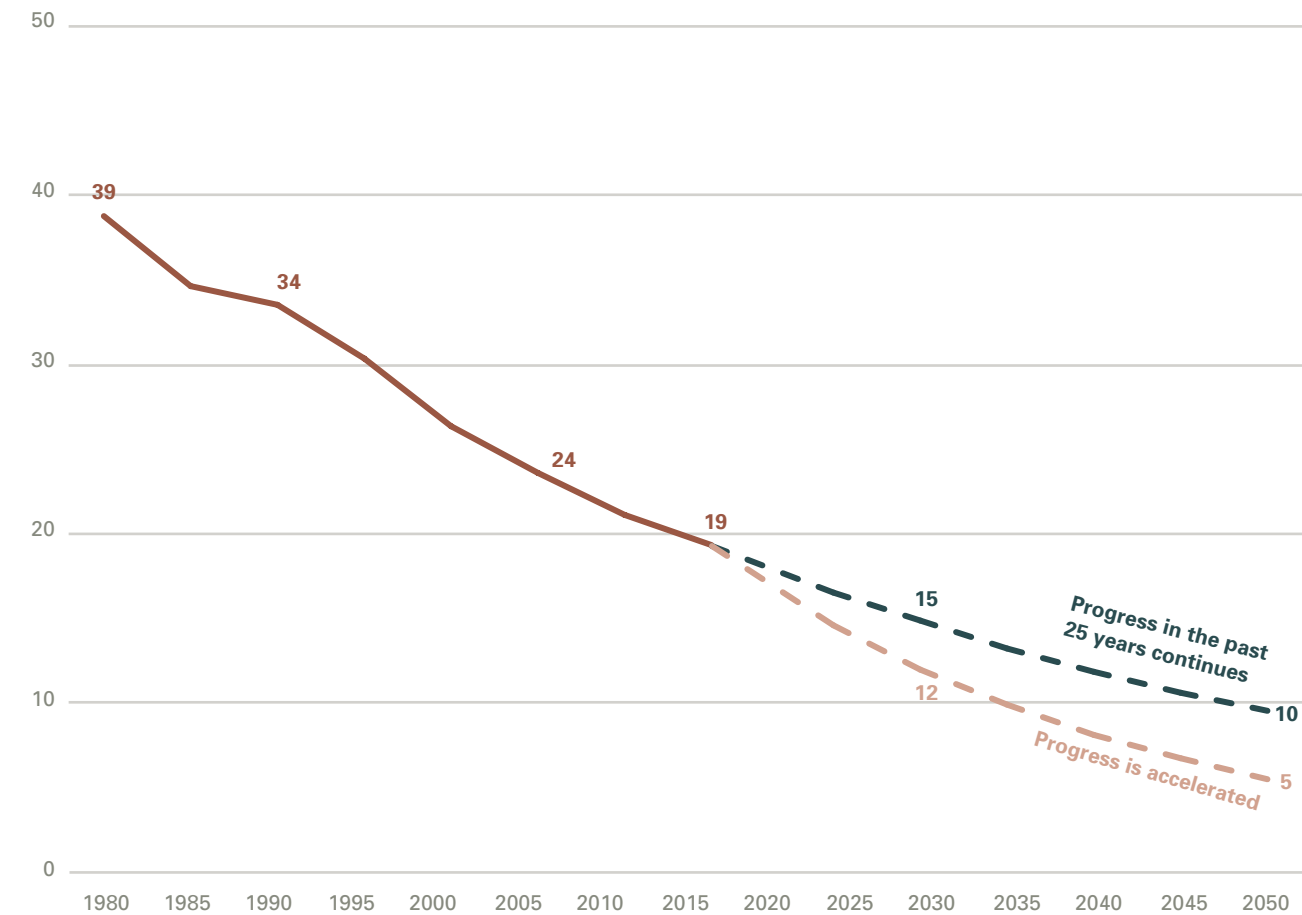
Notes: This table includes all countries in West and Central Africa with nationally representative data on child marriage from 2005 or later. Average annual rates of reduction are calculated on the basis of trends in the prevalence of child marriage, the methods of which are described on page 19. Countries are ranked from highest to lowest according to the 10-year average annual rate of reduction. A negative rate means there has been an increase in child marriage over the specified period. 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.



# ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE: WHAT IT WILL TAKE

**If progress is accelerated, the prevalence of child marriage could drop to 12 per cent by 2030 and to 5 per cent by 2050**

FIG. 19 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, observed and projected



## How to read the projections

The figures in this section show how the prevalence of child marriage has changed since around 1980, and possible future scenarios. Figure 19 shows how the percentage of young women married in childhood has changed and could continue to change through 2050. Figure 20 shows progress in terms of the rates of reduction that have been observed and the rate that would be required to meet elimination targets.

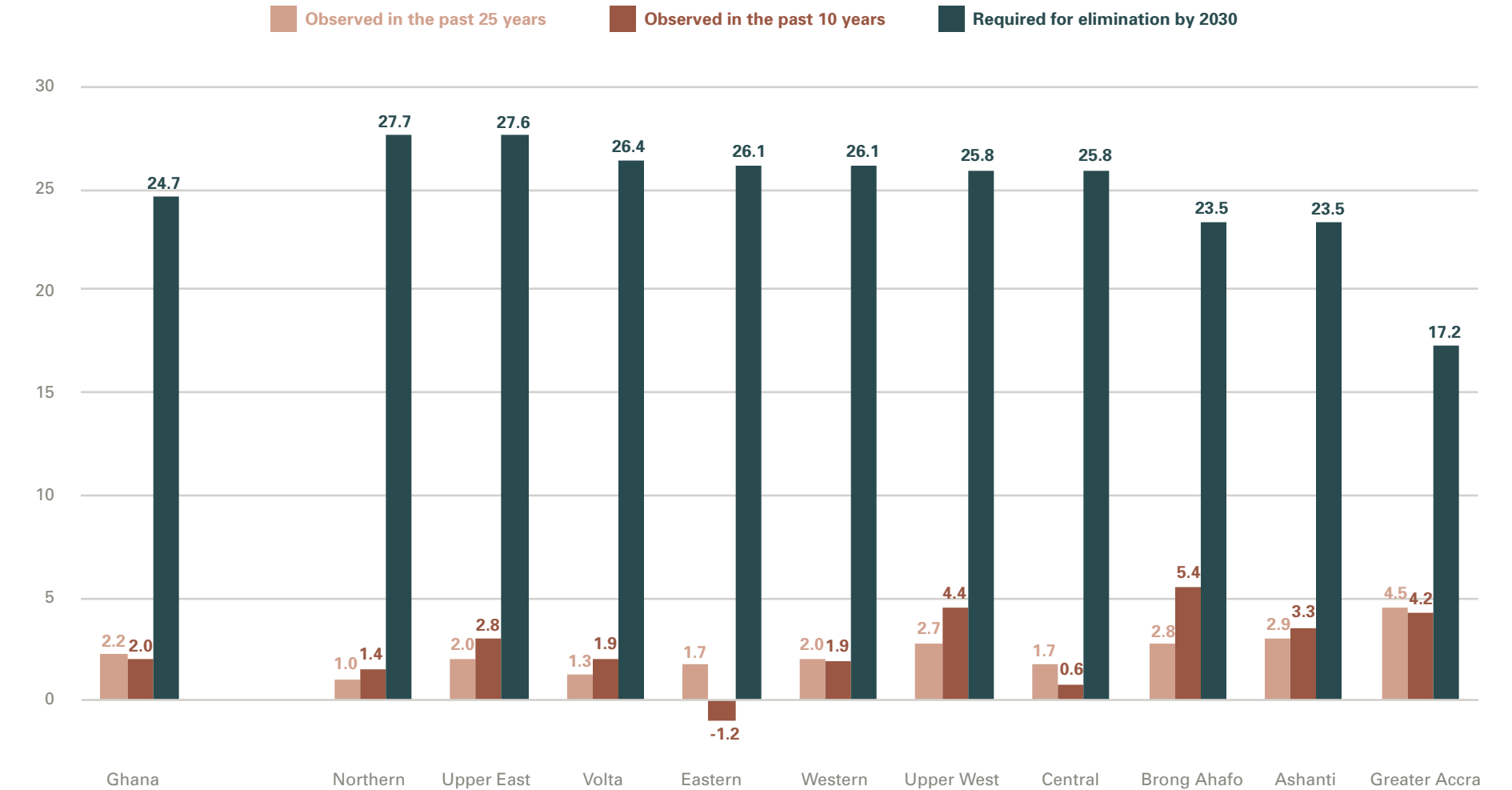
The projection scenarios build on existing trends. They show expected values if progress over the past 25 years were to continue (in dark green). Another scenario (in blush) illustrates what is likely to happen if the rate of progress is doubled.

The observed average annual rates of reduction quantify the rate of progress in the prevalence of child marriage over each period. A higher rate indicates faster progress. Required rates are calculated to illustrate what would be necessary to eliminate child marriage by 2030 – target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The projections do not take into account the potential impact of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, whose broad and likely long-lasting effects on the population are not yet fully understood. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that through economic uncertainty, interruption to schooling, disruption of services and other avenues, the pandemic has the potential to threaten progress made thus far against child marriage.

**Some regions have recorded faster progress than others within the past decade. Nevertheless, eliminating child marriage by 2030 will require additional efforts**

FIG. 20 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



Note: A negative average annual rate of reduction means there has been an increase in child marriage over the specified period.



## Eastern and Central Ghana are farthest from eliminating child marriage

FIG. 21 Ranking of the amount of acceleration needed to eliminate child marriage by 2030 in each region of Ghana, compared to the region's progress in the past 10 years

### How to read this table

In Ashanti, for example, progress would need to be 7 times faster than the rate observed over the past 10 years in order to eliminate child marriage by 2030.

Eastern	—
Central	42
Northern	20
Western	14
Volta	14
Upper East	10
Ashanti	7
Upper West	6
Brong Ahafo	6
Greater Accra	4

The value for the Eastern region is not presented since the rate observed over the past 10 years is negative, thus the region does not need to accelerate but to reverse course.





# GHANA'S PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE TO CHILD MARRIAGE

## A national commitment at the highest political levels

In 2014, the Government of Ghana joined the African Union in a continental call for action to end child marriage. Two years later it launched a national End Child Marriage Now! campaign to meet the 2030 SDG deadline. Its National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026) is guiding and coordinating partners and stakeholders through cross-sectoral strategies and approaches to address the issue. And to support implementation of the strategic plan, a revised National Operational, Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (2020-2021) has been finalized with support from the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. Ending child marriage has been deemed a priority in the President's Coordinated Programme for Economic and Social Development Policies (2017-2024). It has also been flagged as a priority for all government departments through its inclusion in the Medium-Term National Development Policy Framework.

## UNICEF Ghana's support to the national response

UNICEF works with government partners and a number of civil society and non-governmental organizations to end child marriage and support child brides and adolescent girls. These efforts are linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework and the UNICEF Ghana Country Programme 2018-2022; they also contribute to the UNICEF regional office's Key Results for Children. Ghana is one of 11 countries engaged in the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, which extends through 2023. At the country level, UNFPA and UNICEF are implementing the Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health programme (2018-2023), with support from Global Affairs Canada. In addition, UNICEF and the Korean International Cooperation Agency are supporting a Better Life for Girls programme (2017-2020) in selected districts. Since 2014, additional financial support has been provided by the Netherlands, Norway and Global Affairs Canada for interventions aimed at girls' empowerment as part of the UNICEF-Government of Ghana Child Protection Programme.

In alignment with the national strategic plan, UNICEF Ghana is supporting specific interventions that seek to address the multiple needs of both child brides and adolescent girls:

- Enabling at-risk adolescent girls to stay in school and facilitating the re-entry of adolescent girls, child brides and young mothers back to school.
- Building the agency of girls to access prevention and care services related to life skills, sexual and reproductive health, and nutrition.
- Confronting negative social norms related to child marriage and other harmful practices through dialogues at the community level and by direct engagement through both traditional mass media and social media.
- Improving services related to sexual and reproductive health, sexual and gender-based violence, and social welfare case management targeted to at-risk adolescent girls, child brides and pregnant girls.
- Advocating for the adequate allocation of resources to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

## INSIGHTS FROM THIS ANALYSIS

The analysis in this report offers insights into ways that the government and other stakeholders can act to strengthen their approach to ending child marriage. The lessons that emerge include the following:

- Child marriage is often linked with pregnancy, underscoring the need for sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents, including reproductive health education.
- Since the majority of married adolescent girls are out of school, efforts should be intensified to facilitate school re-entry and reach out-of-school girls with training and vocational opportunities.
- The issues facing child brides are multifaceted and require an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to provide interventions aimed at child protection, education, health and social protection.
- Progress in reducing child marriage has been uneven across the country, and accelerated efforts are required in regions with more child brides and in those that have made slower progress.
- Conversely, the regions that have seen the fastest progress can offer lessons on effective measures to end this harmful practice.







For information on the data in this brochure:

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