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Why it matters

Women married before 18 are exposed to higher levels of intimate partner violence – at **39% compared to 26%** among those married after 18– making child marriage a cause and consequence of gender-based violence.

Child marriage carries severe reproductive health risks - girls married before 18 are approximately **19 per cent more likely** to suffer miscarriage or stillbirth.

The consequences extend to the next generation - Children born to mothers married before 18 are nearly 30 per cent more likely to die before their fifth birthday, rising to 42 per cent for children born to mothers married before 15.

Child marriage is a barrier to education – nearly two-thirds of women married as children had no education or incomplete primary schooling, and girls married before 18 are nearly 8 per cent less likely to complete secondary education. Among women who only completed primary school, 65 per cent were married as children, compared to just 11 per cent of those who completed secondary education.

Child marriage locks girls out of economic opportunity – driving lower workforce participation, reduced productivity, and entrenching intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Child Marriage in Mozambique at a Glance

Mozambique is among the countries with the **highest prevalence of child marriage globally**, with rates stagnating at critically high levels — declining only marginally from 50 per cent to 48 per cent since 2017.

Nearly 1 in 2 women aged 18–49 years in Mozambique is married before her 18th birthday, and 1 in 8 before age 15, robbing them of their childhood, education and future.

Child marriage **disproportionately affects girls**. It is a **manifestation of gender inequality and harmful social norms**, and both a driver and consequence of violence against women and children.

Girls from the **poorest households are nearly four times more likely to marry before 18** than their wealthiest peers, trapping them in cycles of poverty and cutting short their education.

Child marriage is almost **twice as prevalent in rural areas as in urban areas**, with northern provinces bearing the heaviest burden.

Climate shocks and armed conflict are intensifying the crisis. In Cabo Delgado, over **61 per cent** of girls are married before 18, compared to 16 per cent in Maputo, exposing how humanitarian crises drive child marriage as a negative coping mechanism.

Women aged 20–24 years who were married before 18 **have more than twice as many children** as those who marry later (2.2 vs. 0.9). Girls married before age 15 have even higher fertility levels.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Economic Cost of Child Marriage

Child marriage costs Mozambique approximately **MZN 42.4 billion** annually, equivalent to 4.01 per cent of GDP.

- Health-related impacts account for approximately MZN 28.8 billion in economic losses, equivalent to 2.72 per cent of GDP.
- Education-related losses linked to lower educational attainment and reduced earnings amount to approximately MZN 13.6 billion, equivalent to 1.28 per cent of GDP.

Early child marriage before age 15 costs Mozambique approximately MZN 17.9 billion annually, equivalent to 1.69 per cent of GDP.

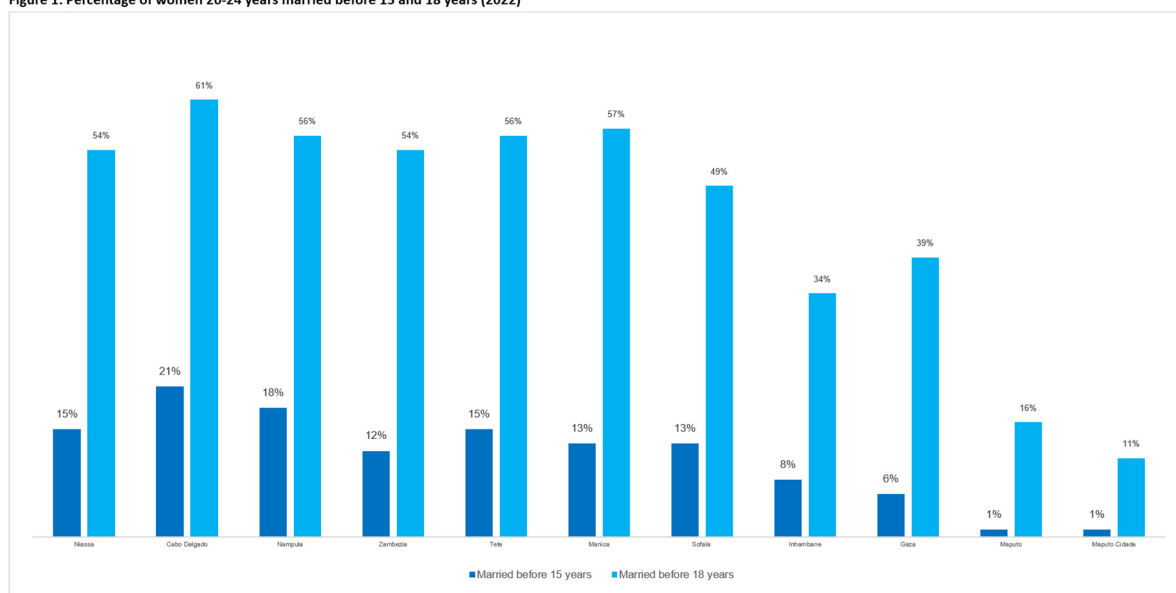
The annual economic cost per case of child marriage is approximately MZN 10,543, while the annual cost per case of early child marriage (before 15) is approximately MZN 15,267 — around 45 per cent higher.

Child Marriage Remains a National Development Crisis

Child marriage continues to affect millions of girls in Mozambique despite national commitments and the adoption of the Child Marriage Law No. 19/2019. The latest data from the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2022–2023 shows that approximately **46.5 per cent of women aged 18–49 years** were married before 18, while **13.5 per cent** were married before their 15th birthday.

Child marriage is overwhelmingly gendered, disproportionately affecting girls, and remains closely linked to poverty and geographic inequality. The practice is most prevalent among poor and rural households. Girls from the poorest households are nearly four times more likely to marry before 18 than their wealthiest peers. Rates are also almost twice as high in rural areas compared to urban areas. Provincial disparities are particularly stark. In Cabo Delgado, more than 60 per cent of girls are married before 18, compared to 16 per cent in Maputo.

Figure 1: Percentage of women 20-24 years married before 15 and 18 years (2022)



THE ECONOMIC COST OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN MOZAMBIQUE

Figure 2: Rates of child marriage, by urban-rural divide, 2022

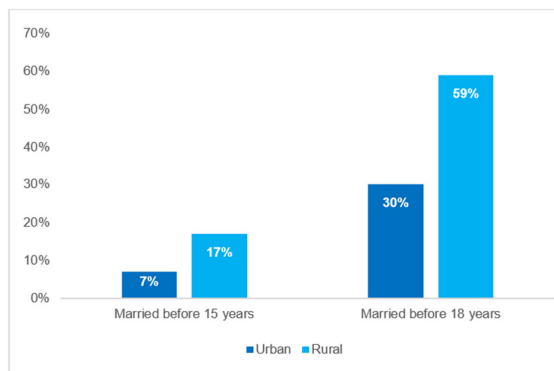
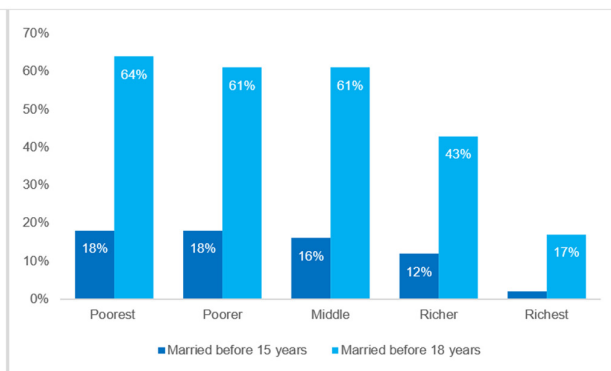


Figure 3: Rates of child marriage among women, by wealth quintile, 2022



Lifetime and Generational Consequences: Harming Girls, Families and Mozambique's Future

Child marriage violates girls' rights to a safe and healthy childhood and undermines their ability to unlock their full potential, as children, and in adulthood. It creates long-term social and economic costs for families, communities, and the country. Girls married before 18 are significantly more likely to experience early pregnancy and high fertility rates. Women aged 20–24 years who were married as children have an average of 2.2 children, compared to 0.9 children among women not married before age 18. Girls married before age 15 have even higher fertility levels at 2.6 children per woman.

Early childbearing increases the risks of maternal complications, child mortality, and long-term poverty. Regression analysis suggests that girls married before 18 suffer serious reproductive health risks. They are approximately 19 per cent more likely to experience miscarriage or stillbirth. The consequences extend to the next generation. DHS data indicate that 14 per cent of mothers aged 20–24 years who were first married before turning 18 reported having had a child die, relative to only 5 per cent of mothers who were married after 18. This proportion of mothers reporting child mortality is even greater among mothers who were married before 15, with nearly one in four mothers (23 per cent) who were victims of such early child marriage reporting child mortality.

Child marriage is a cause and consequence of gender-based violence and is associated with increased risks of women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV). Girls married before 18 are nearly 25 per cent more likely to experience intimate partner violence. DHS (2022) data shows that past-year rates of IPV experienced by women who were married as children (39 per cent) are significantly higher than similar rates among women who were married as adults (26 per cent).

Child marriage is a barrier to education. Education is another major pathway through which child marriage perpetuates poverty and inequality. The study estimates that child marriage reduces the likelihood of completing secondary education by nearly 8 per cent. Among women married as children, two-thirds had either no education or incomplete primary education, while only a small proportion completed secondary education or higher. Child marriage locks girls out of economic opportunity. It limits their future employment opportunities and earning potential, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of poverty.

THE ECONOMIC COST OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN MOZAMBIQUE

Figure 4: Average number of children per women aged 20–24 years, by child marriage status, 2022

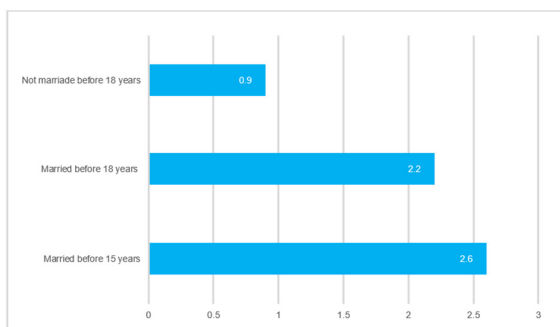


Figure 5: Proportion of mothers aged 20–24 years who have had a child die, by child marriage status, 2022

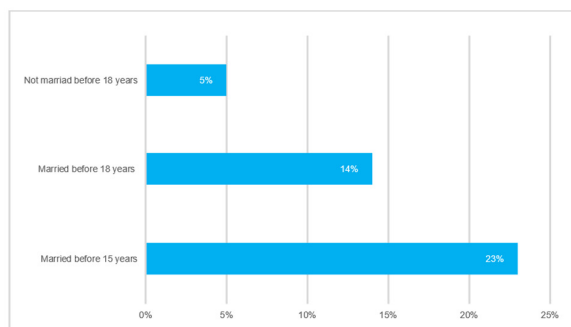
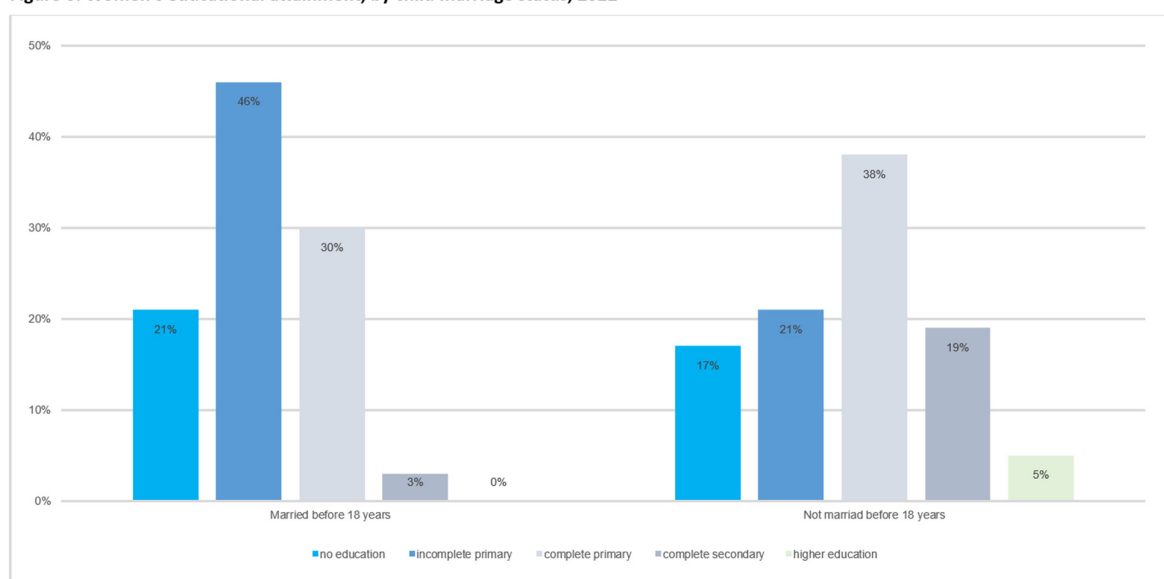


Figure 6: Women's educational attainment, by child marriage status, 2022



The Economic Cost of Child Marriage

Child marriage imposes a substantial economic burden on Mozambique, undermining human capital development, productivity and long-term economic growth. Beyond its harmful consequences for girls' rights and wellbeing, child marriage generates significant costs for the health and education sectors, weakens labour market outcomes and constrains the country's development potential.

*Findings indicate that child marriage cost Mozambique approximately **MZN 42.4 billion in 2021, equivalent to 4.01 per cent of GDP***

The largest share of these losses stemmed from adverse health outcomes linked to adolescent pregnancy, maternal complications, and increased child mortality. Health-related losses were estimated at **MZN 28.8 billion** (2.72 per cent of GDP).

THE ECONOMIC COST OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN MOZAMBIQUE

(in Million MZN)	Health-related costs	Education-related costs	Total	% GDP
Child Marriage < 18 years				
Women (18–49 years)	616.35	13,600.41	14,216.76	1.34%
Children (0–4 years)	28,185.34	-	28,185.34	2.66%
Total	28,801.70	13,600.41	42,402.11	4.01%
Early Child Marriage < 15 years				
Women (18–49 years)	152.92	4,025.53	4,178.45	0.39%
Children (0–4 years)	13,684.25	-	13,684.25	1.29%
Total	13,837.17	4,025.53	17,862.70	1.69%

Child marriage also contributes to major education and productivity losses. Evidence from the analysis shows that child marriage reduces the likelihood of completing secondary education by approximately **7.9 per cent**, generating education-related losses estimated at **MZN 13.6 billion** (1.28 per cent of GDP).

The economic impacts are even more severe for girls married before 15. Early child marriage alone resulted in losses estimated at **MZN 17.9 billion in 2021**, equivalent to **1.69 per cent of GDP**. Of these losses, approximately **MZN 13.8 billion** were linked to health impacts, while **MZN 4.0 billion** resulted from lower educational attainment and reduced lifetime earnings.

Results further show that the economic cost per case is significantly higher among girls married before age 15. The annual cost per case of early child marriage was estimated at **MZN 15,267**, approximately **45 per cent higher** than the average annual cost per case of child marriage overall (**MZN 10,543**). This reflects the particularly severe and long-lasting consequences associated with marriage at very young ages.

Important disparities also emerge between urban and rural areas. Child marriage reduced the likelihood of secondary school completion by **15.4 per cent** among urban girls, compared to **3.7 per cent** among rural girls. Similarly, annual earnings losses per affected girl were substantially higher in urban areas (**MZN 7,049**) than in rural areas (**MZN 1,874**). However, because child marriage remains far more prevalent in rural communities, the overall number of affected girls — and the aggregate economic burden — is considerably greater in rural areas.

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that child marriage is not only a child protection and gender equality issue, but also a major macroeconomic and development challenge. Ending child marriage would generate significant social and economic returns by improving educational outcomes, reducing health burdens, strengthening women's economic participation and accelerating inclusive growth in Mozambique.

Annual cost per case of child and early child marriage, 2021

	Prevalence (%)	Prevalence (Number)	Total Cost (MZN)	Cost Per Case (MZN)
Child marriage	46.45%	4 021 814	42 402 108 443	10 543
Early child marriage	13.51%	1 170 008	17 862 704 693	15 267

Policy recommendations and way forward

UNICEF and partners call on Government and development partners to:

1. **Increase investment and align financing** for evidence-based child marriage prevention and response interventions, prioritising high-burden regions and the poorest, most at-risk girls in high-prevalence provinces and vulnerable rural communities.
2. **Enable a costed national action plan** and financing scenarios by operationalising child marriage prevention and response actions in the third National Plan for Children (PNAC 2025–2034)
3. **Strengthen implementation of the Child Marriage Law** by enforcing the statutory minimum age of marriage, including customary and informal unions, and by engaging community leaders to prevent child, early and forced marriages.
4. **Expand access to quality secondary education**, especially for girls, providing opportunities of Learning to Earning, skills development and economic empowerment.
5. **Invest in early prevention with proven, high-impact approaches**, such as keeping girls in school, delaying first pregnancy, and addressing harmful social norms targeting girls under 15, through innovative digital solutions and accelerated learning for girls aged 10 to 14
6. **Establish sexual and reproductive health services**, including family planning and maternal healthcare, to reduce early pregnancies and associated health risks.
7. **Expand social protection programmes targeting poor households** to address economic drivers of child marriage.
8. **Promote community dialogues to change harmful social norms** engaging religious leaders, traditional leaders, civil society organisations and youth networks.
9. **Scale up and converge actions** integrating education, health, gender and social protection to ensure scalability, intersectoral linkages, feasibility and resource effectiveness.
10. Integrate and harmonise reporting mechanisms, case management and referral pathways to address child marriage cases through coordinated services.
11. **Generate community ownership and accountability of child protection community structures (CCPCs) to scale up** child marriage free communities.
12. Ensure sustained political commitment and increased investment across multiple sectors (health, education, social assistance and protection).

*Donors have a decisive role in converting this evidence into impact. Ending child marriage in Mozambique is **achievable, cost-effective, and transformational**. With strategic investment, Mozambique can unlock significant economic gains, protect millions of girls, and accelerate progress toward sustainable and inclusive development.*

Methodology

The study estimated the economic cost of child marriage in Mozambique using nationally representative data from the Mozambique Demographic and Health Survey (DHS 2022–23), the Household Budget Survey (IOF 2022), the Global Burden of Disease Study (GBDS) and World Bank economic data. The analysis focused on two major pathways through which child marriage affects economic development: health-related impacts and education-related impacts.

To estimate the health-related costs, the study first measured the prevalence of child marriage and early child marriage among women aged 18–49 years using DHS data. Statistical regression models were then used to estimate the relationship between child marriage and a range of adverse outcomes, including intimate partner violence, miscarriage, stillbirth, child mortality and other health risks affecting both women and children.

The study subsequently calculated Population Attributable Fractions (PAFs) to estimate the proportion of these adverse outcomes directly attributable to child marriage. These estimates were combined with data from the Global Burden of Disease Study to calculate disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), which measure years of healthy life lost due to illness, disability or premature death. The DALYs attributable to child marriage were then converted into economic losses using Mozambique's GDP per capita.

To estimate education-related costs, the study analysed how child marriage affects girls' likelihood of completing secondary education and how lower educational attainment influences future earnings and labour productivity. Using data from the Household Budget Survey, the study estimated income losses associated with reduced educational attainment among women affected by child marriage.

Finally, the study combined the health-related and education-related losses to estimate the total economic cost of child marriage in Mozambique. Sensitivity analyses using Monte Carlo simulations were also conducted to test the robustness and reliability of the findings.

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