



# Child Marriage in Mozambique: In Brief

## Background

*Child marriage is defined as any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.*



Preventing and responding to child marriage contributes to SDG Target

5.3, to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Mozambique is among the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, with 48.4 per cent of women in Mozambique aged 20–24 first married or in a union before the age of 18, and 12.9 per cent before the age of 15.<sup>1</sup> Rates of child marriage vary across the country with higher rates in the central and northern regions.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of National Statistics and Ministry of Health. Mozambique Demographic and Health Survey 2022-23.

Child marriage in Mozambique is driven by economic pressures, gender inequality, sociocultural norms, and low education levels. Other factors include material incentives like bride price (lobolo), reduced household expenses, and community norms relating to marriage age. Low education rates, with only 49 per cent of women completing primary school, contribute to the problem, particularly in rural areas where 59 per cent of women aged 20-24 marry before 18, compared to 30 per cent in urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

Climate shocks and armed conflict further increase the risk of child marriage as a coping mechanism in vulnerable communities.

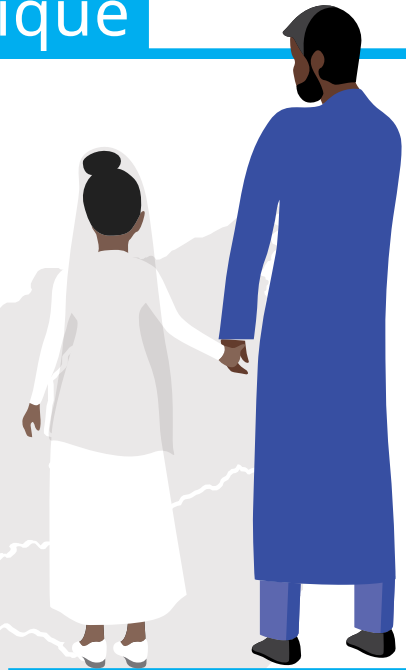
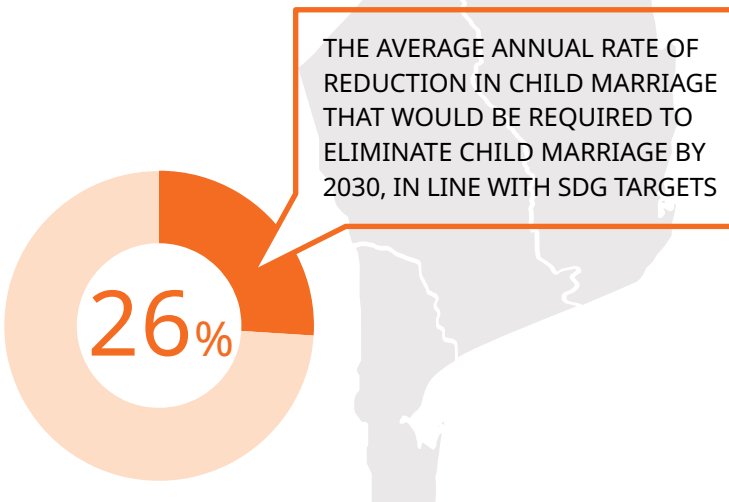
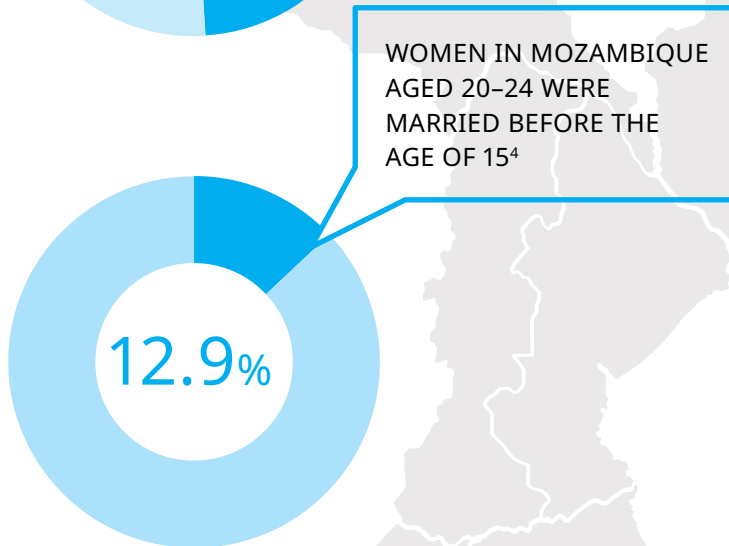
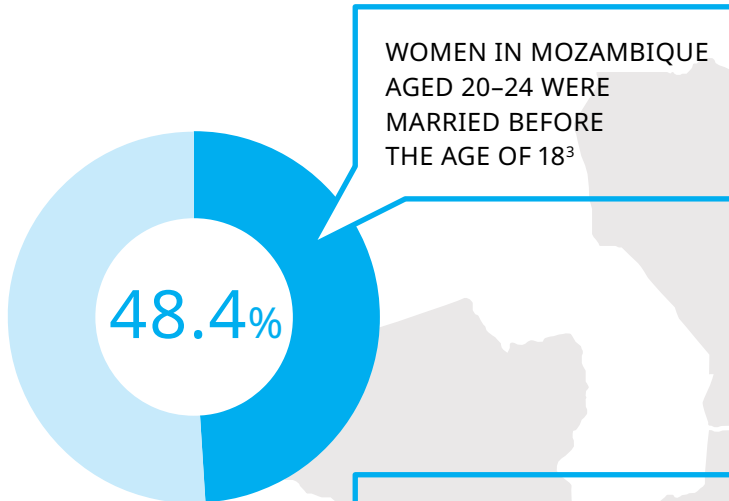
Despite the existence of important legislative measures like the Law to Prevent and Combat Child Marriage (2019) and National Gender Policy (2018), there is an urgent need to strengthen enforcement. Additionally, ongoing violence and unrest in Cabo Delgado province, coupled with recurrent natural disasters, continues to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of children and families, increasing the risk of negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage, among affected communities.

Child marriage hinders girls' ability to exercise their fundamental rights to education, health, and protection, with significant adverse effects on their health and overall well-being. It contributes to poor educational outcomes, increases the risk of domestic violence, leads to adolescent pregnancies, and raises maternal and child mortality rates while negatively affecting nutritional status. These consequences extend beyond the girls themselves, impacting their children, families, and entire communities. Additionally, child marriage undermines national development by perpetuating intergenerational poverty and reducing potential earnings.

<sup>2</sup> Institute of National Statistics and Ministry of Health. Mozambique Demographic and Health Survey 2022-23.

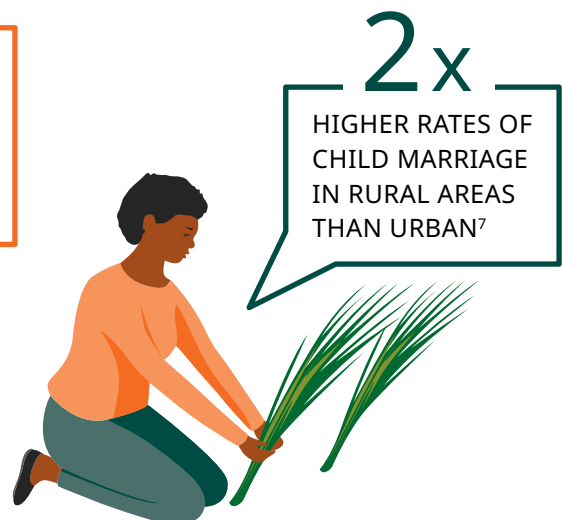
# Child Marriage in Mozambique

## Facts & Figures



**4.3 MILLION**  
MOZAMBIKAN WOMEN AND GIRLS WERE MARRIED BEFORE 18<sup>5</sup>

**1.0 MILLION**  
MOZAMBIKAN WOMEN AND GIRLS WERE MARRIED BEFORE 15<sup>6</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Institute of National Statistics and Ministry of Health. Mozambique Demographic and Health Survey 2022-23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Calculations based on child marriage prevalence rates from DHS and population projections from the Demographic Census (2017)

<sup>6</sup> Calculations based on child marriage prevalence rates from DHS and population projections from the Demographic Census (2017)

<sup>7</sup> Institute of National Statistics and Ministry of Health. Mozambique Demographic and Health Survey 2022-23.

# UNICEF's Response to Child Marriage

## in Mozambique

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of Mozambique and other partners, adopts a multisectoral approach to addressing the complex issue of child marriage through a number of strategic interventions:

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



UNICEF facilitates community-based awareness interventions to challenge harmful norms, engaging 85,394 community members in dialogues on gender equality and alternatives to child marriage in 2023.

### LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME



UNICEF's life skills programmes reached 180,350 students in 2023, while 3,607 students aged 10-19 years old from 600 schools were trained as mentors. These programmes focus on empowering students with knowledge about their rights, relationships, and reproductive health, helping them make informed decisions.

### MALE AND FEMALE PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMME



UNICEF works with boys and young men on peer-to-peer programmes, promoting gender equality by addressing harmful gender norms, reducing the risk of child marriage. Last year, 32,983 boys and young men and 42,984 girls and young women were engaged in this programme.

### IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL OF CASES



UNICEF, in collaboration with Government and the NGO International Child Development Programme (ICDP), actively works to identify and refer cases of child marriage to district-level social services. 6,119 cases were identified in 2023 and 4,895 girls were reintegrated into their biological families.

### SUPPORTING SOCIAL SECTORS



UNICEF supports Government efforts to strengthen the social action, justice, and health sectors in Mozambique, providing support to ensure that cases of child marriage and violence against children are handled effectively. UNICEF supports access to justice including through mobile courts – specialized judicial bodies that travel to remote areas to provide legal services and adjudicate cases – bringing legal services closer to communities and offering justice to victims, as well as birth registration including through mobile brigades.

### PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT



UNICEF offers psychological support through healing group activities such as Capoeira, the Brazilian martial art, benefiting girls who have experienced child marriage or violence. Capoeira programmes reached 900 girls last year.

### LINHA FALA CRIANÇA (Child Helpline)



Mozambique's only free child helpline, LFC, handles 400 calls daily. In 2023, 1,105 cases of child marriage were reported. Linha Fala Criança coordinates with police and social services, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Cabo Delgado.

### SCHOOL REINTEGRATION



UNICEF's interventions helped 219 girls re-enroll in school in 2023, providing necessary materials such as uniforms and school supplies and advocating with school authorities at all levels to ensure rapid reintegration to education.

# Recommendations for Action

To accelerate progress in addressing child marriage in Mozambique and reach the SDG target, the following areas should be prioritized:



## STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS

Ensure the full implementation of the Law to Prevent and Combat Child Marriage (2019) and related policies, such as the National Gender Policy (2018). This should include high-level multi-sectoral coordination between ministries and agencies to close existing gaps in enforcement.



## REINFORCE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Expand capacity building for national and sub-national child protection systems to ensure the delivery of specialized services, including social, justice, health, protection services and civil registration. These services should focus on addressing the needs of girls at risk of child marriage, or rescued from child marriage, including in conflict- and natural disaster-affected areas.



## IMPROVE CASE MANAGEMENT

Strengthen national case management systems to identify and provide care and support to child victims of child marriage. Case management needs to include conflict- and natural disaster-affected regions, ensuring that displaced and vulnerable populations receive adequate care and services.



## INVEST IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

Increase investment in programmes that foster gender equality by promoting positive masculinities, legal rights awareness, and the prevention of harmful practices, including harmful components of initiation rites. Special attention should be given to educating families, communities, and local leaders about the negative consequences of child marriage.



## EXPAND GOVERNMENT BUDGET ALLOCATION

Advocate for expanded budget allocation for implementation of the National Plan of Action for Children (PNAC III) and increase social protection programmes.



## KEEP GIRLS IN SCHOOL

Establish a comprehensive support system for girls who drop out due to early pregnancy or child marriage, ensuring their reintegration, retention, and completion of primary and secondary education. Engage community members, especially adolescent mothers, in supporting early childhood development initiatives.



## INVEST IN GIRLS' ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Support girls at risk of, or rescued from, child marriage with education and training opportunities and income generation activities.