

# Achieving a future without child marriage

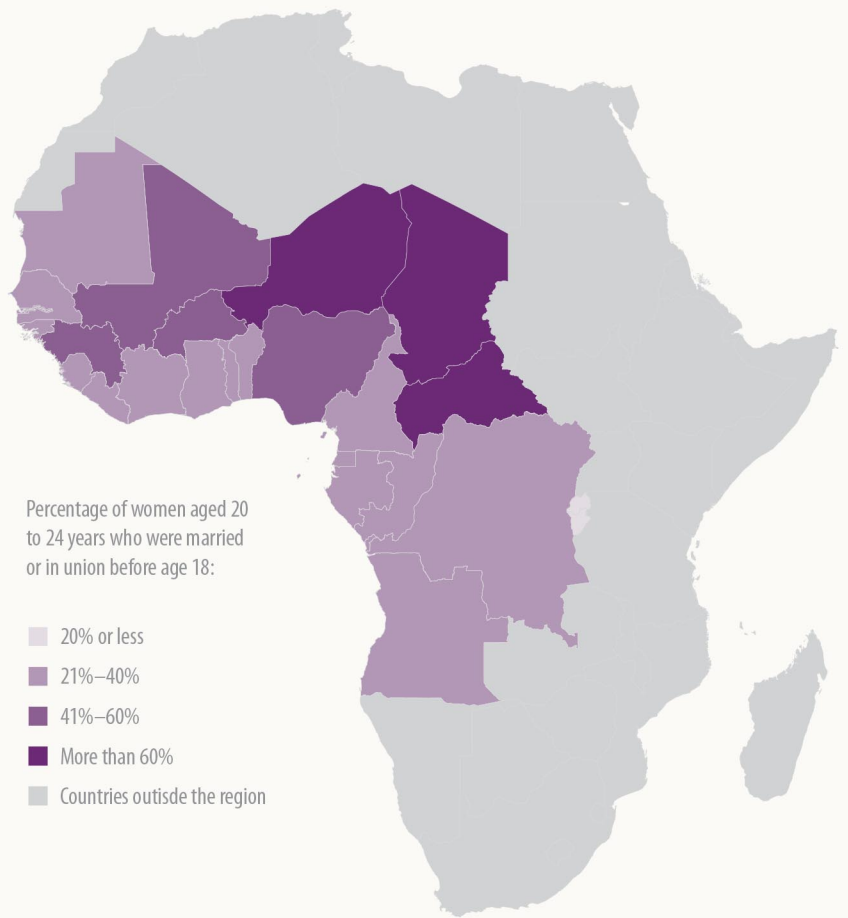
..... FOCUS ON WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA .....



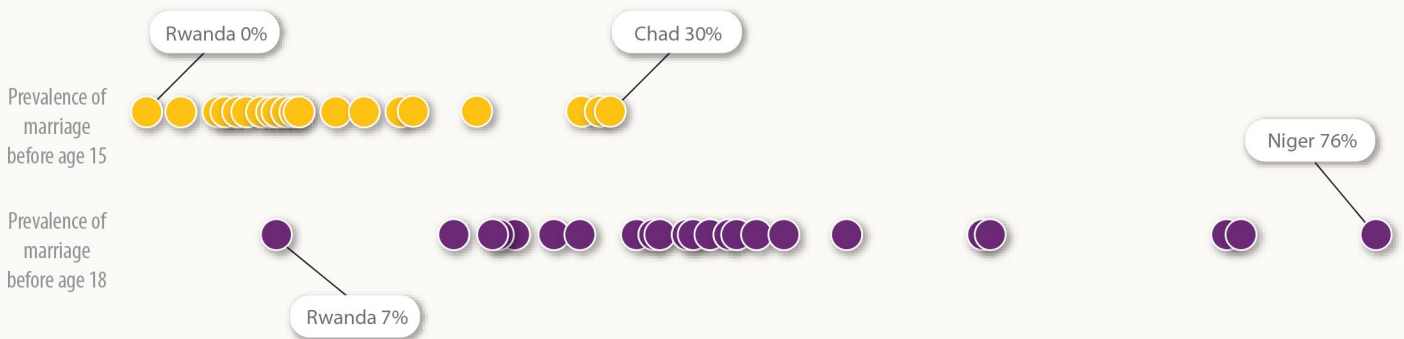
# Current situation

**CHILD MARRIAGE**, THE MARRIAGE OR UNION OF INDIVIDUALS UNDER THE AGE OF 18, **IS A HARMFUL PRACTICE** WHICH VIOLATES THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND HAS FAR-REACHING, LIFE-ALTERING CONSEQUENCES FOR CHILD BRIDES AND GROOMS.

Across West and Central Africa, 4 in 10 young women were married in childhood – there is a tenfold difference in prevalence between countries with the highest and lowest levels



The practice occurs throughout the world and is about five times more common among girls than boys. Girls in West and Central Africa face the highest risk of marrying in childhood; about 4 in 10 young women in the region were married before age 18. Among all child brides in the region, 1 in 3 was married before age 15. West and Central Africa encompasses 6 of the 10 countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage in the world.



NOTE: Each dot represents a country in West and Central Africa.

# Trends in child marriage over time

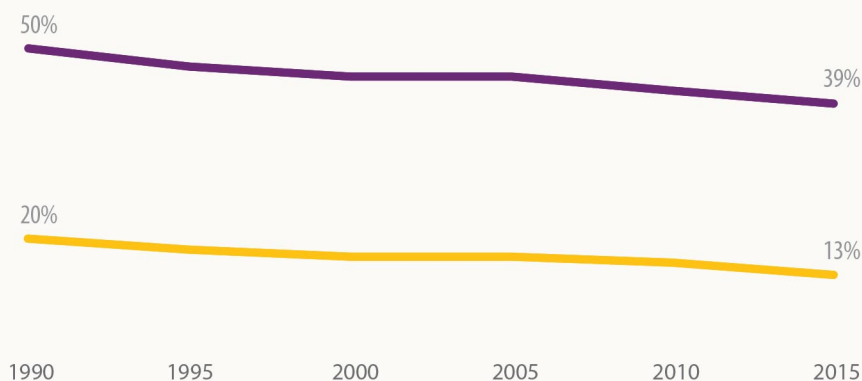
THOUGH CHILD MARRIAGE REMAINS COMMON IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA, **THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE OF A GENERATIONAL DECLINE IN THE PRACTICE.**

The amount of progress has varied across countries, and some countries have shown stronger declines. However, the practice remains entrenched in other countries. In Angola, Burkina Faso and Cabo Verde there is no evidence of reduction within the past quarter century, and in the Central African Republic, levels of the practice appear to be rising.

In the past quarter century, the prevalence of child marriage in West and Central Africa has declined by one fifth, with somewhat greater proportional declines in marriage before age 15

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who were married or in union before age 15 and before age 18

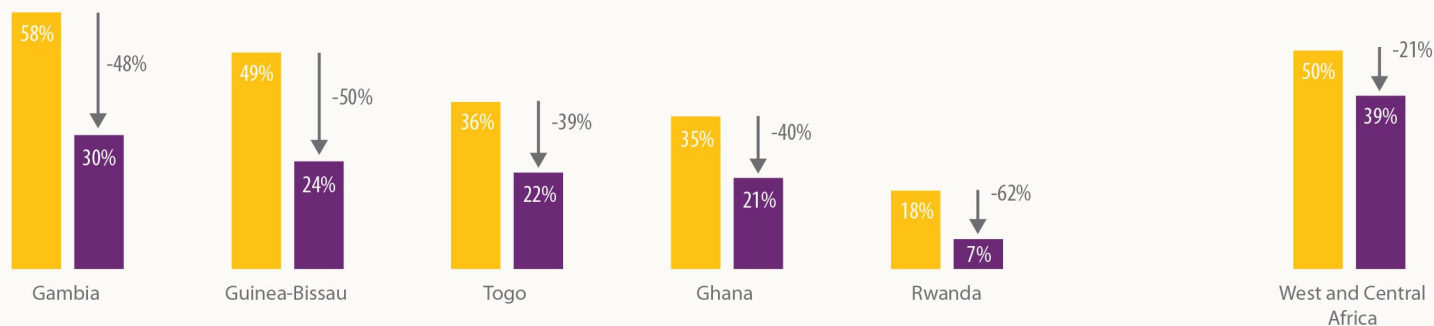
— Marriage before age 18  
— Marriage before age 15



## The five countries with the greatest declines in child marriage show progress is possible even in high-prevalence countries

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18, around 1990 to around 2015, and percentage decline

■ Around 1990 ■ Around 2015





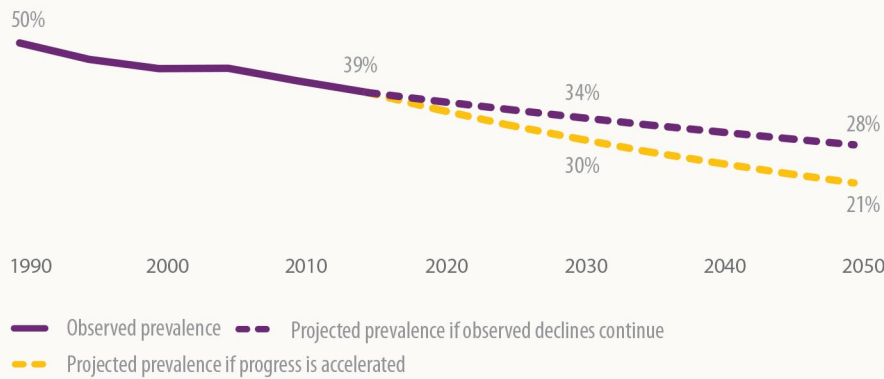
# Looking ahead

WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA FACES A **UNIQUE SET OF CHALLENGES** IN ITS EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF CHILD MARRIAGE

- A HIGH PREVALENCE AND SLOW RATE OF DECLINE IN CHILD MARRIAGE
- A GROWING POPULATION OF GIRLS

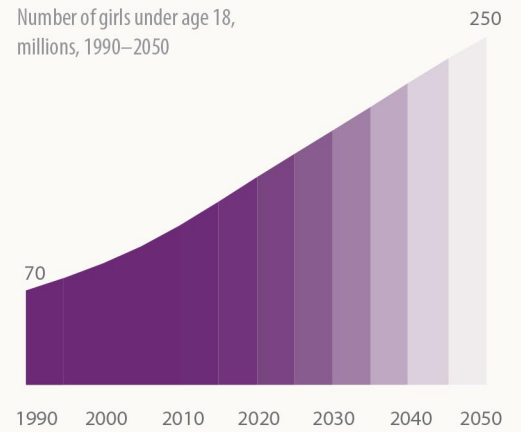
If prevalence of child marriage continues to decline at the observed rate, 1 in 3 girls would marry in childhood by 2030, and more than 1 in 4 by 2050

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



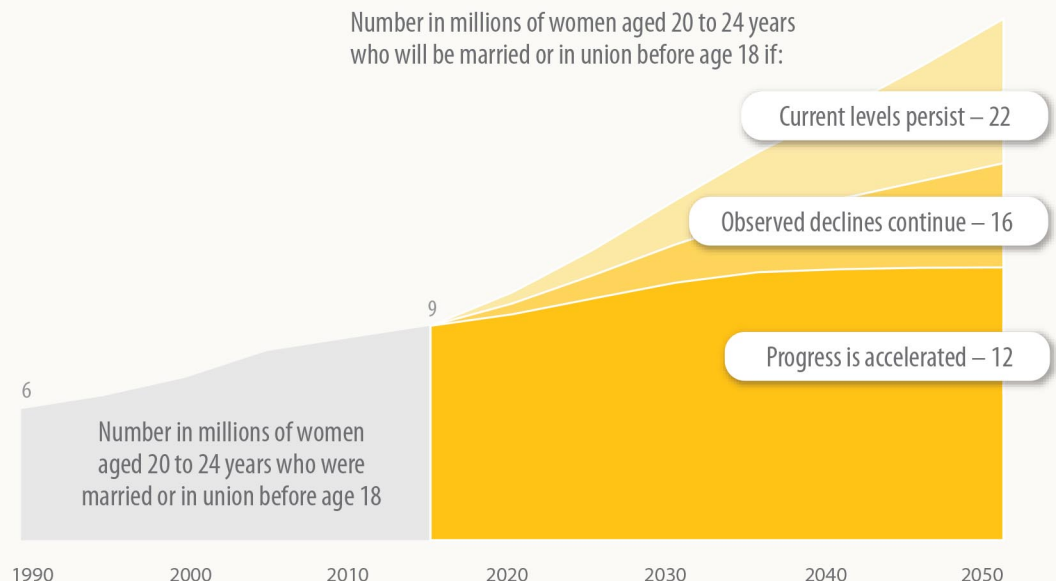
The region will be home to an increasing number of girls

Number of girls under age 18, millions, 1990–2050



WITHOUT INTENSIVE EFFORTS TO REDUCE LEVELS OF THE PRACTICE, THIS COMBINATION OF FACTORS WILL LEAD TO AN **INCREASING NUMBER OF CHILD BRIDES** AS THE POPULATION GROWS. EVEN A DOUBLING OF THE RATE OF DECLINE WOULD NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO DECREASE THE NUMBER OF GIRLS MARRYING EACH YEAR.

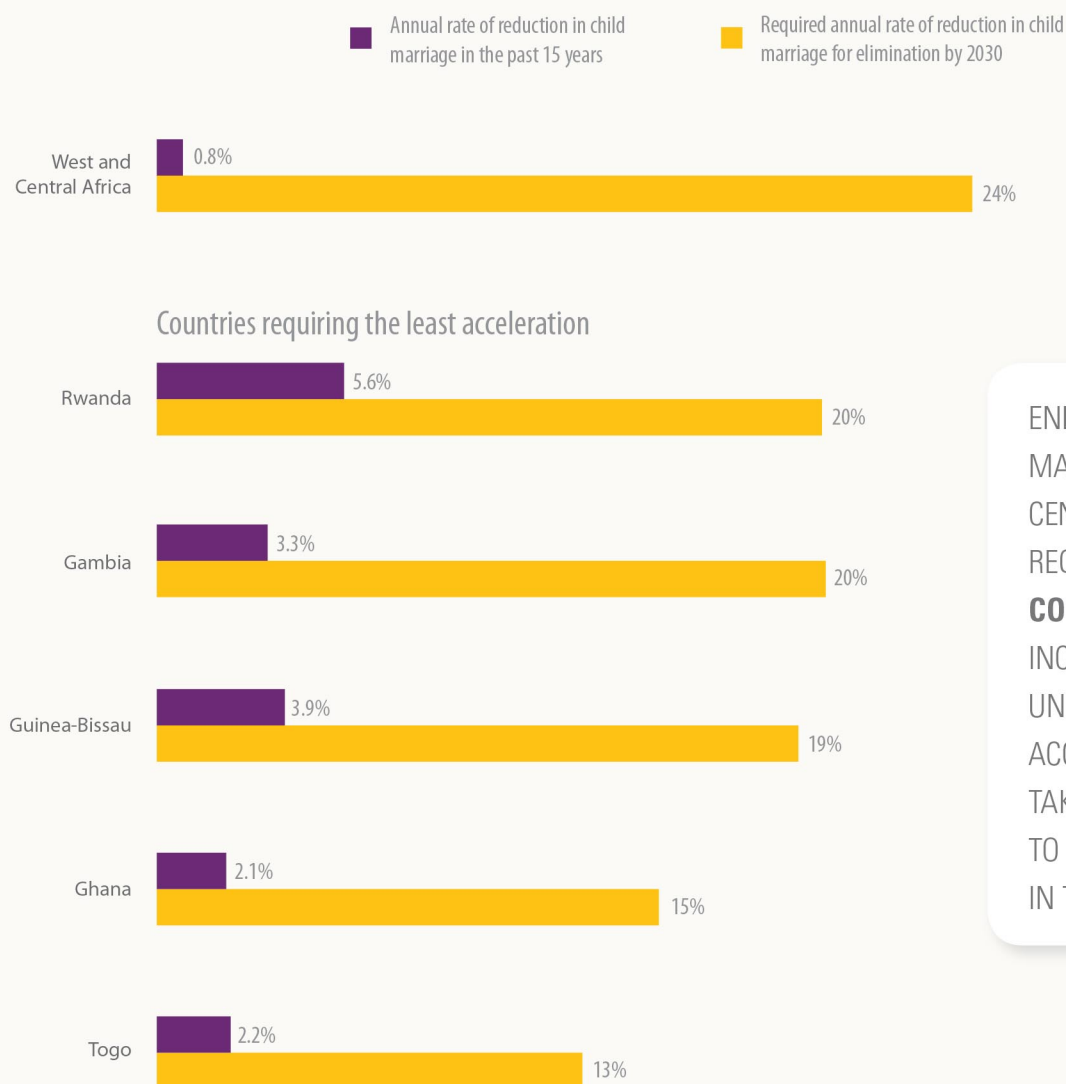
Number in millions of women aged 20 to 24 years who will be married or in union before age 18 if:



# Accelerating progress

**THROUGH THE 2030 AGENDA** FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND THE ASSOCIATED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS, **THE WORLD HAS COMMITTED TO ELIMINATING HARMFUL PRACTICES** AND HAS SET AN ASPIRATIONAL TARGET OF THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD MARRIAGE BY THE YEAR 2030.

## Eliminating child marriage by 2030 would require substantial acceleration, even in high-performing countries



ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA WILL REQUIRE **A RENEWED COMMITMENT** AND INCREASED INVESTMENT. UNLESS PROGRESS IS ACCELERATED, IT WILL TAKE **OVER 100 YEARS** TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE REGION.

## POLICY AND ACTION TOWARDS ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

The momentum around eliminating child marriage in West and Central Africa has opened up a new opportunity for major stakeholders to work on a common agenda. Urgent actions that are required include the following:

- Governments must scale up their response to child marriage by combining four key strategies: empower girls; mobilize families and communities to change attitudes and behaviours; provide adequate services to girls at risk and to married girls; and establish and implement consistent laws and policies to protect and promote the rights of girls.
- Strong partnerships must be maintained between all actors in society, at both the programme and country levels, to ensure an effective response.
- Action to end child marriage must be evidence-based. Countries must invest in solutions that have been proved to work.
- Governments of high-prevalence countries need to invest more to improve essential services and systems, including in education, health, social protection and justice.

- More funding from partners and donors must be mobilized to support and scale up existing efforts.
- Efforts to end child marriage at the country level must align with continental and global commitments. Existing accountability mechanisms need to be used to monitor progress and accelerate efforts.

The **Common African Position on Ending Child Marriage** creates a framework for implementation across the continent and sets requirements for appropriate systems to prevent child marriage.

The **UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage** contributes to this effort, and focuses on enabling girls at risk of child marriage to choose and direct their own futures. The Global Programme targets adolescent girls at risk of child marriage or already in union in 12 selected countries, including 4 in West and Central Africa. It supports communities in demonstrating positive attitudes towards adolescent girls, and strengthens systems delivering social services. It also ensures that laws and policies protect and promote girls' rights, and highlights the importance of using robust data to inform policies.

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**NOTES:** Aggregate estimates are based on 26 countries with available data from 2010–2016, covering over 99 per cent of the female population in the region. The countries presented here as part of West and Central Africa differ from the standard UNICEF regional classification, for purposes of alignment with the country membership of the Economic Community of Central African States and the Economic Community of West African States; Angola, Burundi and Rwanda were added to the analysis for this brochure. Projections based on a continuation of observed progress apply the average annual rate of reduction observed since 1990; the acceleration scenario assumes a doubling of the observed annual rate of reduction. For statistical purposes, 'elimination' is defined here as a child marriage prevalence of below 1 per cent.

**DATA SOURCES:** UNICEF global databases, 2017, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys, and other nationally representative surveys, 2005–2016. For detailed source information by country, see [data.unicef.org](http://data.unicef.org). Demographic data are from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, DVD Edition.

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