



Save the Children

# CHILD MARRIAGE IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

## STATUS OVERVIEW

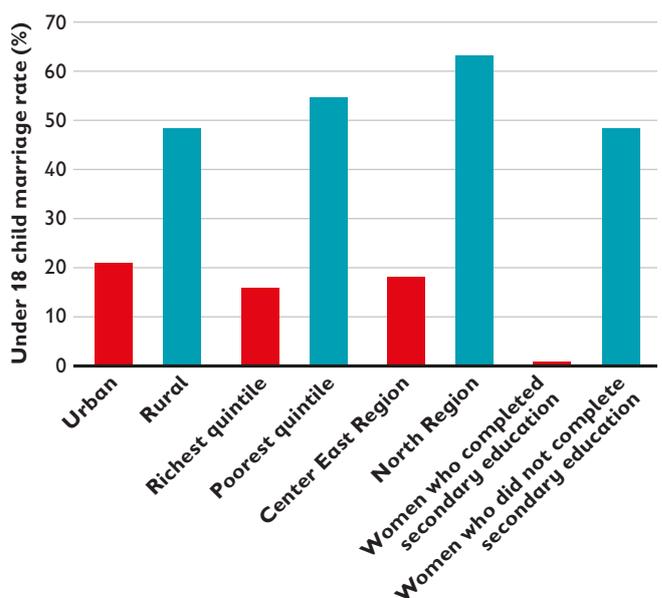
The law in Côte d'Ivoire forbids any customary or religious marriage of children under 18 years old. However 33% of girls are married by 18 and 10% by 15.<sup>1</sup>

Despite early progress in reducing the rate of child marriage in Côte d'Ivoire, in recent years this progress has virtually stalled. If current trends continue, the rate of child marriage could still be 30% in 2030.

Girls at risk include:

- girls in rural areas: child marriage rates are 48% in rural areas compared to 21% in urban areas
- the poorest girls: child marriage rates are 54% in the poorest quintile, compared to 16% in the richest quintile
- girls in the north and north-west regions: child marriage rates are 63% and 58% respectively, compared to the national average of 33%
- girls with less education: only 1% of women who completed secondary school were married by 18, compared to 48% of those with no education<sup>2</sup>
- girls living apart from their parents to attend school (living in temporary accommodation or boarding houses).

Figure 1. Child marriage rates among different groups in Côte d'Ivoire



## THE DAMAGING IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

**Child marriage is an extreme violation of children's rights, with negative impacts for children and families as well as for society and the economy.**

In Côte d'Ivoire, teenage pregnancy and child marriage often trigger a vicious cycle of deprivation and disempowerment for girls, with many marriages characterised by violence and servitude. Affected girls usually drop out of school, depriving them of learning and economic opportunity later in life. Child mothers often have sexual and reproductive health complications due to having babies before their bodies are ready, and their children are more likely to die young or be malnourished.

Ending child marriage and reducing teenage pregnancy in Côte d'Ivoire would yield considerable benefits for the country, helping to lower population growth and build a healthier, more productive workforce.

Research suggests that, by 2030, at the global level, ending child marriage could generate more than \$500 billion in benefits annually from lower population growth, and an additional \$100 billion through reduced deaths and a reduction in severe malnutrition among young children.<sup>3</sup>

## TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

### Sustainable Development Goals Target: To end child marriage by 2030

On track to meet SDG target: **No**

Increase in rate of progress needed: 2.2% a year, whereas the rate remained unchanged between 1999 and 2012.<sup>4</sup>

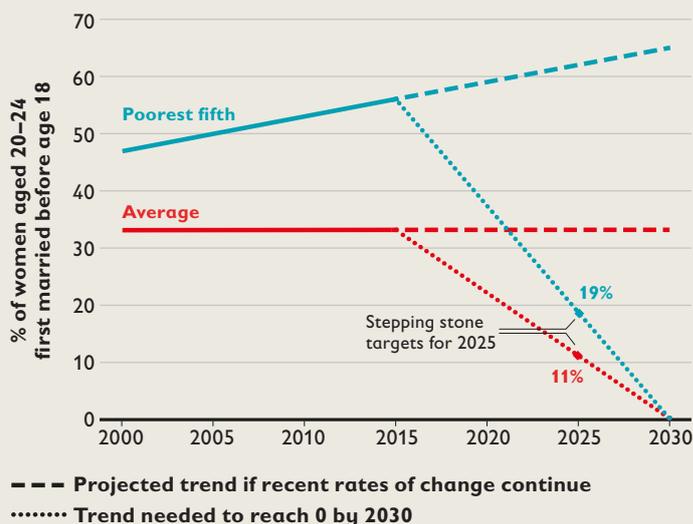
**African Union campaign status:** Not joined

Under the SDG framework, governments pledged to **Leave No One Behind**. This means child marriage must end for all segments of society, and the furthest behind groups should be reached first.

According to Save the Children estimates (see Figure 2), Côte d'Ivoire is currently **not on track** to reach these commitments. The government should set interim stepping stone targets for the groups with the highest rates of child marriage. By 2025, child marriage rates should be no more than:

- 19% for the poorest economic group (compared to an increase to 62% if current trends continue)
- 15% for rural girls (compared to 43% if current trends continue).

Figure 2. Child marriage trends in Côte d'Ivoire



Efforts to tackle child marriage must go hand in hand with work to empower girls, reduce teenage pregnancy, end violence against girls, challenge discriminatory gender norms and increase attendance, success and safety in school.

## HOW PROGRESS IS BEING ACHIEVED

The government has taken positive action to address child marriage in the following areas:<sup>5</sup>

### Strengthening the legislative and policy framework

- In 2006, the government created the Direction de l'Égalité et de la Promotion du Genre (DEPG – Directorate for Equality and Gender Promotion), and reinforced this in 2009 with guidance on gender equality mainstreaming in government processes.
- The Ministère de la Femme, de la Protection de l'Enfant et de la Solidarité (MFPE – Ministry of Women, Child Welfare and Solidarity) has incorporated a Gender Unit to ensure that gender is considered in all programmes, policies, and practices. This serves as a model for other ministries.
- From 2013–15, the national government created a plan to accelerate the fight to end child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The plan was to engage community and religious leaders in Abidjan, Man, and Bondoukou to increase sensitivity to the issue. The President supported the initiative and planned to finance a media campaign to encourage women to engage in politics and advocacy. This plan was not instigated due to lack of resources and budget.
- In 2013, a law (Communiqué n° 2830/MENET/DEL of 28 August 2013) was passed to allow students without birth certificates to enrol in primary school. The law increased enrolment and was followed in 2017 by an initiative to allow primary school children without birth certificates to obtain them through their school directors.

### Improving education systems and facilities

- The government distributes school kits to parents to reduce the cost burden of school supplies. Uniforms

are no longer mandatory, which has also reduced costs for families.

- More than 9,000 new preschool and primary school classrooms have been built between 2011 and 2013, as well as 38 secondary schools. A project is under way to build more latrines and canteens to encourage student attendance.
- Groups have been created to decentralise education promotion and inspection, and an initiative is under way to increase teacher capacity to prevent violence, sensitise communities on education issues, and promote girls' education.
- From 2009–12, the national curriculum was adapted to incorporate gender equality and remove content which promoted negative gender stereotypes. Teachers received gender sensitivity training.

### Strengthening social services and access to sexual and reproductive health services

- Most cases of child marriage are handled by a 'Centre Social' (social centre), which works with families to identify solutions and manage cases. They often coordinate with a local 'Centre d'accueil' (welcome centre), which provides a variety of services including childcare, vaccinations, nutrition courses and health services.
- Local health organisations focus on school-aged children, especially in preventing adolescent pregnancy. These include the Protection Maternelle et Infantile (Mother and Child Protection service) and the Service de la Santé Scolaire et Universitaire (School and University Health Department), which has 73 school health centres, 80 offices and 10 large medical centres.

## Initiatives that have had demonstrable impact in Côte d'Ivoire and other countries include:

- **Strengthening education initiatives:** Community-based initiatives to increase school enrolment rates and access to schools
- **Women's and girls' rights outreach:** Promoting women's and girls' rights and access to justice for vulnerable groups
- **Community-led initiatives:** Helping girls stay in school and promoting female entrepreneurship
- **Child-centred advocacy and support:** Support for organisations advocating on children's rights.

## BARRIERS TO ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

### In Côte d'Ivoire, child marriage is driven by factors including:

#### Lack of enforcement of the law, and social norms around child marriage, gender and violence

Community and religious leaders have historically promoted child marriage and attempts to notify authorities are often futile. Many communities abide by traditional customs, which they respect more than national child marriage laws, despite awareness programmes. Knowledge about the discrepancy between national and local laws encourages families to hide the practice from authorities. There is a lack of awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage, and negative gender stereotypes persist. Sexual violence against girls is carried out in schools by students and teachers, often with impunity, making many parents fear sending their daughters to school.

#### Insufficient investment and commitment to the issue

Instead of being treated as a specific issue within government policy, child marriage is included under the umbrella of gender-based violence. This results in insufficient investment and attention to the issue, including lack of funding for Centres Sociaux to support girls at risk and for civil society organisations responsible for identifying cases outside urban areas.

#### Gendered poverty

Women and girls often lack bargaining power to make decisions about their lives, especially where poverty is high, education levels are low and livelihood opportunities are limited. Marriage is often a practical response to poverty, especially when families cannot

afford to send their girls to school. Some girls engage in prostitution as a survival strategy and to pay for their education. Girls who become pregnant and wish to remain in school must pay for an expensive pregnancy certificate and certificate of absence, without which they are forced to leave.

#### Poor access to health, education and protection services

- **Sexual and reproductive health:** High rates of adolescent pregnancy are linked to high child marriage rates, and are exacerbated by inadequate sex education. In 2016, there were nearly 4,500 cases of adolescent pregnancy, more than 1,000 of which were among girls aged 9–14. Contraception use is low.
- **Education:** Due to the low number of secondary schools, many girls either board or find other temporary accommodation, leaving them vulnerable to sexual abuse or relationships. In the absence of safe spaces and sexual and reproductive health and rights education, many become pregnant and are forced to marry.
- **Child protection:** Distribution and awareness of education and health resources are poor, both for married and unmarried girls. There is a lack of Centres d'accueil, where girls can stay while their case is investigated.



Investing in education is key for reducing child marriage

PHOTO: GONJIGNON THIERRY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## ENFORCING THE LAW

Enforcement of laws on child marriage in Côte d'Ivoire is often weak, with a reliance on the general public to report cases to prosecutors. However, one exceptional case in 2014 received high publicity. The father of an 11-year-old girl in Bouaké attempted to force her into marriage with a man 16 years older. When a teacher noticed that the girl had stopped coming to school, the school director contacted the police. The girl's father stated that according to his faith, girls can be married as soon as they reach puberty. He told authorities he did not know child marriage was illegal and had given consent. He was sentenced to one year in prison and ordered to pay a fine of 360,000 CFA (\$644), and the girl was re-housed with family members and returned to school.

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING PROGRESS

The Côte d'Ivoire government should establish a national action plan to end child marriage, including steps to:

## 1) Invest in girls

### • Education:

- Build separate latrines for girls and boys in schools that meet menstruation needs; build more secondary schools; strengthen child protection mechanisms and tailored gender-based violence referral pathways in schools and boarding facilities.
- Integrate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education into the national curriculum and train teachers.
- Ensure pregnant girls can continue education, support young mothers back into education and training, and end impunity for exploitation and abuse in schools.

• **Health:** Break the link between child marriage and teenage pregnancy through ensuring access to contraceptives across all health centres and training health workers to provide adolescent-friendly family planning services.

• **Protection:** Invest in local civil society organisations and Centres Sociaux to deliver training, support advocacy, and fundraise. Ensure a government-led response to sexual and gender-based violence and end impunity for crimes.

• **Finance:** Ensure gender-responsive budgeting across all Ministries, ensuring additional budget lines that contribute towards reducing child marriage, and increase overall budget allocation to the MFPEs (Ministry of Women, Child Welfare and Solidarity).

## 2) Empower girls and advance gender equality

- Ensure girls can access pregnancy certificates at no cost, so child mothers can continue education without stigma.
- Train public sector employees working with girls and communities on the drivers and consequences of child marriage.
- Run transformative teenage pregnancy awareness and prevention programmes, which engage men, boys and communities to address norms that place responsibility for early pregnancy onto girls and excuse violence.
- Strengthen enforcement of laws on child marriage and mandatory education, including harmonising traditional customs with national laws, and provide capacity building for local law enforcement organisations.

## 3) Ensure accountability to girls

- Establish mechanisms for girls (including child mothers and child brides) to engage meaningfully in policy and decision making at district and national levels, and to make their voices heard by policy makers.
- Improve the quality, coverage, regularity and accessibility of disaggregated data on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy and their drivers.

## REFERENCES

Unless otherwise stated, all data in this briefing has been processed by Save the Children from DHS household survey data for Cote D'Ivoire (2011–2012), available at <http://dhsprogram.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-311.cfm>

Disaggregated data cited in this briefing is available from Save the Children's GRID tool at: <https://campaigns.savethechildren.net/grid>

'Child marriage rate' refers to the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in a union before age 18. The only exception is for data disaggregated by the level of women's education (including for Figure 2), which refers to women aged 18–22, and is drawn from Malé, C. and Wodon, Q. (2016), *Basic Profile of Child Marriage in Cote d'Ivoire*, Knowledge Brief, Washington DC: World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).

<sup>1</sup> Fenn, N.S., Edmeades, J., Lantos, H., and Onovo, O. (2015) *Child marriage, Adolescent pregnancy and Family formation in West and Central Africa, Patterns, trends and drivers of change*, UNICEF and ICRW.

<sup>2</sup> Women aged 18–22 who report they were married or in a union before age 18. Malé, C. and Wodon, Q. (2016), *Basic Profile of Child Marriage in Côte d'Ivoire*, Knowledge Brief, World Bank and ICRW.

<sup>3</sup> Wodon, Q., Malé, C., Nayihouba, A., Onagoruwa, A., Savadogo, A., Yedan, A., Edmeades, J., Kes, A., John, N., Murithi, L., Steinhaus, M. and Petroni, S. (2017) *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report*, World Bank and ICRW.

<sup>4</sup> All data in this section and for the trends graph has been calculated by Save the Children from DHS survey data points between 1999 and 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all policy analysis in this briefing has been drawn from Hunersen, K. (forthcoming) *Child Marriage in Côte d'Ivoire*.

Save the Children is campaigning for an end to child marriage through our global campaign, **Every Last Child**.

Save the Children Côte d'Ivoire is focusing on the links between child marriage and girls' education, with our advocacy strategy *Leur place est à l'école: Maintenir les filles dans le système éducatif en Côte d'Ivoire* (Their place is in school: Keeping girls in the education system in Côte d'Ivoire).

<https://campaigns.savethechildren.net/country/cote-divoire>