



MAYA, AGE 8 / KISHORE, AGE 13 (India)

Maya and Kishore pose for a wedding photo in their new home.

Photo by Stephanie Sinclair / VII Photo / Too Young To Wed



CHAPTER

03

GLOBAL & REGIONAL
LEVELS AND TRENDS

CHAPTER 3

GLOBAL & REGIONAL LEVELS AND TRENDS

This chapter describes the extent and geographic distribution of child marriage among developing countries at the global, regional and country level. It also looks at recent trends. Comparing the prevalence of child marriage across regions reveals the diversity of situations behind the global average. Comparing regions as well as countries highlights existing challenges along with signs of progress towards the elimination of this harmful practice.

CHILD BRIDES: MORE THAN ONE WOMAN IN THREE

For the period 2000-2011, just over one third (an estimated 34 per cent) of women aged 20 to 24 years in developing regions were married or in union before their eighteenth birthday. In 2010 this was equivalent to almost 67 million women. About 12 per cent of them were married or in union before age 15.

The prevalence of child marriage varies substantially among countries, ranging from only 2 per cent in Algeria to 75 per cent in Niger. In 41 countries, 30 per cent or more of women aged 20 to 24 were married or in union when they were still children (Figure 1).

In 41 countries, the prevalence of child marriage is 30 per cent or more

FIGURE 1

41 COUNTRIES WITH 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF WOMEN 20-24 YEARS OLD WHO MARRIED OR ENTERED INTO UNION BY AGE 18, 2000-2011

HAITI	30%
GUATEMALA	30%
ZIMBABWE	31%
YEMEN	32%
SENEGAL	33%
CONGO	33%
GABON	33%
SUDAN	34%
SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE	34%
BENIN	34%
CÔTE D'IVOIRE	34%
MAURITANIA	35%
BRAZIL	36%
GAMBIA	36%
CAMEROON	36%
UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA	37%
LIBERIA	38%
HONDURAS	39%
AFGHANISTAN	39%
NIGERIA	39%
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	39%
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	40%
NEPAL	41%
ETHIOPIA	41%
ZAMBIA	42%
NICARAGUA	43%
SOMALIA	45%
UGANDA	46%
ERITREA	47%
INDIA	47%
BURKIN FASO	48%
SIERRA LEONE	48%
MADAGASCAR	48%
MALAWI	50%
MOZAMBIQUE	52%
MALI	55%
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	61%
GUINEA	63%
BANGLADESH	66%
CHAD	72%
NIGER	75%

Source: UNFPA database using household surveys (DHS and MICS) completed during the period 2000-2011.

Trends in child marriage are more difficult to assess, since not all 107 developing countries with data on child marriage have conducted two consecutive household surveys. Table 1 is based on 48 countries with adequate trend data. It shows countries by region that have experienced a decline in the prevalence of child marriage, disaggregated by urban and rural populations. Some countries have managed to reduce the incidence of child marriage in either urban or rural areas or both. However, the weight of evidence from these countries suggests that little progress has been made in reducing rates of child marriage globally.

Despite gains in selected countries, little progress has been made in preventing child marriage in developing countries

TABLE 1
COUNTRIES SHOWING A DECLINE IN THE RATE OF CHILD MARRIAGE BY REGION

REGION	COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT* DECLINES IN RATES OF CHILD MARRIAGE
Sub-Saharan Africa	Benin (U), Cameroon (U), Congo (R), Ethiopia, Lesotho, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe (R)
Arab States	Jordan (R)
East Asia and the Pacific	Indonesia (R), Philippines (R)
South Asia	Bangladesh (U), Nepal
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	Armenia
Latin America and the Caribbean	Bolivia, Guyana (R)

Source: Results from two consecutive household surveys (MICS and DHS) in 48 countries.

* Measured as changes of 10% or more in the prevalence of child marriage between the two surveys.

(U) Changes observed in the urban areas only.

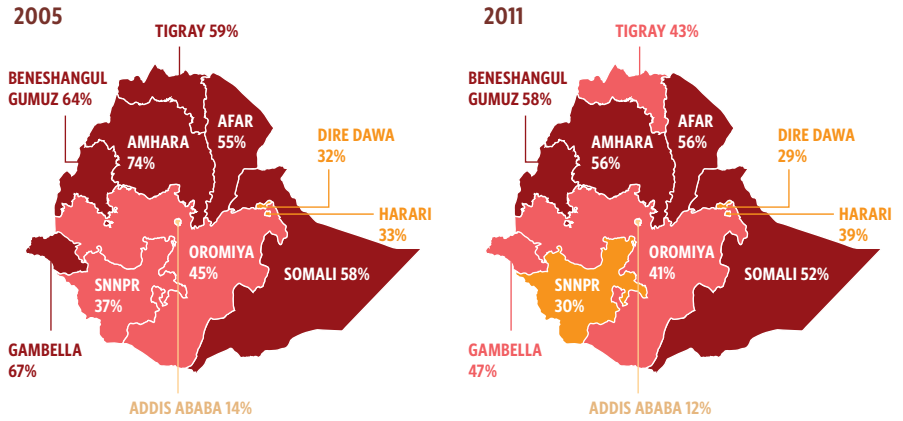
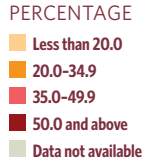
(R) Changes observed in the rural areas only.

However, we know that the incidence of child marriage had already to drastically changed in some countries across different regions. In Ethiopia and Nepal, the prevalence of child marriage declined substantially (20 per cent or more) during a short period of five years (Map 1 below). This is also observed across regions: SNNPR, Tigray and Gambella in Ethiopia and in all regions but the Far West Region of Nepal. Similarly, in Bolivia, the prevalence of child marriage has declined in both urban and rural areas of four of the country's nine departments.²⁸ Other countries showing significant decreases of 10 per cent or more in the prevalence of child marriage include Armenia, Guyana, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

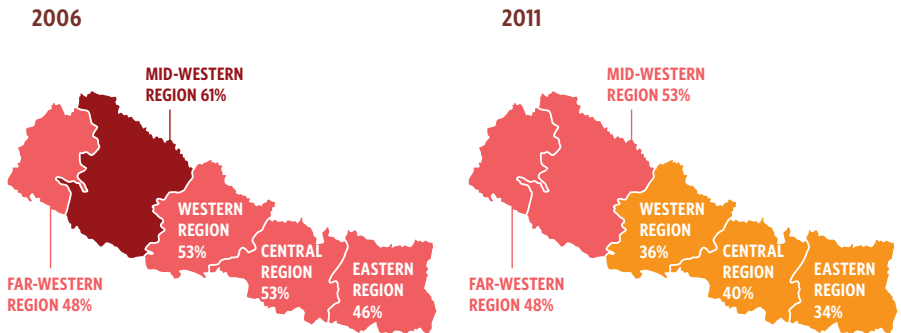
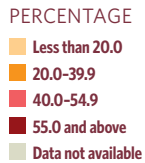
The incidence of child marriage has already started to change in countries such as Ethiopia, Nepal and Bolivia

MAP 1
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN 20-24 YEARS OLD WHO WERE MARRIED OR IN UNION BY AGE 18

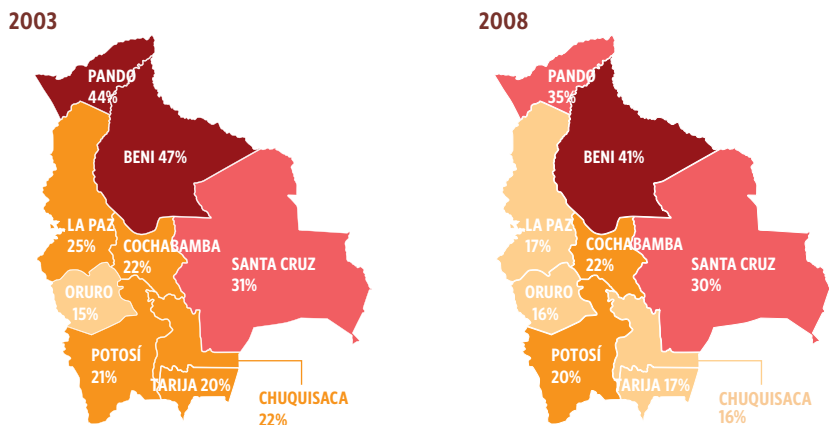
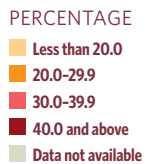
ETHIOPIA



NEPAL



BOLIVIA



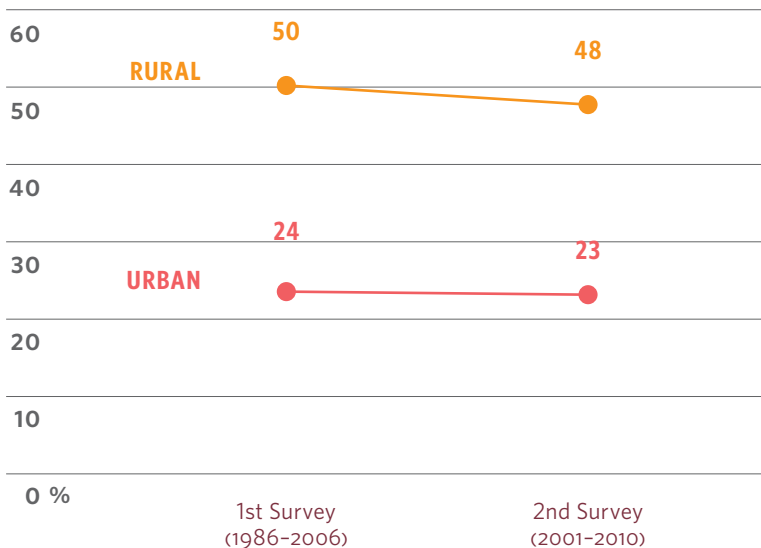
CHILD MARRIAGE LEVELS HAVE NOT CHANGED DURING THE PERIOD 2000-2010

The results to date point to three main conclusions:

- The practice of child marriage is still high in many developing countries (61 countries have a child marriage prevalence of 20 per cent or higher).
- Child marriage at the global level has remained relatively constant over the last 10 years (at around 50 per cent in rural areas and 23 per cent in urban areas) (Figure 2).
- Many developing countries lack evidence to document prevalence and trends in child marriage and are therefore unable to develop appropriate policies and programmes to address it. For the preparation of this report, for example, data disaggregated by demographic, social and economic characteristics were unavailable for Afghanistan, Bhutan, Brazil, Central African Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nauru, Marshall Islands, Mexico, El Salvador, South Sudan and Yemen—all countries in which the prevalence of child marriage is high.

Over the last 10 years, little change has been seen in the rates of child marriage in either rural and urban areas

FIGURE 2
TRENDS IN THE PREVALENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE BY URBAN AND RURAL RESIDENCE



Source: UNFPA database using DHS and MICS for 48 countries with two data points.

WIDE DISPARITIES IN CHILD MARRIAGE BOTH WITHIN AND AMONG REGIONS AND COUNTRIES

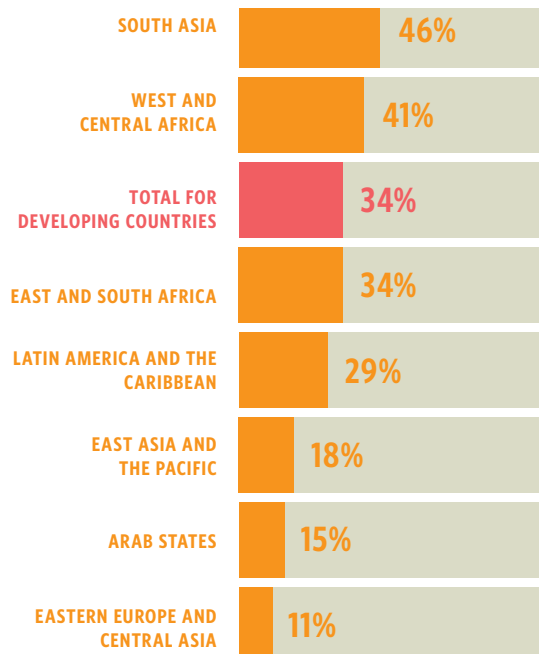
While the practice of child marriage is a global issue affecting most regions, it is most common in South Asia and in West and Central Africa, where two out of five girls marry or enter into union before age of 18 (46 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively), as shown in Figure 3. Lower percentages are observed in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Arab States and East Asia and the Pacific (11 per cent, 15 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively). In Latin America and the Caribbean, prevalence is higher, at 29 per cent, just under East and Central Africa (34 per cent).

Substantial variations in the rates of child marriage are also found among countries within regions. The highest prevalence in South Asia, for example, is found in Bangladesh (66 per cent); in West and Central Africa, in Niger (75 per cent) and Chad (72 per cent). In Latin America and the Caribbean and East and Southern Africa, values are 40 per cent or more in the Dominican Republic (40 per cent) and Mozambique (52 per cent). Among the regions with a lower prevalence of child marriage—Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, and the Arab States—we also find countries where a relatively large proportion of children become brides, as in the Republic of Moldova (19 per cent), Indonesia (22 per cent) and Yemen (32 per cent). Naturally, heavily populated countries tend to outweigh regional averages.

In South Asia and West and Central Africa, two out of five girls are child brides

FIGURE 3

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN 20-24 YEARS OLD WHO WERE MARRIED OR IN UNION BY AGE 18, BY REGION, 2000-2010



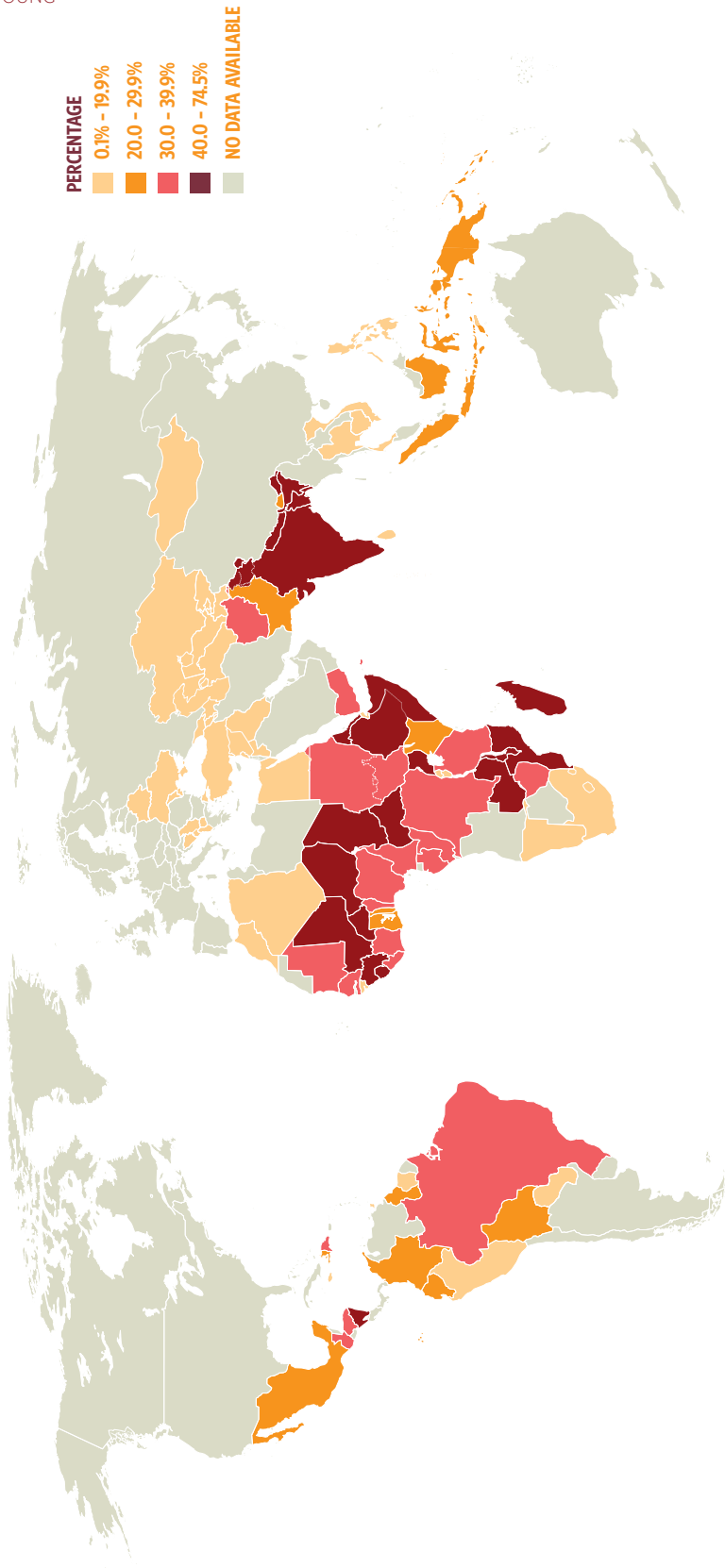
Source: UNFPA database using DHS, MICS and other household surveys.

It is also true that groups of countries with high levels of child marriage tend to be concentrated in particular regions. Map 2 shows that the highest concentration of such countries are found in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where both the regional average and data for individual countries reveal very high rates that are above the global average (34 per cent).

Rates of child marriage show wide variations within regions.

MAP 2

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN 20-24 YEARS OLD WHO WERE MARRIED OR IN UNION BY AGE 18, 2000-2011



Source: UNFPA database using DHS, MICS and other household surveys.

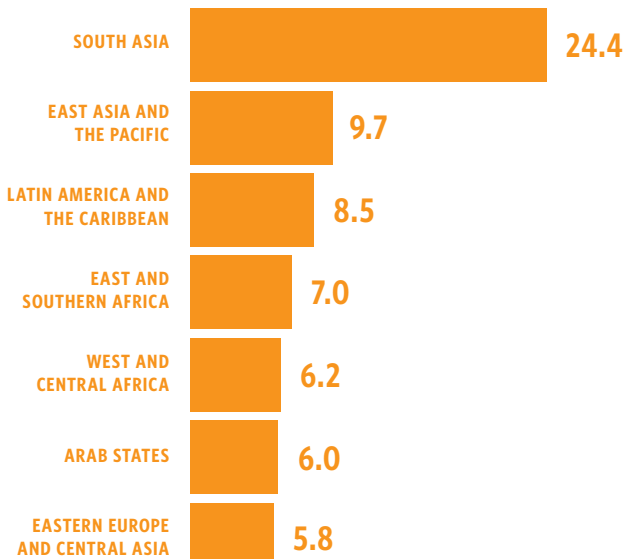
CHILD MARRIAGE IN ASIA: A QUESTION OF NUMBERS

Looking at absolute numbers rather than rates, a different picture emerges. This is the result of large variations in population size from region to region. For example, although West and Central Africa has a much higher prevalence of child marriage than East Asia and the Pacific (41 per cent versus 18 per cent), far more women aged 20-24 in East Asia and the Pacific were married as children, 9.7 million compared with 6.2 million in West and Central Africa (Figure 4). South Asia has an even higher prevalence of child marriage in both relative and absolute terms (46 per cent and 24.4 million). Overall, in 2010, over 67 million women aged 20 to 24 had been married or in union before their eighteenth birthday. Asia (excluding China) accounted for half of these child brides; sub-Saharan Africa for 13.2 million (almost 20 per cent) of them.

About half of the child brides in the developing world live in Asia, excluding China

FIGURE 4

NUMBER OF WOMEN 20-24 YEARS OLD IN 2010 WHO WERE MARRIED OR IN UNION BY AGE 18, BY REGION IN 2010 (MILLION)



Source: UNFPA database using DHS, MICS and other household surveys.