

MALAWI
COUNTRY PROFILE ON CHILD MARRIAGES
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What is the Prevalence rate of Child Marriages in Malawi :

In Malawi, [42%](#) of girls are married before the age of 18 and almost [one in 10](#) are married before their 15th birthday.

Malawi has the 12th highest prevalence of child marriage globally.

[7%](#) of boys in Malawi are married before their 18th birthday, which makes the Malawi one of the [top 20 countries](#) in the world with the highest prevalence of child marriage among boys.

Child marriage is common among all [ethnic groups](#), and across all three regions of Malawi, although [rates](#) are slightly higher in rural areas of southern Malawi. UN Women has [identified](#) hotspots for child marriage in the Karonga district in the Northern region, and Mulanje, Mangochi, Machimba and Zomba, in the Southern region.

A 2017 [World Bank/ICRW study](#) estimated that ending child marriage in Ethiopia could generate a 10% rise in earnings for women who married early, and up to USD 167 million in additional earnings and productivity for the whole country.

What causes child marriage

In Malawi, child marriage is also driven by:

- **Poverty:** [Half](#) of the population in Malawi live below the national poverty line. Some poorer families marry off their daughters to reduce their perceived financial burden or to offer them a better life. Some girls are exchanged during [Kupimbira](#) – a form of debt repayment –

in the northern part of the country. Human Rights Watch [reports](#) that some parents force their daughters to have sex with men in order to receive money or food.

- **Harmful traditional practices:** The *chinamwali* or *nsondopuberty rite of passage* can act as a catalyst to child marriage. Among ethnic groups in northern Malawi, [lobola](#) – bride price – signifies the creation of an alliance between families, and representatives from both sides negotiate the terms of a marriage through a mediator. Human Rights Watch [reports](#) that some girls are thrown out of their homes if they refuse to marry.
- **Adolescent pregnancy:** Malawi’s traditions and patriarchal culture [encourage](#) early sexual initiation, while renounces pregnancy outside of matrimony. In a 2017 ICRW [study](#), 87% of respondents said that child marriage happens because of pregnancy and 93% agreed that unmarried girls who get pregnant are “naughty”. The “defilement” or rape of a girls can also [initiate](#) a child marriage, particularly when the sexual abuse results in pregnancy. Girls are married off to avoid bringing [dishonour](#) to their families. One traditional leader was quoted saying that unmarried pregnant girls are labelled as [“disabled”](#).
- **Limited awareness:** Many girls in Malawi do not know their rights under the law or where to look for [assistance](#) when faced with child marriage. A 2017 study shows that only [8%](#) of girls in Malawi are able to list at least three harmful effects of child marriage.
- **Lack of opportunities:** In a 2017 ICRW [study](#), 77% of respondents said that child marriage happens in Malawi because of a lack of education or job opportunities for girls. Girls may [see](#) early marriage as a way out of poverty or violent family situations.
- **Boarding:** A 2015 shadow [report](#) to CEDAW highlights that schools with a lack of boarding facilities force some girls to self-board in nearby houses, where they sometimes end up marrying men in exchange for money.

What International Commitments have been made

- Malawi has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with [target 5.3](#) of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Malawi co-sponsored the following Human Rights Council resolutions: the [2017](#) resolution on recognising the need to address child, early and forced



marriage in humanitarian contexts, and the [2019](#) resolution on the consequences of child marriage. In 2014, Malawi also signed a [joint statement](#) at the Human Rights Council calling for a resolution on child marriage.

- Malawi co-sponsored the [2013](#) and [2018](#) UN General Assembly resolutions on child, early and forced marriage.
- Malawi acceded to the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) in 1991, which sets a minimum age of marriage of 18, and acceded to the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) in 1987, which obligates states to ensure free and full consent to marriage.
- In 2017, the UN Child Rights Committee [urged](#) Malawi to take all measures necessary to eliminate child marriages, including by developing comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns and programmes on the harmful effects of child marriage and providing appropriate financial resources.
- During its 2015 [Universal Periodic Review](#), Malawi supported recommendations to ensure successful implementation of strategies and legal reforms to end child marriage.
- In 1999 Malawi ratified the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#), including Article 21 regarding the prohibition of child marriage. In 2005 Malawi ratified the [African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#), including Article 6 which sets the minimum age for marriage as 18.
- In 2014, Malawi launched the [African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa](#).
- Malawi is one of 20 countries which has committed to ending child marriage by the end of 2020 under the [Ministerial Commitment](#) on comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and young people in Eastern and Southern Africa.
- In 2019, at the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, the Government of Malawi [committed](#) to end child marriage and delay first pregnancy among girls (10-19 years) by 2030, by effectively enforcing laws, coordinating policy making, and promoting national prevention awareness and advocacy campaigns as part of a wider

programme to target all forms of violence against women, girls and boys.

- [Malawi](#) is one of the countries where the Spotlight Initiative (a global, multi-year partnership between European Union and United Nations) is supporting efforts to end all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls. Combating child marriage is one of the key focus areas of the Spotlight Initiative in Malawi.
- Malawi is also one of the countries where the [U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief \(PEPFAR\)/DREAMS Initiative](#) is working to reduce rates of HIV among adolescent girls and young women.
- At the London Girl Summit in July 2014, the government signed a [charter](#) committing to end child marriage by 2020.
- [Malawi](#) partner country of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).

What is the government doing to end Child Marriages

- In March 2018, First Lady Gertrude Mutharika [urged](#) all Malawians to be part of the solution to end child marriage.
- In 2018, the Government of Malawi launched the [Strategy of Adolescent Girls and Young Women](#), developed with support of UNICEF and public and private stakeholders. The strategy has a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to empower girls and young women, and improve their health, education, gender equality, and economic empowerment outcomes. Adolescent mothers are among the identified group of vulnerable adolescents.
- The [National Plan of Action for Vulnerable Children in Malawi](#) identifies child marriage as an effect of vulnerability. It calls for measures to protect children from being married off and envisions activities to raise awareness in the communities.
- The [National Plan of Action to Combat Gender-Based Violence in Malawi 2014-2020](#) includes several targets related to child marriage, including producing and disseminating local language awareness-raising materials and supporting traditional leaders to end child marriage.
- Traditional leaders play a key role in ending harmful cultural practices such as child marriage. Senior [Chief Theresa Kachindamoto](#), a prominent Ngoni Chief in

the Central region of Malawi, has been a vocal advocate on the issue of child marriage and has contributed to the achievement of legislative changes. During her chieftainship, Chief Theresa has annulled more than 2500 child marriages.

- Plan International and Malawian young people have been working with a taskforce of government bodies, advocates, traditional authorities, religious leaders and teachers calling for Malawi's constitution to be reformed. In 2016, young campaigners [presented](#) the First Lady of Malawi with a petition signed by people from over 30 countries.

What is the minimum legal framework around child marriages

Under the Constitution and the [Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill No. 5 \(2015\)](#), the minimum legal age of marriage is 18 years with no exceptions.

In 2017, the Parliament voted to [amend the Constitution](#) to make child marriage illegal and remove a provision that allowed children to marry at 15 with parental consent.

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