

ZAMBIA
COUNTRY PROFILE ON CHILD MARRIAGES
April 2022



UNICEF/Zambia/2016/Schermbrucker

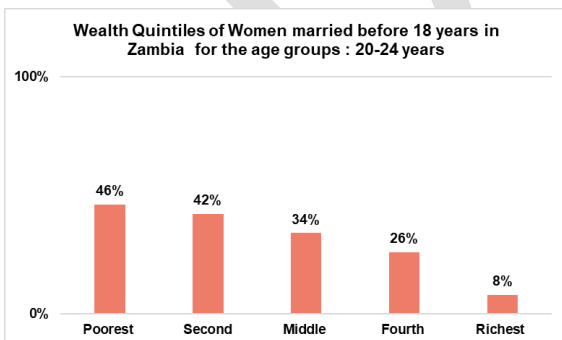
Prevalence rate of Child Marriage

According to the 2018 Demographic Health Survey (DHS, 2018), Zambia is home to nearly 2 million children brides; 3 in 10 (29%) young women were married in childhood with 5% married before 15 years. Likewise, 3% of boys are married by 18.

World Bank/ICRW estimates that Zambia could gain USD 68.2 million in productivity if child marriage ends.

What are the causes of child marriage

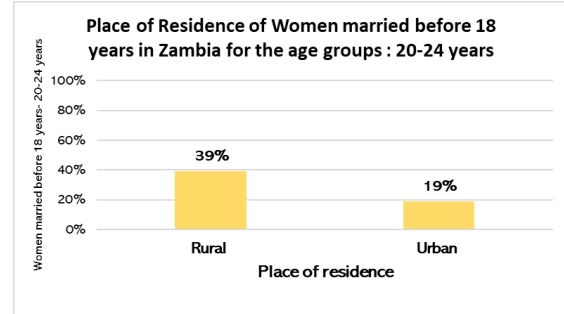
In Zambia, child marriage is also driven by: **Poverty:**



The 2019 Demographic Health Survey (DHS'19) indicates that girls in the poorest households are almost 8 times more likely (46%) to get married before the age of 18 years compared to those from the richest households (8%). This is because 60% of the population is living in poverty and therefore parents marry off their daughters to get a bride

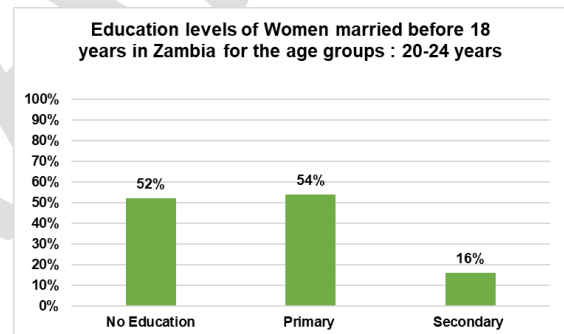
price – lobola for financial relief. Girls also run off to get married to escape the abject poverty their families live and to have their basic needs taken care of.

Rural Settings



Girls aged 20-24 years and living in rural settings are twice as likely to get married before the age of 18 years (39%) compared to those from urban settings (DHS'19) (chart 2 above) . This could be attributed to the bigger proportion of the population living in rural settings where *poverty, high school dropout rates and harmful traditional practices loom.*

Low Education levels



As indicated in chart 3 above (DHS'19) girls 20-24 years with no education and those with primary education are almost four times more likely (52%- no education, 54% primary education) to get married before 18 years compared to those with secondary education (18%).

Harmful Traditional Practices

Adolescent pregnancy: Teenage pregnancy (among girls 15-19 years) in Zambia is estimated at 29% . Traditionally pregnant girls in Zambia are married off to the men responsible to protect the family's image , and in some communities parents receive damage payments from the responsible men.



Orphan hood: these girls who are often under care of hostile relatives, often times escape these difficult conditions by getting married to older men.

Controlling Gender norms: which encourage the marrying off of girls early to protect them from indecent sexual behaviour like having sexual partners and hanging out in bars, which may lead to teenage pregnancy and HIV

What is the minimum legal age of consent

Under the [Marriage Act 1964](#) the minimum legal age of marriage is 21 years.

However, under Articles 17 & 33, a person aged 16-21 may marry parental consent. A person aged under 16 can be married with judicial consent assuming the circumstances of the case are not contrary to public interest.

International and global commitments made by Zambia to End Child Marriage

- The 1985 [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW) to ensure free and full consent to marriage
- The 1991 ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) in 1991, which sets a minimum age of marriage of 18,
- The 1992 signature but pending ratification of the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#), including Article 21 regarding the prohibition of child marriage.
- Zambia co-sponsored the following Human Rights Council resolutions on child marriage:
 - The 2019 [resolution](#) on the consequences of child marriage,
 - The 2017 [resolution](#) recognising the need to address child, early and forced marriage in humanitarian contexts,
 - The 2015 [resolution](#) to end child, early and forced marriage, recognising that it is a violation of human rights,
 - The 2013 [resolution](#) on child, early and forced marriage.
 - The 2014 signature of a [joint statement](#) at the Human Rights Council calling for a resolution on child marriage.
- The 2006 ratification of 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.

- Co-sponsorship of the the [2013,2014](#) and [2016](#) UN General Assembly resolutions on child, early and forced marriage.
- Co- leadership of the [2018](#) Canada UN General Assembly resolution on child, early and forced marriage, including hosting a side event on "[Accelerating Efforts to Eliminate Child Marriage in Africa by 2030](#)".
- In 2016 the UN Child Rights Committee raised [concerns](#) about the extent of child marriage in Zambia. It recommended that the government disseminate the Marriage Act widely at the local level and raise awareness on the harmful consequences of child marriage among parents, teachers and community leaders.
- During its 2018 [Universal Periodic Review](#), Zambia supported recommendations to take all necessary measures to accelerate implementation of the Marriage Bill (2015) and to end child marriage.
- In November 2015, the country co-hosted the first ever [African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage](#) and in 2016 it hosted a review meeting of the [African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa](#).
- Zambia has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with [target 5.3](#) of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Zambia made commitments to end child marriage by 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, [Zambia committed](#) to end harmful practices against women and girls, including ending child marriage by 2030 by introducing the [Southern African Development Community \(SADC\) model law on ending child marriage](#), and accelerating the implementation of the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and other policy and legislative frameworks.
- At the Girl Summit in London in 2014, the government signed a [charter](#) committing to end child marriage by 2020.
- Zambia is one of the countries where the [U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief \(PEPFAR\)/DREAMS Initiative](#) .

- [Zambia](#) is a partner country of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).

What steps has the government taken to End Child Marriage

- In 2013, the government launched a nationwide campaign to end child marriage. Spearheaded by the MOCTA, the campaign prioritised engagement with traditional leaders and law reform.
- In 2014, the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs (MOCTA), in collaboration with the Graca Machel Trust, held a [National Symposium on Child Marriage](#).
- Zambia is a focus country of the [UNICEF-UNFPA Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage](#), a multi-donor, multi-stakeholder programme working across 12 countries over four years. [In 2018](#), the Global Programme supported more than 3500 girls with life skills education intended to keep girls in school, and more than 31,000 people participated in community dialogues promoting gender equitable norms including delaying child marriage.
- In March 2016, the government adopted a [National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia](#) (2016-2021) and later a national costed Action Plan with the aim of [reducing](#) child marriage by 40% by 2021.
- An [Advocacy and Communication Strategy \(2018 – 2021\)](#) has also been developed to support objective 3 –to improve knowledge and facilitate positive change of parents, children and communities, and strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders to act as change agents.
- At district level, two Action Plans to End Child Marriage (with costed multi-sectoral operational frameworks) were launched in [Senanga and Katete](#) in 2018 by UNICEF to serve as pilots for the implementation of the NAP.
- The launch of the NAP was reinforced with the launch of the Adolescent Health Strategy 2017–2021 by the Ministry of Health. The strategy gives policy guidelines on how the government and partners should work together towards securing the health status of adolescents.
- Zambia's seventh [National Development Plan](#) (2017-2021) includes child marriage related interventions and has helped to

institutionalise efforts to address child marriage across ministries and budgets.

- In 2019, the President of Zambia hosted a [high-level event](#) within the framework of African Union Campaign to end Child Marriage where the “*Traditional and Cultural Leaders movement to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa*” was launched. In the same grain, president of Zambia was nominated by the AU as the Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage..
- In 2018, the National Assembly of Zambia organised, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a [Parliamentary Seminar “Parliamentarians Take Action to End Child, Early, and Forced Marriage”](#). Participants included MPs and other stakeholders, who recognised child marriage as a human rights violation and agreed on effective parliamentary responses to this practice.

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