**EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 OCTOBER 2021 AT 00:01 GMT**

***PLEASE NOTE: WE WILL ALSO BE HOLDING A ZOOM PRESS CONFERENCE AT 13:30 GMT ON 11 OCTOBER. DETAILS AT END OF THIS RELEASE.***

**Child marriage kills more than 60 girls a day**

**OUAGADOUGOU, 11 October** – More than an estimated 22,000 girls a year are dying from pregnancy and childbirth resulting from child marriage, new analysis from Save the Children released on International Day of the Girl reveals.

With the highest rate of child marriage in the world, West and Central Africa accounts for nearly half (9,600) of all estimated child marriage-related deaths globally, or 26 deaths a day. The regional teenage maternal mortality rate is four times higher than anywhere else in the world.

South Asia sees 2,000 child marriage-related deaths every year (or six every day), followed by East Asia and the Pacific with 650 deaths (or two every day), and Latin American and the Caribbean, with 560 annual deaths (or nearly two a day).

Although nearly 80 million child marriages globally have been prevented in the last 25 years, progress had stalled even before the COVID-19 pandemic—which has only worsened inequalities that drive child marriage. With school closures, health services under strain or closed, and more families being pushed into poverty, women and girls face an increased risk of violence during lengthy lockdowns. A further 10 million girls are now expected to marry by 2030,[[1]](#endnote-1) leaving more girls at risk of dying.

Inger Ashing, CEO of Save the Children International, said: “Child marriage is one of the worst and deadliest forms of sexual and gender-based violence against girls. Every year, millions are forced into wedlock with men who are often much older, robbing them of an opportunity to keep learning, be children, and in many cases, to survive.

“Childbirth is the number one killer of teenaged girls because their young bodies aren’t ready to bear children. The health risks of children having children cannot, and must not, be ignored. Governments must prioritise girls and ensure they’re protected from child marriage and premature childbirth-related deaths. This can only happen if girls have a say in the decisions that affect them.”

Gender inequality continues to fuel child marriage, as revealed in a national report from Save the Children in Nigeria, *The state of Nigerian girls: An incisive diagnosis of child, early and forced marriage in Nigeria.* According to a survey carried out by the organisation, the belief that children born to young mothers are healthier and smarter is widespread among many communities. There’s also a common perception that younger girls “refresh” older men with their “younger blood”.

Even in countries where child marriage is illegal, exceptions are common and the practice is still widespread, including in Burkina Faso—which has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world.

Viviane\*, now 23, was promised at birth to her husband and was forced to marry him when she was only 12. She said:

“My husband was 54 and already had four wives. I wanted to keep studying, so I decided to escape. I was caught and taken back to live with him, so I tried again. I walked for 40km, managed to make my way onto a bus, and eventually ended up in a centre that supports child brides like me. I’m now studying mathematics and training to become a nurse, while mentoring other young girls about the importance of getting an education.”

In a global report released today by Save the Children, [*Global Girlhood Report 2021: Girls’ rights in crisis*](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/global-girlhood-report-2021-girls-rights-crisis), the organisation is calling on governments to:

1. **Raise girls’ voices** by supporting their right to safe and meaningful participation in all public decision-making.
2. **Address immediate and ongoing risks of gender-based violence, including child marriage,** by putting girls’ rights and gender equality at the centre of COVID-19 and humanitarian responses, development policy, and wider efforts to build forward better.
3. **Guarantee the rights of all girls**, including thoseimpacted by different forms of inequality and discrimination (including on the basis of gender, race, disability, economic background, etc.), by developing inclusive policies and programmes. Safe and ethical data collection must also be improved to better understand and respond in real time to COVID-19’s impact on existing economic, climate and conflict-related crises.
4. **Ensure the safe and unrestricted participation of female humanitarian staff in all humanitarian response efforts**, including needs assessments, and the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of all humanitarian services at every level.
5. **Join the Generation Equality movement**, working to deliver on the Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality, which set a target to prevent nine million child marriages in five years.

To mark International Day of the Girl, Ms. Ashing will host a live Zoom Press Conference from Ouagadougou with an activist from Nigeria, and two activists and former child brides from Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso, respectively, to discuss their experiences and solutions to end this violent practice.

Media can join the press conference at 13:00 GMT via: <https://zoom.us/j/95748353309?pwd=c0ludGN1WGh4eFB5WWhNTGI4MnRXZz09>

Meeting ID: 957 4835 3309  
Passcode: 7q2ABc

**ENDS**

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Our CEO of Save the Children International, Inger Ashing, is available as a spokesperson.  
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Please also check our Twitter account @Save\_GlobalNews for news alerts, quotes, statements and location Vlogs.

**Notes to editors**

**\*** Name has been changed to protect the identity of the child marriage survivor.

*Methodological note*

Child marriage is an egregious violation of a girl’s fundamental rights, including her right to survive. Child marriage is both a consequence and a [critical driver](https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-and-health/adolescent-pregnancy-and-child-marriage/) of adolescent pregnancy and fertility, the [leading cause of death](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy) for 15-19-year-old girls globally. Save the Children’s analysis estimates the number of girls (15-19 years) for which child marriage is deadly.

The analysis considers four variables: adolescent female population, adolescent birth rate, age-specific maternal mortality rate, and the prevalence of child marriage among adolescent mothers (for more details on each variable, see Table 1 below). The analysis is two-step: first, the number of age-specific maternal deaths is calculated using the following formula:

*adolescent birth date/1000 \* adolescent maternal mortality rate/100’000 \* adolescent female population*

Then, the number is multiplied by the percentage of adolescent mothers who were already married/in a union when they gave birth. In recognition of the fact that child marriage is not only a cause, but also a consequence, of adolescent pregnancy (girls who become pregnant may decide or be pressured to marry as a result), the analysis developed three scenarios of which the middle one was selected and presented in the press release (for more details on each individual scenario, see Table 2 below).

Beyond a global, yearly estimate, the methodology allows for the calculation of regional estimates – i.e., how many girls child marriage kills in a given region – and daily estimates, i.e., how many girls child marriage kills on any given day, globally or in a given region (for a breakdown of results, see Table 3 below). Regional estimates are weighted by population, whereas daily estimates are obtained by dividing the yearly number by 365, or the number of days in a (normal) year. The assumption underlying the analysis is that if a girl is affected by child marriage, child marriage is the primary factor driving her pregnancy and childbirth.

As appalling as the estimate might look, the real number of girls for which child marriage is deadly is likely much higher. First, when different sources reported conflicting maternal mortality rates, the lower one was chosen for the analysis. Secondly, our analysis disregards the effect coronavirus-related increase in maternal mortality rates, which according to [The Lancet](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/langlo/PIIS2214-109X(20)30229-1.pdf) could as high as 39%. Finally, our estimates do not take into account the increase in child marriage rates projected by both [Save the Children](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/global-girlhood-report-2020-how-covid-19-putting-progress-peril) and [UNICEF](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19) due to COVID-19.

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| **Variable** | **Definition** | **Source** | **Year** | **Age group** |
| Teenage female population | Girls aged 15-19 | [World Bank](https://databank.worldbank.org/source/population-estimates-and-projections) | 2021 | Girls 15-19 |
| Adolescent birth rate | Number of live births to adolescent women per 1,000 adolescent women | [UNICEF](https://data.unicef.org/indicator-profile/MNCH_ABR/) | Varies by country | Girls 15-19 |
| Adolescent maternal mortality rate | Number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period | [The Lancet](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(14)70007-5/fulltext); [DHS Stat Compiler](http://www.statcompiler.com/en/)[[2]](#endnote-2) | Varies by country | Girls 15-19 |
| Prevalence of child marriage among adolescent mothers | Amount of adolescent births from adolescents who were already in a marriage/union | [UNFPA](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Girlhood_not_motherhood_final_web.pdf) | 2015 | Adolescent mothers |

Table 1.

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| **Scenario** | **Percentage of adolescent mothers for which child marriage caused pregnancy** | **Interpretation** |
| Conservative | 15% | Most adolescent pregnancies to girls already married or in a union happen for reasons other than child marriage. |
| Intermediate | 45% | Child marriage is a cause as much as a consequence of adolescent pregnancy. |
| Liberal | 90% | All adolescent pregnancies to girls already married or in a union are a result of child marriage. |

Table 2.

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| **Region** | **Adolescent maternal deaths (unit/year)** | **% of all adolescent maternal deaths** | **Deaths due to child marriage (unit/year)** |
| East Asia and Pacific | 1440 | 3.3% | 648 |
| Europe and Central Asia | 86 | 0.2% | 38 |
| Latin America and Caribbean | 1179 | 2.7% | 531 |
| Middle East and North Africa | 1023 | 2.3% | 460 |
| North America | 20 | 0% | 9 |
| South Asia | 4607 | 10.5% | 2073 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 35562 | 81% | 16003 |
| **Total** | **43917** | **100%** | **19763** |

Table 3.

1. [COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage - UNICEF DATA](https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This source was used for a minority of countries and is not age specific. The Lancet data was replaced by DHS Stat Compiler data when the latter presented a lower value than the former. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)