



Save the Children

# CHILD MARRIAGE IN SENEGAL

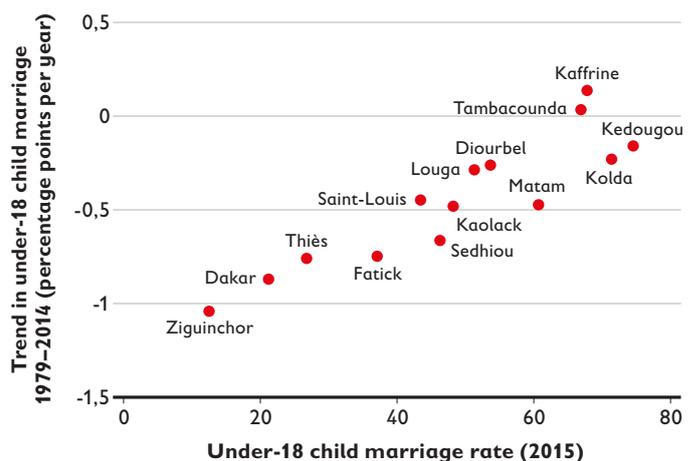
## STATUS OVERVIEW

The prevalence of child marriage<sup>1</sup> in Senegal is 31% before age 18 and 8.5% before age 15.<sup>2</sup> This amounts to 42,905 girls married before age 18 every year, of which 11,764 are married before age 15.<sup>3</sup>

The national prevalence has decreased by 16 percentage points in 20 years and is today below the regional average (42%).<sup>4</sup> However, the rate of child marriage among the poorest quintile (60%)<sup>5</sup> is nearly twice the national average and has seen virtually no progress in the last 20 years. Rates are particularly high in the south-eastern part of the country: Tambacounda (57%), Kaffrine (59%), Kolda (68%) and Kédougou (72%). In these regions, the prevalence has barely changed over the past 30 years.

Child marriage is one of the main causes of girls dropping out of school. Giving girls access to education, and keeping them in school, remains one of the best ways to combat the practice.

Child marriage prevalence and trends in Senegal by region



## THE DAMAGING IMPACTS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

Child marriage has significant negative impacts on Senegalese society. It is particularly harmful for the health of mothers and children.

The maternal mortality rate is 629 deaths per 100,000 births for mothers aged 15–19, compared to 371 deaths per 100,000 births for mothers aged 20–24.<sup>6</sup> The majority of cases of obstetric fistula, a devastating childbirth injury, are caused by early pregnancies. Children born to mothers under age 20 have a 40% greater risk of dying in their first year compared to those where the mother is aged 20–29 years.<sup>7</sup>

Child marriage is also one of the principle causes of **girls dropping out of school, reducing overall economic productivity and perpetuating gender inequality.**<sup>8</sup>

But above all, child marriage is a **serious violation of human rights** and a severe form of child abuse: girls have the right to equality, education and health.

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>9</sup>

## TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

**Sustainable Development Goals target: eliminate child marriage by 2030**

On track to achieve the target: **No**

Increase in the rate of progress required to meet the SDG target: 1.5% per year

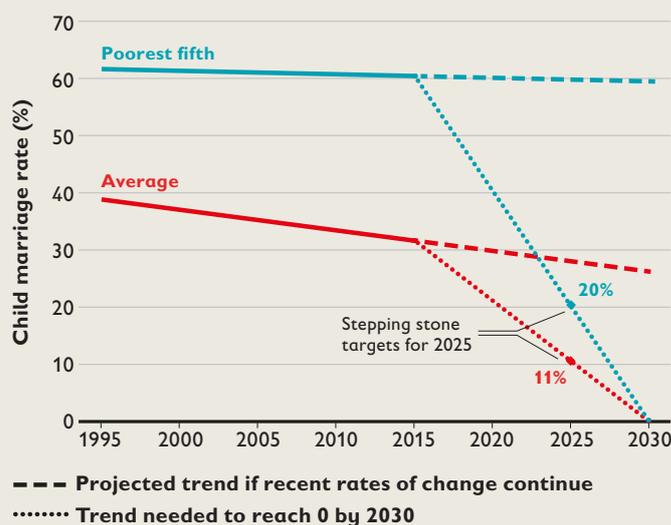
**African Union campaign status:** launched in June 2016.

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.

To achieve these commitments, stepping stone targets must be established for the groups with the highest rates of child marriage. By 2025, the child marriage rate should be:

- 11% at the national level (compared to 25% if current trends persist)
- 20% for the most disadvantaged economic group (compared to 60% if current trends persist)
- 15% for girls in rural areas (compared to 36% if current trends persist).

Child marriage trends in Senegal



## HOW PROGRESS IS BEING ACHIEVED

### State action

- Child marriage was identified as a child protection issue in the National Strategy for the Protection of Childhood in Senegal in December 2012. The 2016–2018 action plan translates this strategy into operational terms and allocates it a specific budget. In May 2014, the President of the Republic openly declared his commitment to both child protection and an educational approach to ending child marriage.
- A national communication plan is currently being developed with the support of United Nations agencies to operationalise the national campaign launched in 2016.

### Education: a winning formula to end child marriage

- Access to schooling for girls, and keeping them in school, are recognised as the best strategies to eliminate child marriage, especially in the West African context where research has shown that an additional year of education reduces the probability of marrying before age 18 by between 3 and 13 percentage points.<sup>10</sup>
- Educated girls are better able to exercise their rights, enter the labour market and contribute to the social and economic development of their country. They are also better equipped with the information they need to bring up healthier and better educated children.<sup>11</sup>

### Lessons drawn from interventions to reduce child marriage:

- Interventions to **raise awareness** about the harmful impact of child marriage at the national level and among practising populations. Child marriage is often considered to be a private issue, rather than a societal problem.
- Programmes targeting **access to schooling for girls, and keeping them in school** (including strengthening school infrastructure and staffing among high prevalence communities) and economic incentives for girls and their parents (for example as grants or conditional transfers to parents and care givers).
- Programmes integrating **multiple approaches:** awareness-raising among communities, mobilisation of leaders and stakeholders, economic subsidy for girls' schooling, education of boys and girls on health and sexual and reproductive rights, and research and advocacy.
- Another success factor for interventions is **coordination between government and civil society interventions**, supported by centralised planning and oversight coupled with collective monitoring and evaluation. In Senegal, interventions are not coordinated across regions, sectors or programme implementors, and are not monitored and evaluated collectively.

# BARRIERS TO ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

## Economic and social determinants:<sup>12,13</sup>

- **Gender inequality:** parents often marry their daughters early to avoid them losing their virginity or falling pregnant out of wedlock
- **Economic pressure:** many poor families marry their daughters early to reduce the number of dependants and establish support networks between families
- **Religious and societal norms:** a majority of religious practitioners do not see child marriage as a problem. Furthermore, some parents believe they are following religious precepts.

## Legal and regulatory framework:

- **Senegalese law is discriminatory:** the minimum legal age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys.
- **Senegalese law is contradictory:** the minimum legal age for sexual intercourse is 16 but sex within a customary marriage is only prohibited for children aged under 13.
- **Senegalese law is yet to be harmonised:** several of the country's treaty obligations set the legal minimum age for marriage at age 18, and prohibit child marriage and gender-based discrimination (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women).

**CHILD MARRIAGE IS A SERIOUS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND A SEVERE FORM OF CHILD ABUSE, AND DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS GIRLS**



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING PROGRESS

### Regulatory framework and state action:

- The government of Senegal should set up a scientific committee, under the leadership of the Ministry for Women, Family and Childhood, bringing different stakeholders together to develop a specific plan to combat child marriage, with an allocated budget.
- The government must adopt a Children's Code and harmonise national law with its treaty obligations, in particular raising the minimum age for marriage to 18 for girls, prohibiting any marriage or customary union involving a child, and removing discriminatory provisions. The Penal Code and the Family Code must also be revised.
- The government must renew its commitment to genuine gender equality and launch a broader national dialogue on the subject.

### Investing in girls' education:

- The government's 2015 objective of "education for all" must be renewed for 2030 via the Global Partnership for Education, with a sufficient allocation of funds and specifically targeting girls' education.
- The government must update its sectoral plan for education, targeting child marriage as a principal cause of girls dropping out of school at secondary level. The budget allocated to girls' education must take into account all costs associated with education for families as well as the need for construction of school infrastructure in communities with a high prevalence of child marriage.
- The government must subsidise the schooling of girls in communities with a high prevalence of child marriage, or make conditional payments to the parents and care-givers.

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## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING PROGRESS *continued*

### Programmes and interventions:

The government of Senegal should work with partners to:

- raise awareness among parents of the harmful consequences of child marriage
- mobilise community leaders, women, men and boys to support the protection of childhood and respect girls' rights
- offer girls and boys comprehensive education and services to advance sexual and reproductive health, focused on prevention and counselling
- integrate civil society and other interventions as an integral part of the national action plan
- coordinate and monitor the interventions via the decentralised framework for the protection of childhood
- share programme and policy evaluations and examples of best practice.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> '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.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the data has been processed by Save the Children from demographic and health surveys (DHS) with households in Senegal (DHS permanent 2012–15, DHS standard 2010–11, DHS standard 2005, DHS standard 1999, DHS standard 1997 and DHS standard 1992–3), searchable at: <http://dhsprogram.com/What-We-Do/survey-search.cfm?pgtype=main&SrvyTp=country>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*, DVD Edition.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF data <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/> Consulted on 25 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> The disaggregated data cited in this briefing is drawn from the Save the Children GRID tool searchable at: <https://campaigns.savethechildren.net/grid>

<sup>6</sup> Government of Senegal, Agence Nationale de la Statistique (2014). *General Census of Population, Habitat, Agriculture and Livestock: Definitive Report* [Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat, de l'Agriculture et de l'Élevage : Rapport Definitif] (RGPHAE 2013)

<sup>7</sup> DHS Stat compiler: <http://www.statcompiler.com/en/> Consulted on 25 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, J.-A. (2013). *Why Ending Child Marriage Needs to Be an Education Goal: The Case for Improved Coordination between Ending Child Marriage and Girls' Education Movements in West Africa*, Center for Universal Education, Brookings Institution.

<sup>9</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 International Center for Research on Women.

<sup>10</sup> Wodon et al, see endnote 9

<sup>11</sup> Walker, J.-A. *Mapping early marriage in West Africa: a scan of trends, interventions, what works, best practices and the way forward* (2013). Development Research and Projects Center for the Ford Foundation (West Africa office).

<sup>12</sup> Government of Senegal, Ministère de l'Économie/Ministère de la Femme, de la Famille et de l'enfance (2017). *Analysis of Social, Cultural and Economic Determinants of Child Marriage* [Analyse des Déterminants Sociaux Culturels et Économiques du mariage d'enfants].

<sup>13</sup> Guilbert, L. Thomson Reuters Foundation. 'Family honor, more than money, fuels child marriage in West Africa', 29 May 2017 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-westafrica-children-marriage-idUSKBN18Q001>

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

Save the Children Senegal is focusing on the links between child marriage, discriminatory laws and harmful practices. In launching our campaign, we hope to stimulate changes in community attitudes and practices and promote gender equality.