

Key national data

- Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world with approximately 1 in 2 girls being married before the legal age of 18. About 30 percent of girls give birth before the age of 19.
- Child marriage is more prevalent amongst girls and families with less education than those with a good education. The prevalence of child marriage amongst girls with secondary education (19 per cent) is three times less than their counterparts with just primary education (59 per cent). At the same time, the proportion of both male and female parents engaged in a customary marriage involving children, decreases as the level of education attained goes up (University of Zurich et al. 2018). According to the Malawi Demographic Health Survey (MDHS) (2015/16), women with no education in Malawi marry 7.2 years earlier than their counterparts with more than secondary.
- According to the World Bank (2011), the aggregated lifetime social and economic costs of child marriage can be as high as 27 per cent of Malawi's current gross domestic product (GDP). The World Bank (2018) estimated that the demographic returns due to ECM in Malawi could reach US\$500 million in purchasing power parity (PPP) by 2030 and that ECM in Malawi could generate education budget savings of up to US\$108 million by 2030.
- Child marriages lead to high fertility rates – exacerbating the problem of rapid population growth by pushing girls into an early reproductive role. In Malawi, approximately 29 per cent of girls aged 15-19 are already mothers or pregnant with their first child.
- Child marriage also has severe impacts on learning, including contributing to low secondary school completion rates. In Malawi, only 45 per cent of girls stay in school beyond standard eight (8th grade).
- Low transition rates to secondary school by both girls and boys account for high child marriage rates. Only 38.4 per cent of children transition from primary to secondary school (40.9 per cent for boys and 35.8 per cent for girls), and of those, only 8 per cent move on to tertiary education (EMIS, 2018).
- Girls aged 15-19 years are twice as likely to die during childbirth as women 20 years and above. 30 percent of all maternal deaths occur in adolescents.
- Malawi's maternal mortality ratio remains one of the highest in the world—439 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016—and maternal deaths present a major public health challenge for the country.