

Towards Ending Child Marriage

Global trends and
profiles of progress

unicef 

for every child

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Towards Ending Child Marriage

Global trends and profiles of progress

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Key messages

- Child marriage is a **harmful practice** detrimental to girls' well-being and in violation of their rights
- It is becoming less common. Still, it affects 650 million girls and women around the world, and global **progress is not fast enough** to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of eliminating child marriage by 2030
- The amount of **progress has varied substantially** across different contexts
- **Progress is possible under the right conditions** – with significant shifts in the well-being of society, the status of women and the provision of key services over the course of several decades
- **Opportunities for girls** are fundamental to success. Child marriage becomes a less attractive option when productive alternatives are available to girls
- Reductions in child marriage are **possible in a variety of settings**, among countries with both high and low levels. What's more, several countries show that progress can be made equitably, with girls from the poorest households benefiting alongside those from the richest households
- **Gains made must not be lost.** Poverty reduction, access to education and labour force participation are key to ending child marriage. We can't afford to lose gains in these areas, especially given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- **The SDGs are deeply interconnected.** Progress on target 5.3 (eliminating child marriage) is dependent on progress in other areas, especially education, employment and poverty reduction

Though child marriage is an age-old tradition, the practice is becoming less common. Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted.

The girls shown here are among those who were able to avoid early marriage or are taking a stand against this harmful practice. Their stories are reminders of the potential that opens up when girls are free to pursue their ambitions and uphold their rights.



Kushma Kumari did not see child marriage and child labour as rights violations until she joined the Child Reporters Programme. Kushma was one of the reporters selected to anchor the Child Reporters YouTube series. She dreams of becoming a doctor and working in the Indian Army.

© UNICEF/UNI207690/Katragadda

"I'm not ready to get married yet. I'm interested in the idea and I even have a suitor. But first I prefer to dedicate myself to my future and my dreams of owning my own business. I want to open a boutique where women can buy textiles and clothes."

Azima

© UNICEF/UNI328117/Haro



Tseganesh Dansa wants to go to university and make her parents proud. She is happy that her parents support her education and made sure she didn't get married at a young age.

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Rima Bera is high-spirited enough to face threats from her community for reporting on and preventing child marriages. She looks forward to continuing her good work.

© UNICEF/UN0331600/Das



"I want to tell the world that we girls are capable of doing many things that you thought we couldn't. ... We have the right to work and to education, the right to be protected from violence, the right to vote, the right to be protected from early marriage and the right of choice when it comes to choosing the right partner."

Ahed

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The **Brahmanbaria team** cheers after winning the Championship Football Tournament, part of a series of initiatives to empower girls through sports and to end child marriage.

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Moriom Banu has been standing up against child marriage and supporting the right to education for girls in her community. Here she shares her experiences with other young activists and solution providers during an interactive session.

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Bira is a volunteer who is creating awareness on the dangers of child marriage in her village.

© UNICEF/UN0388655/Panjwani

Halima [name changed to protect her identity] escaped being married off by her father. Together with six other girls, she sought refuge at a police station. Through community dialogues, her father has now become an advocate against child marriage and has signed an agreement to keep his daughters in school.

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01.

Introduction

Child marriage is widely recognized as a violation of human rights and a hindrance to national development. The practice can have lasting deleterious consequences on the health, well-being and rights of millions of girls. In fact, evidence suggests that it is closely associated with lower educational attainment, early pregnancies, intimate partner violence, maternal and child mortality, increased rates of sexually transmitted infections, intergenerational poverty, and the disempowerment of married girls. In committing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community has vowed to end the practice of child marriage by 2030.

Globally, more than half a billion girls and women alive today were married in childhood. The highest rates of child marriage are found in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where 34 per cent and 28 per cent of young women, respectively, were married in childhood. Recent data indicate that the prevalence of child marriage is generally in decline, but there is substantial heterogeneity in rates of reduction across and within regions and countries, with some high-prevalence areas seeing stagnating progress and even increases.

In the Middle East and North Africa, substantial progress in

reducing the prevalence of child marriage has been made over the past 25 years, but within the last decade, progress appears to have slowed. In Latin America and the Caribbean, levels of child marriage today are as high as they were 25 years ago. In contrast, a girl's risk of marrying in childhood in South Asia has declined by more than one third, from nearly 50 per cent a decade ago to 28 per cent today, largely driven by rapid progress in India. Increasingly, however, the global burden of child marriage is shifting from South Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, where levels of child marriage have declined at a modest rate. Still, progress has been observed in parts of the region. In Ethiopia, once among the top five countries for child marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, prevalence has dropped by one third since 2006.

Understanding the breadth and depth of the factors that trigger child marriage or prevent its occurrence is important to further reducing and ultimately ending this harmful practice. Over the past decades, a growing body of research has fostered such an understanding. Empirical and theoretical evidence offers explanations for the origins and persistence of child marriage, and has informed efforts to end the practice. Despite these advances in child marriage research, gaps remain. While evidence is growing

about what may help prevent early marriage, knowledge in this area is still largely based on relatively small-scale and time-limited research studies and programme evaluations. For the most part, studies point to root causes and exacerbating factors that contribute to child marriage. In addition, research has focused primarily on drivers at the individual and household levels, while the knowledge base of macro-level factors at the societal level remains fragmented.

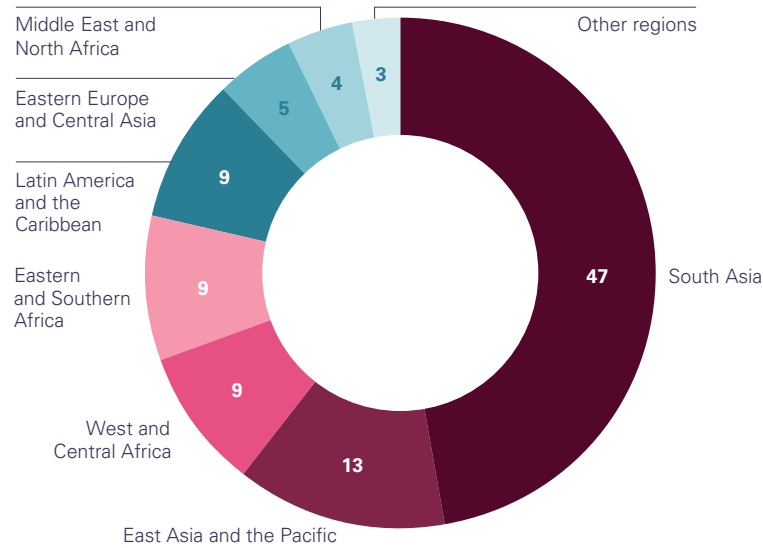
The analysis presented in this report looks at historical trends, with a focus on selected countries that have recorded significant declines in child marriage prevalence. It offers an overview of changes in the practice together with a review of other shifts that have occurred in these countries in terms of girls' access to education and employment opportunities, as well as economic development and poverty reduction.

The publication features global and regional estimates, as well as country profiles, spanning a period of nearly 30 years. Its findings are intended to raise awareness of the conditions that need to be in place to promote the societal transformations that would lead to a rapid drop in the prevalence of child marriage.

02. Global and regional overview

Approximately 650 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday

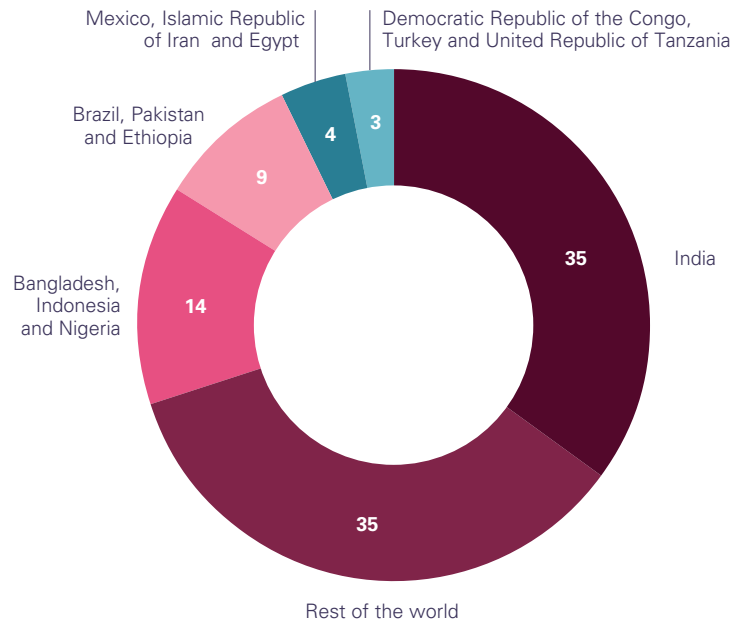
FIGURE 1 | Percentage distribution of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: The global estimate is based on a subset of 98 countries covering 79 per cent of the global population of girls and women of all ages. Due to rounding, numbers do not add up to 100.

One in three of the world's child brides live in India

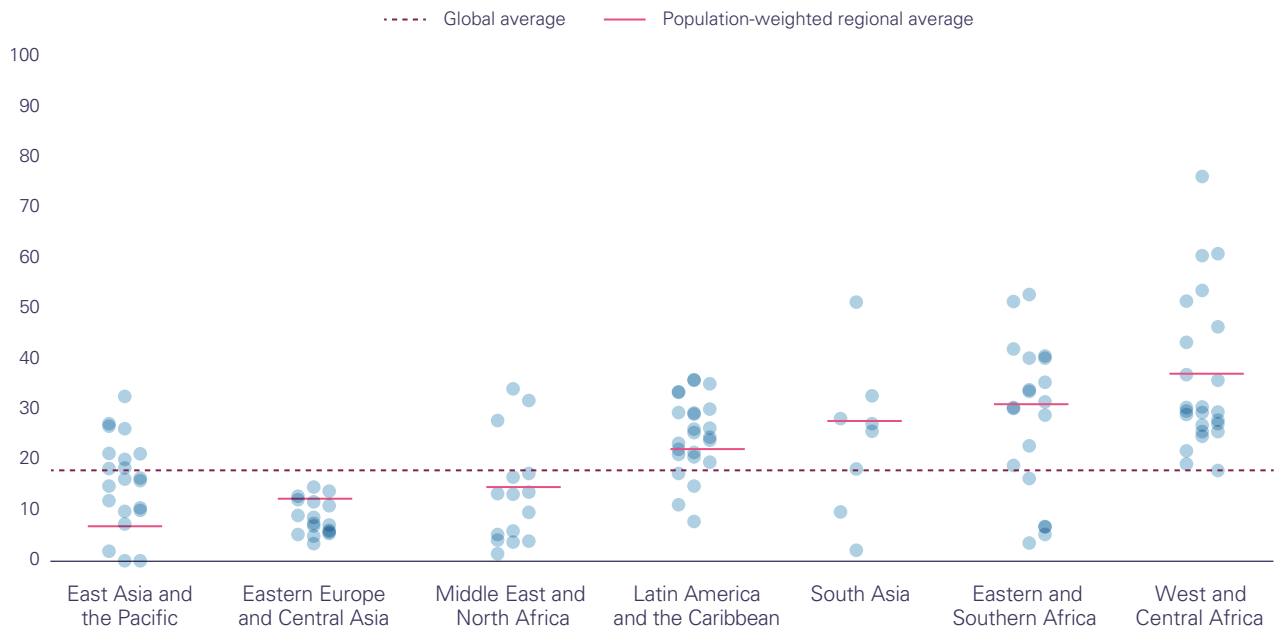
FIGURE 2 | Percentage distribution of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before age 18



Sources: The data on child marriage that appear in all the charts in this chapter are from UNICEF global databases, 2021, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and other nationally representative household surveys, 2010-2020. Demographic data are from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2020 revision (DVD Edition)*. Data on gross national income (GNI) per capita are from World Bank, 2021. Data on the Human Development Index (HDI) are from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2021.

Sub-Saharan Africa stands out as the region with the highest prevalence of child marriage

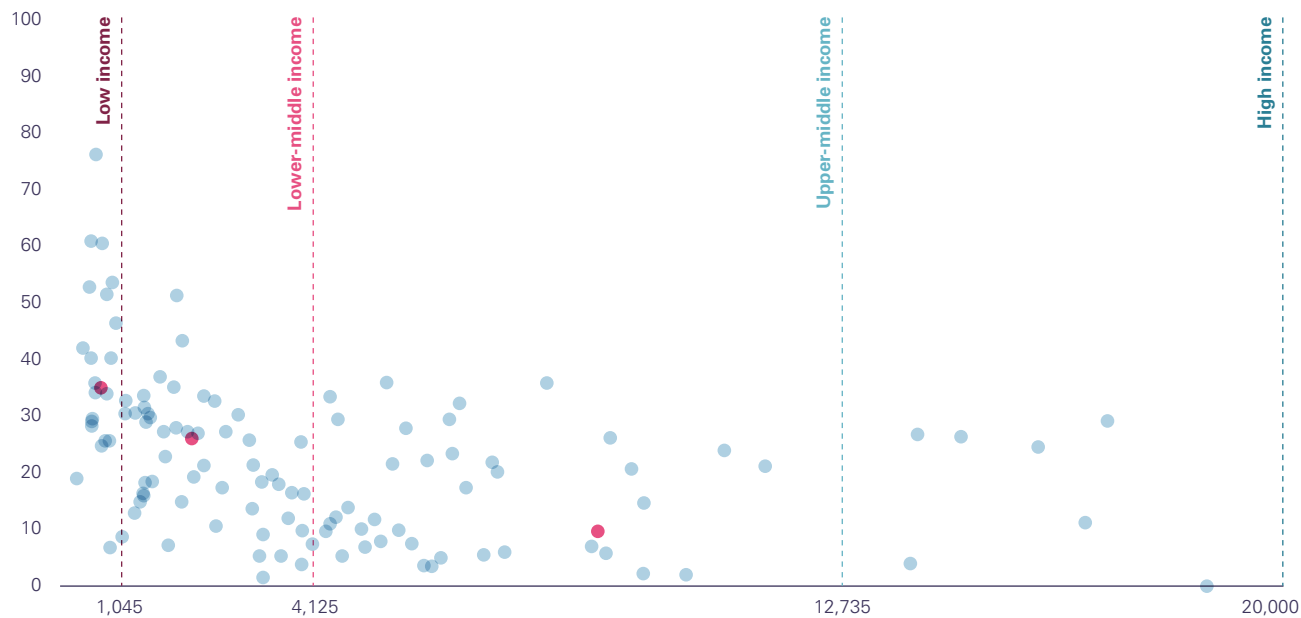
FIGURE 3 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: Each dot represents a country. The global estimate is based on a subset of 98 countries covering 79 per cent of the global population of women aged 20 to 24 years. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population. Data coverage was insufficient to calculate regional estimates for Western Europe and North America.

Child marriage is most prevalent in low-income countries. Still, high rates can be found in high-income nations

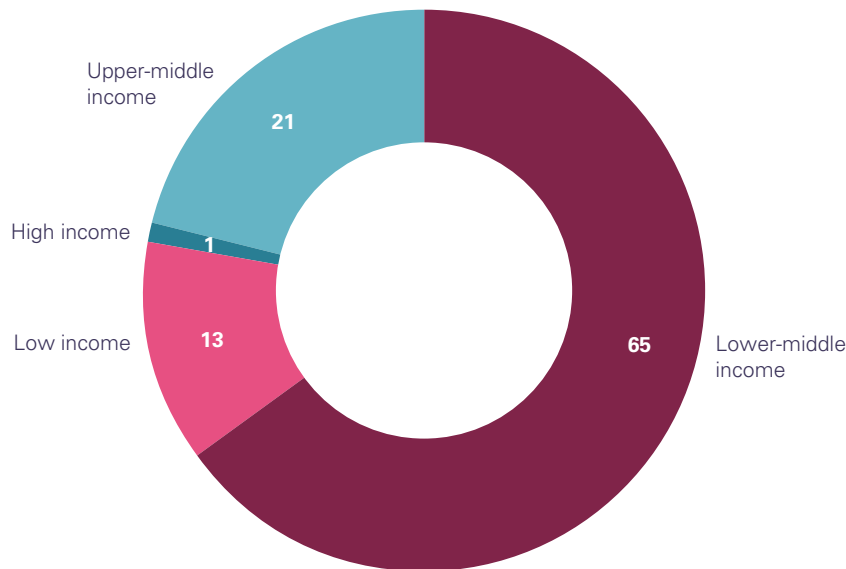
FIGURE 4 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 and gross national income (GNI) per capita (current US\$)



Notes: Each dot represents a country, with the pink dots representing population-weighted averages. Low-income countries had a GNI per capita in 2020 of \$1,045 or less. GNI per capita was between \$1,046 and \$4,125 for lower-middle-income countries, between \$4,126 and \$12,735 for upper-middle-income countries, and \$12,736 or more for high-income countries. Calculations used the World Bank Atlas method. The population-weighted estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the population. Data coverage was insufficient to calculate an estimate for high-income countries.

While child marriage is more common in low-income countries, 86 per cent of the child marriage burden is found in middle-income countries

FIGURE 5 | Percentage distribution of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before age 18, by national income group



Notes: Low-income countries had a GNI per capita in 2020 of \$1,045 or less. GNI per capita was between \$1,046 and \$4,125 for lower-middle-income countries, between \$4,126 and \$12,735 for upper-middle-income countries, and \$12,736 or more for high-income countries. Calculations used the World Bank Atlas method.

Overall, countries with higher levels of human development have lower levels of child marriage. Still, low rates of child marriage can be found even in countries with low human development

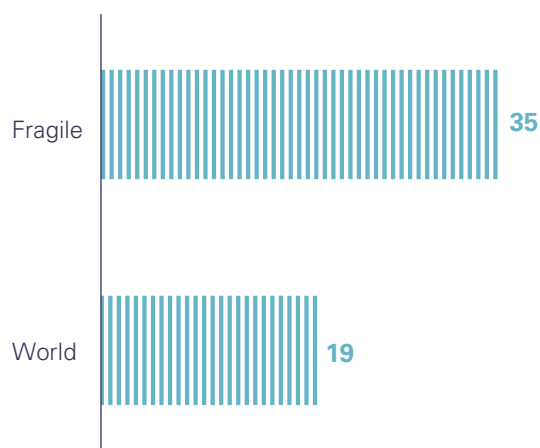
FIGURE 6 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 and countries' Human Development Index (HDI)



Notes: Each dot represents a country, with the pink dots representing population-weighted averages. Countries are grouped into four categories according to the 2019 HDI, which links measures of education, health and income. The ranges are: very high (0.800 or greater), high (0.700-0.799), medium (0.550-0.699) and low (less than 0.550). The population-weighted estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the population. Data coverage was insufficient to calculate an estimate for countries with very high levels of human development.

Child marriage in situations of fragility is nearly two times higher than the world average

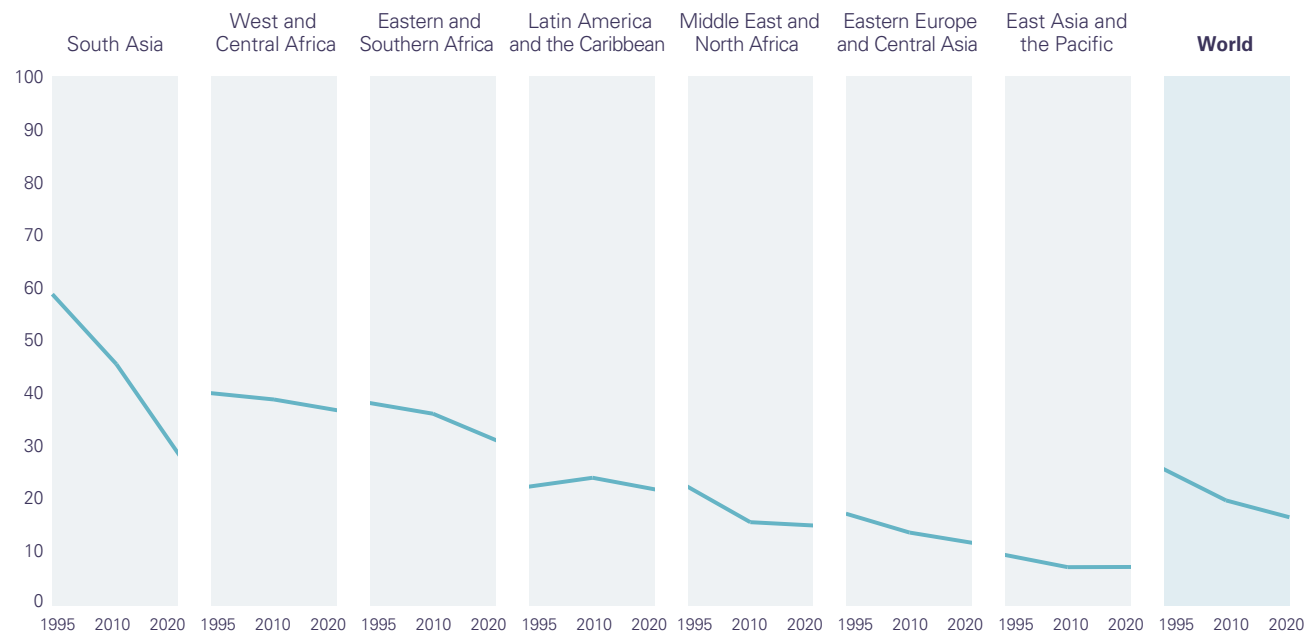
FIGURE 7 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, worldwide and in countries with high levels of institutional and social fragility



Notes: According to the Revised Classification of Fragility and Conflict Situations for World Bank Group Engagement, fragile countries are defined as those with one or more of the following: (a) the weakest institutional and policy environment (as measured using a set of 16 criteria grouped into four clusters: economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public sector management and institutions), (b) the presence of a UN peacekeeping operation, since this reflects a decision by the international community that a significant investment is needed to maintain peace and stability, or (c) flight across borders of 2,000 or more per 100,000 population, who are internationally regarded as refugees in need of international protection, as this signals a major political or security crisis.

Child marriage has declined across most regions in the last 25 years, with accelerated progress in certain high-prevalence regions over the past decade

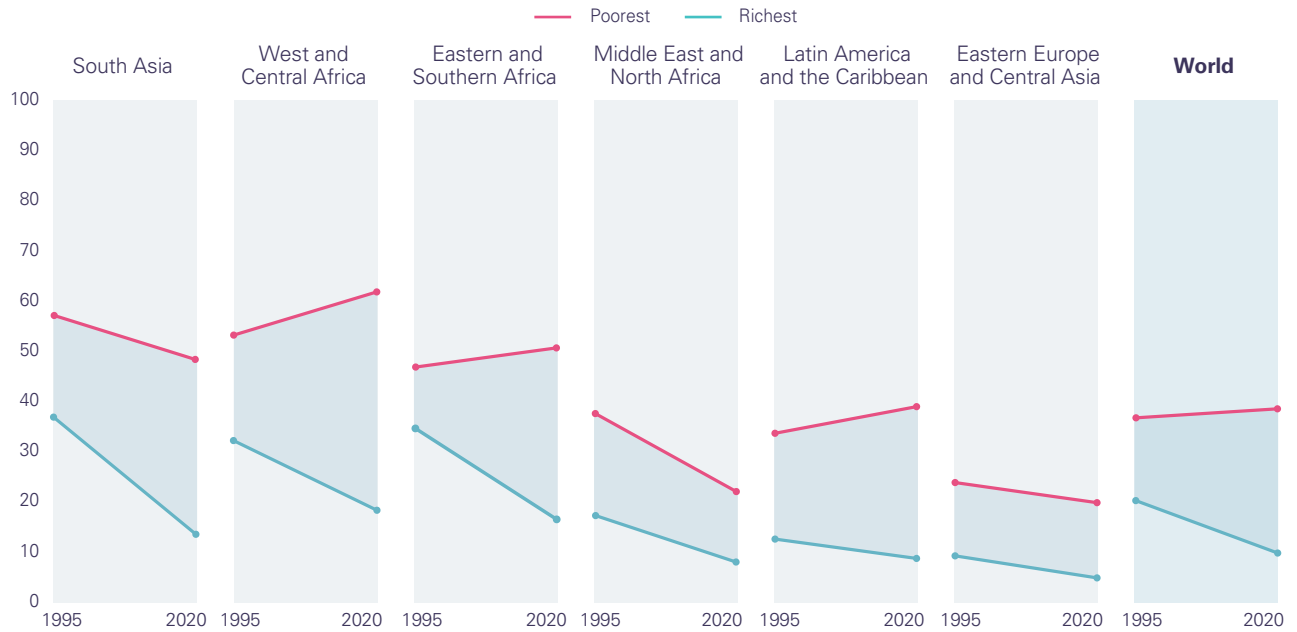
FIGURE 8 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: Estimates are based on a subset of 98 countries covering 79 per cent of the global population of women aged 20 to 24 years. Regional estimates represent data covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population. Data coverage was insufficient to calculate regional estimates for Western Europe and North America.

The gap in child marriage prevalence between the richest and poorest households has widened in most parts of the world

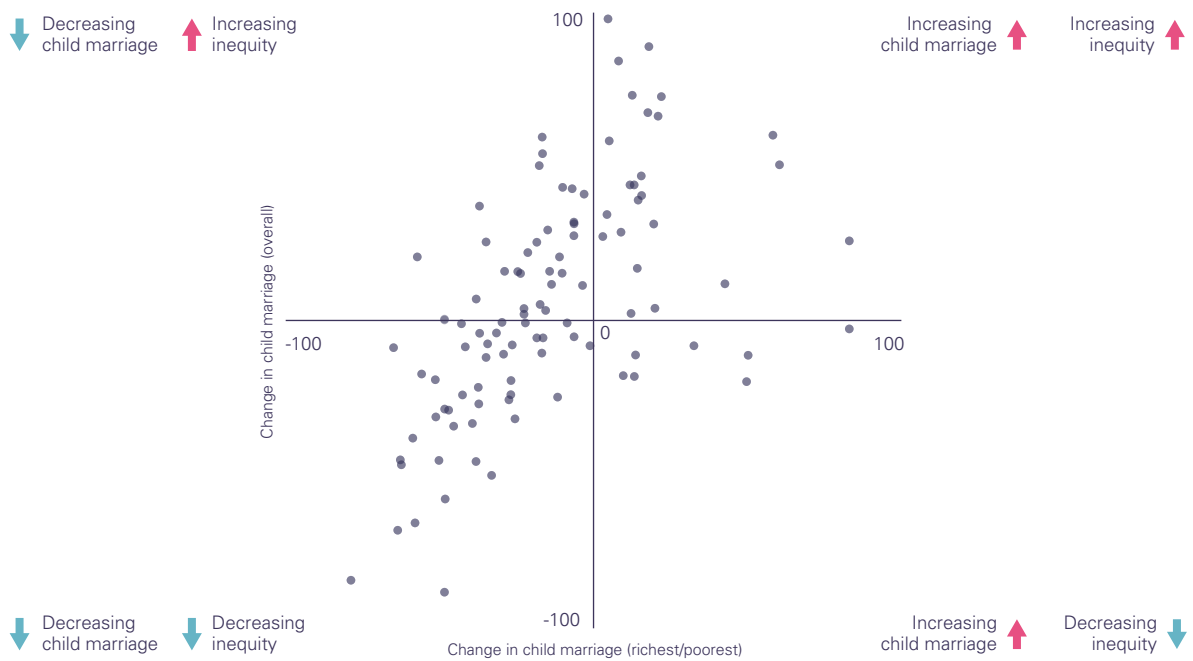
FIGURE 9 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Notes: Estimates are based on a subset of 105 countries covering 58 per cent of the global population of women aged 20 to 24 years. Regional aggregates are based on at least 50 per cent population coverage. Data were insufficient to calculate regional averages for East Asia and the Pacific, North America and Western Europe.

While the majority of countries have decreasing rates of child marriage, approximately half have experienced increasing inequity

FIGURE 10 | Percentage change in the overall prevalence of child marriage among women aged 20 to 24 years, and percentage change in the prevalence of child marriage among women aged 20 to 24 years from the poorest quintile versus women aged 20 to 24 years from the richest quintile over the past 25 years



Note: Each dot represents a country.



03. Understanding trends

What drives progress in reducing child marriage? Insights can be gleaned from examining how child marriage patterns correlate with broader demographic, legal, economic and development trends.

Risk factors for child marriage are commonly studied at the individual level, and drivers of change are often evaluated in terms of programmatic effectiveness. However, a body of literature also exists on societal, macro-level factors related to the practice, including economic development and poverty reduction, access to education, and women's access to the labour market. These factors are closely aligned with established risk and protective factors for child marriage at the individual or household level. For example, evidence shows that individual girls with lower educational attainment are typically at higher risk of child marriage than their more educated peers. Similarly, countries with higher levels of education also have lower levels of child marriage.

The links between poverty and child marriage are also well established and can be mutually reinforcing. Child marriage is most common among the poorest segments of society and its prevalence is highest in low-income countries. At the same time, high rates of child marriage negatively affect a country's economic growth and ability to eradicate poverty through their impact on fertility and population growth, maternal and child health and women's potential earnings and productivity. Conversely, rising national incomes

enable families to invest in their daughters' futures through education and to cope with shocks without resorting to child marriage. These parallels are not surprising, but they do underscore the magnitude and breadth of gains that can be made when improvements in these related sectors are achieved at the societal level.

While the relationships among these factors and child marriage are largely intuitive, the available data and literature reveal important nuances.

Within the area of economic development, factors that impact child marriage are multifaceted. For example, alleviating the most severe levels of poverty may not be sufficient to reduce child marriage, since more basic needs are likely to be addressed before resources are invested in girls' futures. Inequality is also important to consider, since equitable economic development will do more to reach the portions of society most affected by child marriage than aggregate progress driven by gains only at the top.

The relationship between child marriage and labour force participation is also complex. The availability of any type of work for women is not sufficient to reduce child marriage, particularly if most of the work is in the informal sector. Rather, it is the availability of more



stable, often skilled work in the formal sector that is correlated with a reduction in child marriage, likely because it provides a more promising pathway for girls.

Keeping girls in school is often cited as one of the best ways to prevent child marriage. Decisions about removing a girl from school and marrying her off at a young age are often made at the same time. This hypothesis is supported by the relationship we see between rates of out-of-school girls and child marriage prevalence. In countries with high rates of girls out of school, we see correspondingly high rates of child marriage. The effect appears to be strongest for girls of lower-secondary and upper-secondary school age, reflecting the fact that most girls are married soon after they hit puberty or in their later teenage years. A strong relationship is also found between child marriage and school completion rates. However, the data indicate a more robust relationship between primary/lower secondary completion rates and child marriage compared to upper-secondary completion rates. This may be because upper-secondary completion rates are relatively low across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

In considering the impact of these various socioeconomic factors on child marriage, it is also important to reflect on the possibility of interactions between individual and societal variables. This is evident in the relationship between education and the labour market, for example. It has been established that increases in the perceived value of education at the household level (thus reducing the risk of early marriage and taking girls out of school) are more likely when labour market opportunities are available. This relationship is also likely to play out at the macro level, where an increasingly educated population can drive innovation and create entrepreneurial opportunities as well as draw in opportunities for skilled work, thus creating productive career pathways for young people.

Two additional factors that are often studied in relation to child marriage are adolescent pregnancy and a country's legal age at marriage. Neither aspect, however, has a straightforward association with child marriage, and their ability to drive the practice has many caveats.

Child marriage is both a cause and consequence of adolescent pregnancy. This premise

is supported by the robust relationship found between the prevalence of child marriage and the adolescent fertility rate. In many contexts, child marriage is a driver of early pregnancy; in others, including in parts of Latin America and the Caribbean as well as certain African countries, unintended pregnancies may drive child marriages. Even in such contexts, however, most adolescent pregnancies occur within an early union. Looking at the use of modern contraception by unmarried girls aged 15 to 19 can reveal insights into the effect on child marriage of reducing unintended pregnancies. Increased use of modern contraception among this demographic group shows a modest corresponding decrease in the rate of child marriage.

Finally, while it is well known that setting the minimum age at marriage at or above 18 can make a crucial difference in progress against child marriage, the existence of loopholes, the absence of sanctions and the fact that many marriages may still occur illegally weaken the effectiveness of legislation as a driver of change.

Economic development and poverty reduction

Harmful practices are often a feature of poor economic development, which is well known to produce a cascade of social risks for children. Typically, limited wealth is a decisive factor in encouraging families to marry their children off at a young age. Studies show that the countries with low gross domestic product (GDP) per capita are also those in which children are most at risk for child marriage. At the same time, economic development and better infrastructure have been shown to reduce the practice. An analysis of several South Asian countries found that regional growth in economic activity significantly reduced the likelihood of child marriage. The effect of growth holds even after other economic and demographic indicators,

including household poverty, are factored in. This implies that improvements in macroeconomic wealth are indeed associated with reductions in the prevalence of child marriage. Still, the benefits of economic growth are often experienced unevenly across populations, reinforcing the need for social protection to ensure that the most vulnerable are reached.

Up until the COVID-19 pandemic, the world had made unprecedented progress against poverty, reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty by more than 1.2 billion over the past quarter century. South Asia has made the most rapid progress, lifting 33 per cent of its population – over 200 million people – out of extreme poverty. The Middle East and North Africa was the one region that experienced an increase in extreme poverty. From 1990 to 2014, this

region saw rapid economic growth, with a 3.5-fold increase in GDP per capita, with extreme poverty dropping to 2 per cent in 2013. However, from 2015 to 2018 the extreme poverty rate tripled, with conflicts in the region largely driving the increase.

Sub-Saharan Africa has seen steady economic growth and has succeeded in reducing poverty in recent years. Poverty levels remain high relative to other regions, however, with more than 40 per cent of the population living in extreme poverty, circumstances that often drive parents to marry off their daughters during childhood. Additionally, in the last 10 years, given rapid population growth, the GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa has stagnated and continues to be low relative to other regions of the world.



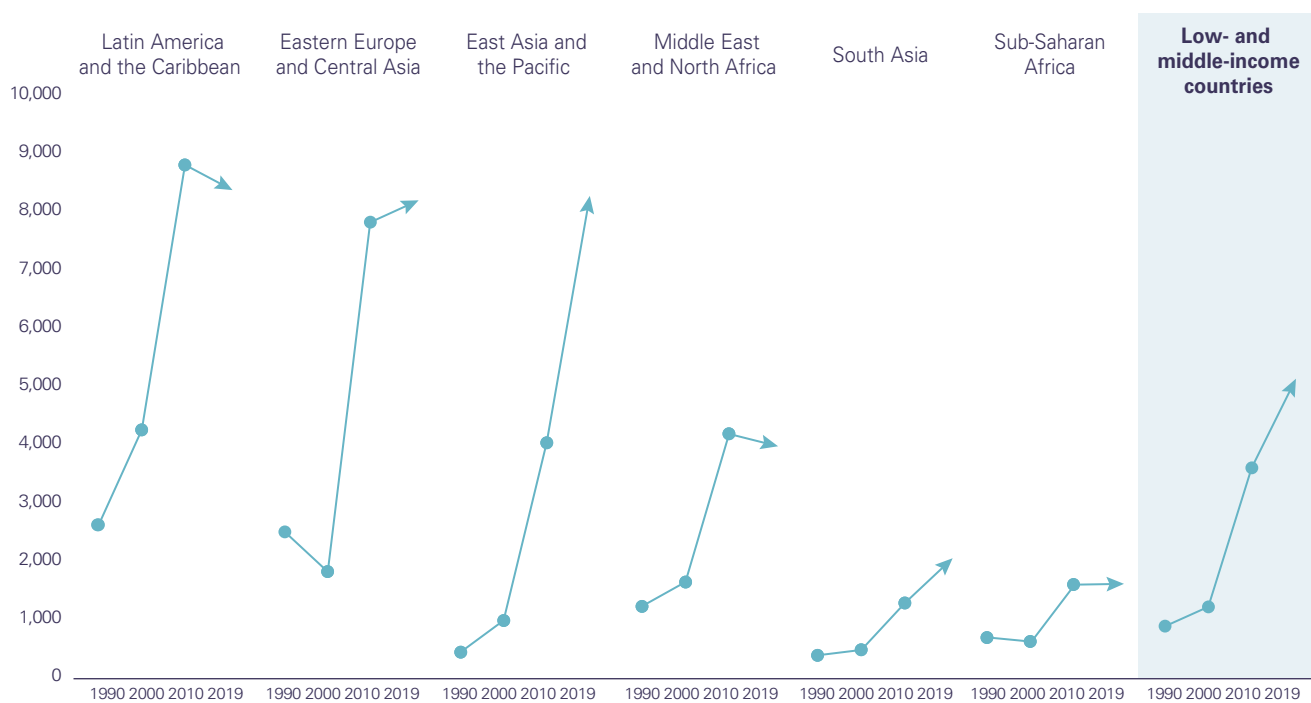
While most regions have made progress in reducing poverty over the past several decades, per capita GDP has stagnated or declined in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa

FIGURE 11.a | Percentage of population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Source: World Bank, 2021.

FIGURE 11.b | GDP per capita (current US\$)



Source: World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2021.

Access to education

Education is widely recognized as the most significant factor in delaying the age of marriage for girls. Research suggests schooling may be protective against early marriage for several reasons. In many countries, schooling and marriage are viewed as incompatible activities: Girls are often forced to leave school upon marriage, and many parents are unwilling to delay marriage so their daughters can attain a higher level of education. Better quality and higher education may make the returns on investment in girls more apparent and justifiable for both parents and society.

Primary education lays the foundation for a lifetime of learning, while secondary education provides children with the knowledge

and skills they need to become empowered adults. It is widely acknowledged that the benefits of secondary education for girls are significant. For example, research suggests that while, in some areas, primary school completion can be protective against child marriage, attending school during early adolescence is significant in reducing the practice.

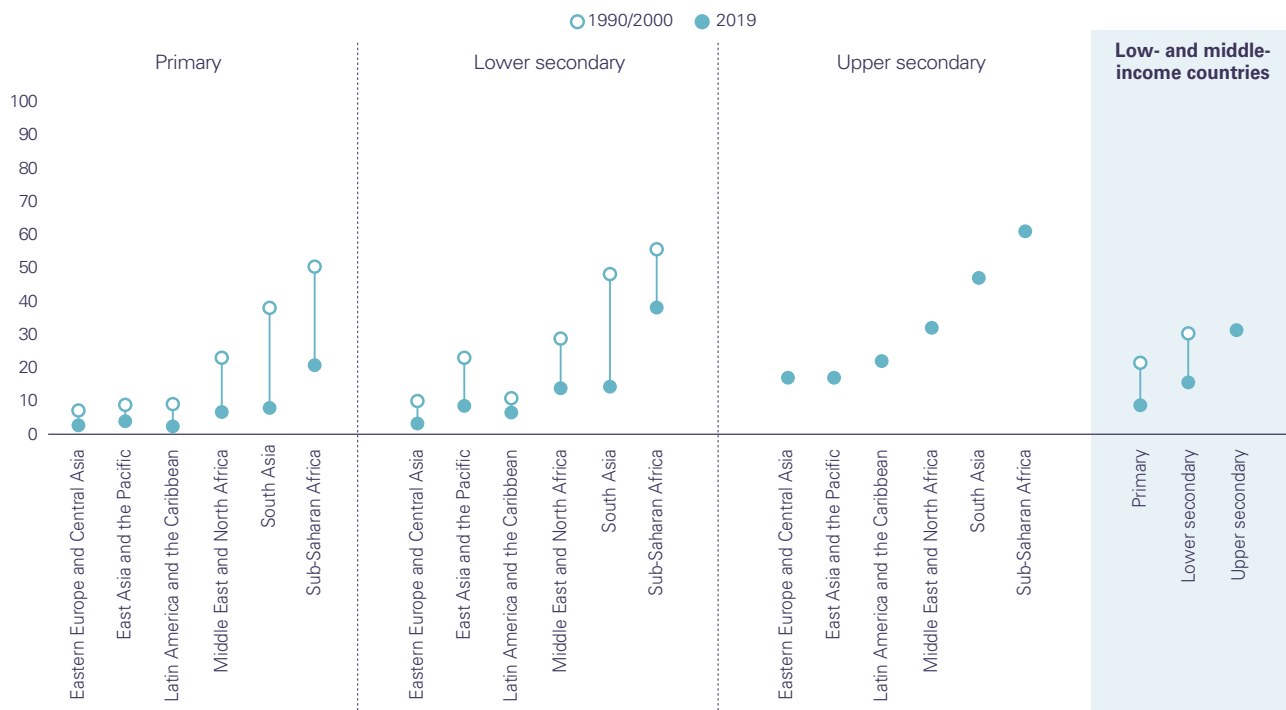
Regions that have had greater success against child marriage have also made faster progress in improving education for girls. South Asia experienced the most dramatic progress in increasing female completion rates and bringing more girls into the educational system. That region exceeds the low- and middle-income country average for both primary- and lower-secondary-level indicators. Sub-Saharan Africa also

saw significant improvements, and its progress is even more impressive when considered against the backdrop of its rapid population growth. Progress has, however, been slower at the secondary level, and the gap in female educational achievements between sub-Saharan Africa and other regions remains wide.

Across all regions, the proportion of girls of upper-secondary age who are out of school remains high and upper-secondary completion rates are low, particularly in regions that have a high prevalence of child marriage. Approximately half of girls in this age group in South Asia, and two thirds in sub-Saharan Africa, are out of school. Similarly, only 38 per cent of girls in South Asia and 26 per cent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa complete upper-secondary school.

Today, more girls are in school than ever before

FIGURE 12 | Percentage of girls out of school, by level

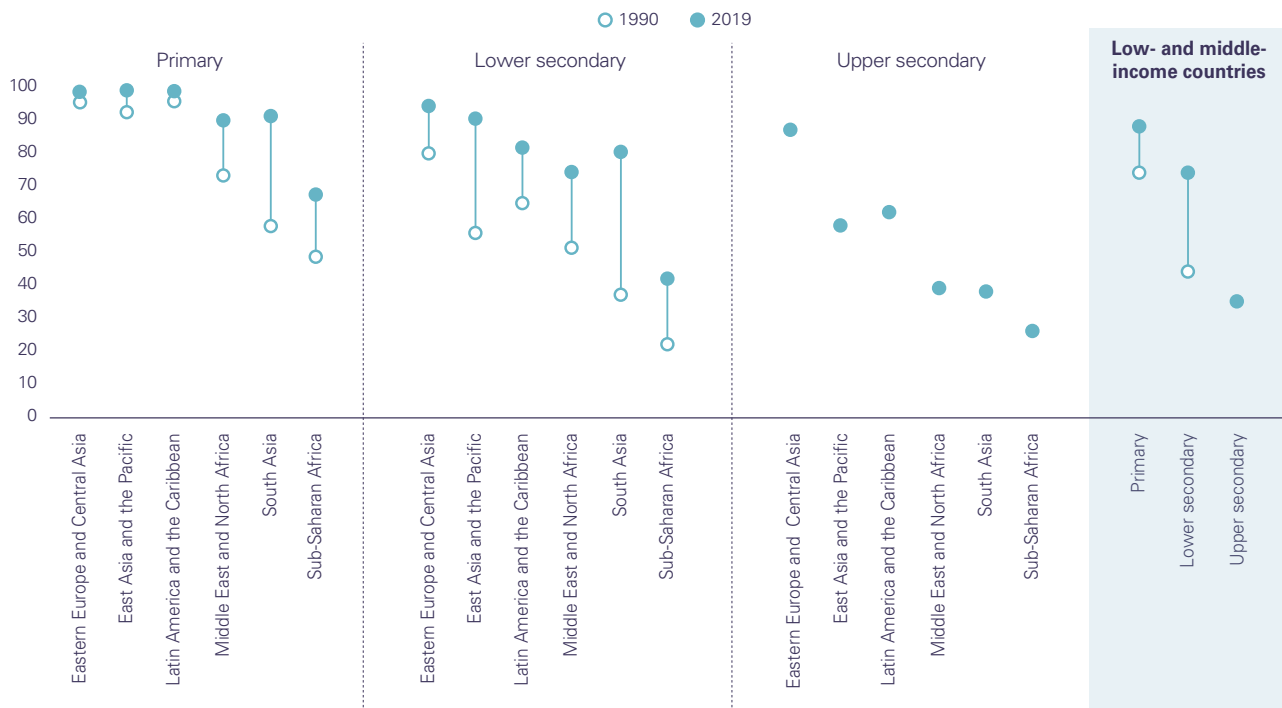


Notes: Lower-secondary data are only available since 2000. Trend data are not available for upper-secondary education. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020.



And more girls are successfully completing primary and secondary education

FIGURE 13 | Percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Trend data are not available for upper-secondary education.
 Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020.

Labour force participation

Access to employment and participation in the labour market are associated with an increase in women's empowerment, the enhancement of their position in society and the household, and other improved life outcomes, including delayed age at marriage. Evidence suggests that improved employment opportunities may raise the cost of dropping out of school, in addition to allowing young women to build an economic base to lift themselves and future generations out of poverty, addressing two of the primary drivers of early marriage.

However, not all types of employment are equally protective against child marriage, with participation in the informal labour sector potentially increasing the risk of child marriage. To understand this risk, it is important to consider not only the proportion of wage and salaried workers among employed women and girls, but also the proportion of those working in vulnerable jobs. Vulnerable employment is typically represented by poorly compensated, time- and labour-intensive activities, such as agricultural work, which often lack sufficient social protections. Women tend to work outside the formal economy since they are disproportionately responsible for care and household work. They often have less time to devote to a job outside the home, making informal and often vulnerable employment a more accessible option. Research shows that participation in this type of employment, especially among adolescents, increases the likelihood of dropping out of school and, ultimately, child marriage.

On average, the female employment-to-population ratio has

declined across low-and-middle-income countries – from 50 per cent to 43 per cent over the past three decades. The gender gap, however, has remained constant, with the male employment-to-population ratio also decreasing by 7 per cent over the same period. In some instances, falling participation rates are the result of improved educational attainment and the ensuing reduction in youth participation rates. This is good news, but the positive effect may be limited by the extent to which these countries can create jobs that leverage these enhanced skill sets, a trend seen in South Asia. On the other hand, higher female employment-participation rates, such as those seen in sub-Saharan Africa, can be the result of a lack of other livelihood opportunities and limited social protection coverage (such as childcare benefits, social pensions or unemployment provisions). In the absence of decent work and social protection,

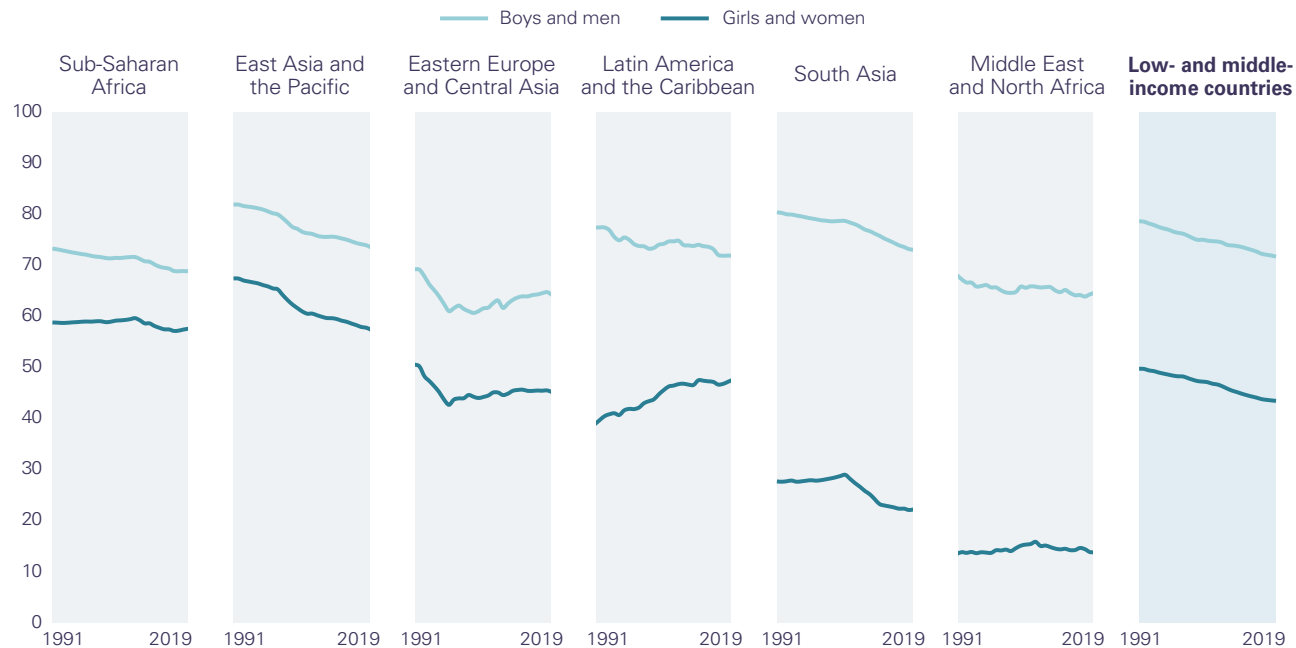
women are often forced to take risky and unappealing jobs to ensure they can satisfy their household's basic needs.

While female labour force participation is declining globally, on average, an increase in the quality of work has been observed across all regions, with a shift towards wage and salaried jobs. These trends may reflect two opposing forces. First, a large proportion of women at the bottom of the income distribution, who previously worked in unappealing jobs, are pulling out of the labour market as their households become more affluent. Second, educated women are increasingly accessing more lucrative jobs. These jobs reward higher educational attainment and are associated with delayed marriage. As expected, regions with higher rates of female wage and salaried workers continue to have the lowest rates of child marriage.



Globally, female employment rates in low- and middle-income countries have declined slightly, but the gender gap has remained constant

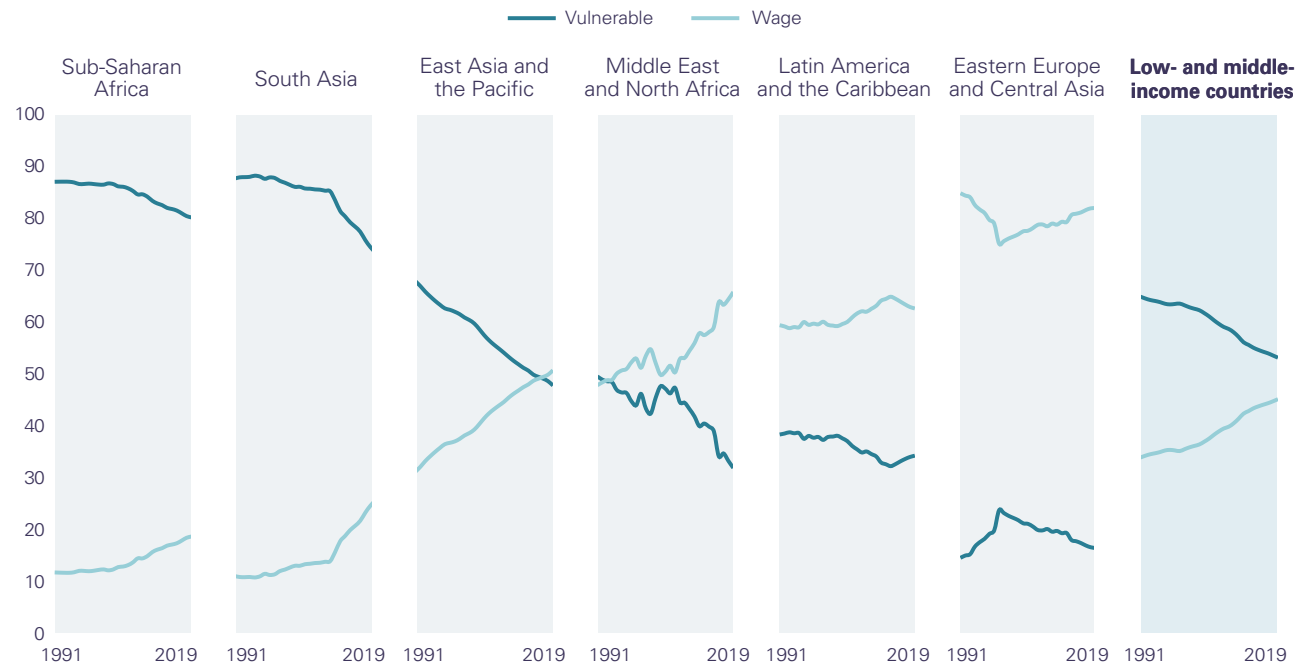
FIGURE 14 | Employment-to-population ratio for girls and women and boys and men aged 15 years and older



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), 2021.

A trend away from vulnerable employment and towards wage and salaried work for women can be seen in most regions

FIGURE 15 | Proportion of vulnerable employment among girls and women aged 15 years and older as a percentage of female employment and proportion of wage and salaried female workers aged 15 years and older as a percentage of female employment



Source: International Labour Organization, 2021.

Improvements in reproductive health

Delaying childbearing is a crucial starting point for improving maternal health, as well as improving women's lives more broadly, including delaying the age at marriage. Early pregnancy is one of the main drivers of child marriage in countries where pre-marital sex is common. Every year, an estimated 21 million girls aged 15 to 19 years become pregnant in low- and middle-income regions, and approximately 12 million of them give birth. Evidence shows that one of the most effective ways to prevent unintended pregnancy is to use modern forms of contraception.

Available data show improvements in maternal and reproductive health across all regions. Adolescent fertility and maternal mortality have declined while, at the same time, access to modern contraception has increased.

Regions that experienced the most significant declines in child marriage also saw the most marked reductions in the adolescent fertility rate. All regions saw at least a 30 per cent drop in adolescent fertility, except East Asia and the Pacific, where the fertility rate was already low at 30 births per 1,000 girls in 1990. By 2018, the fertility rate declined modestly to 22 births per 1,000 girls. South Asia saw the most

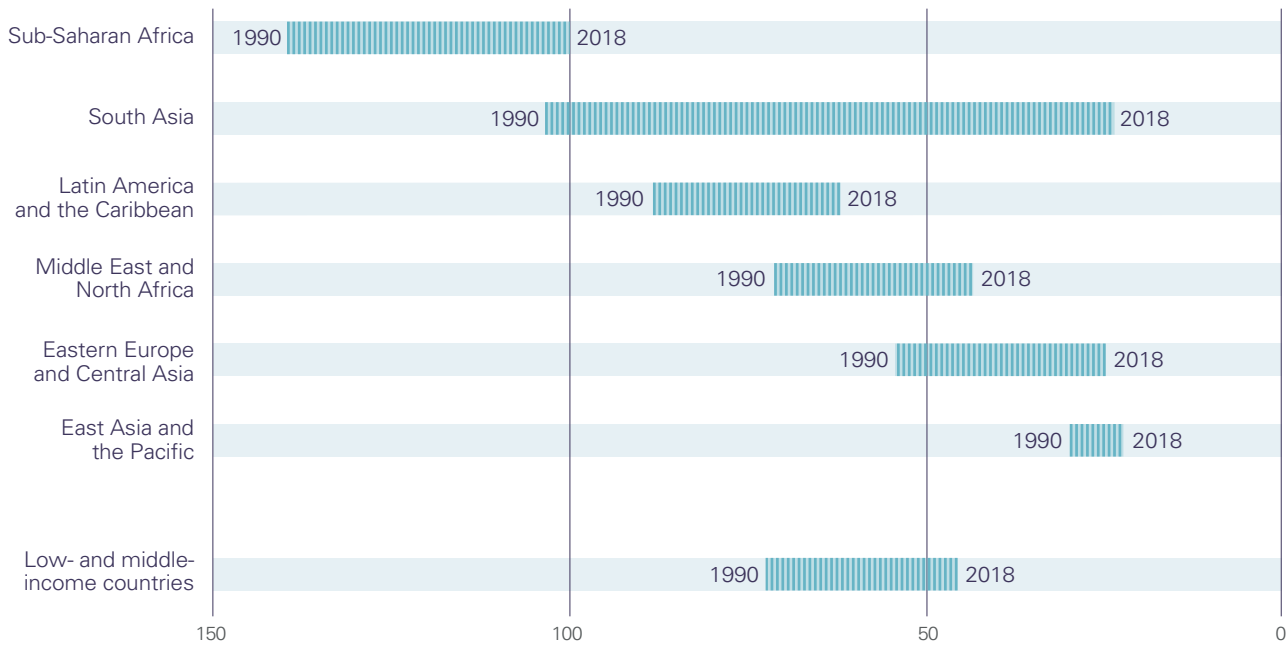
significant drop in adolescent fertility with a 77 per cent decline, from 103 births to 23 births per 1,000 girls, reaching the levels of East Asia and the Pacific and Europe and Central Asia today.

All regions also experienced at least a 24 per cent increase in access to modern contraception among adolescents from 1995 to 2020. However, the adolescent demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods did not exceed 75 per cent in any region in 2020. More than half of adolescent demand for modern contraception is still unmet in regions with the highest prevalence of child marriage.



All regions have seen a significant reduction in adolescent fertility except East Asia and the Pacific, where the fertility rate was already low

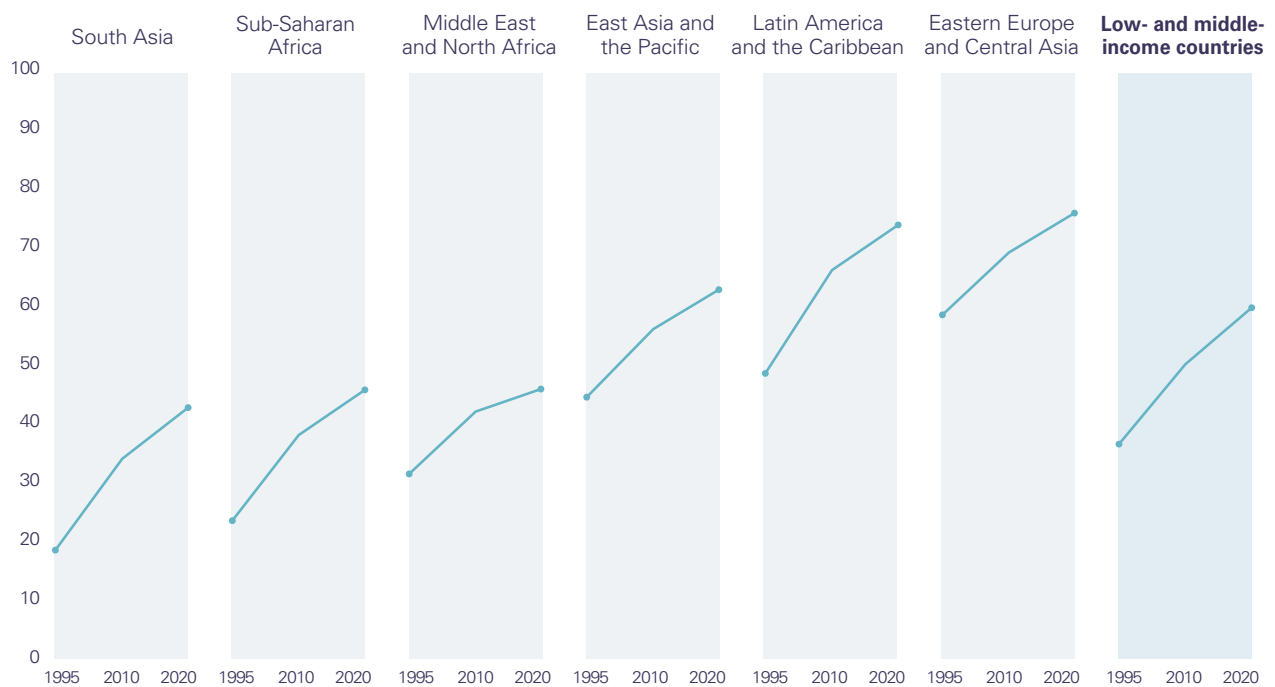
FIGURE 16 | Births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19 years



Source: United Nations Population Division (UNPD), 2019.

Adolescent demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods has increased in all regions over the past 25 years

FIGURE 17 | Percentage of girls aged 15 to 19 years who have their need for family planning satisfied by modern methods



Source: United Nations Population Division, 2020.



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Legal protections

Establishing legislation that sets a minimum age for marriage at 18 is recognized as essential to eliminating child marriage. Legislative provisions can encourage government follow-through and provide levers for civil society advocates to hold leaders accountable to national and international commitments. In most countries, child marriage is prohibited by national law. Indeed, most countries have adopted 18 years as the legal age at marriage for girls, and in some countries the age is higher. Countries that consistently protect the rights of girls by setting their legal minimum age at marriage, their legal minimum age at marriage with parental consent, and their legal minimum age of sexual consent at 18 or older had rates of child marriage that were 40 per cent lower than countries where these laws contradicted one another. Such associations point to the crucial difference that legislation can make in progress against child marriage.

While this is good news, in theory, there are often loopholes (such as parental consent, religious/

customary law, pregnancy or court approval) that allow girls to marry before the legal age. Moreover, while national laws against child marriage are important, they are not sufficient for ending the practice. Even after accounting for exceptions to the legal age at marriage with parental or judicial consent, a global study found that 7.5 million girls marry illegally each year. The fact that, in many countries, there are no legal sanctions for child marriage, such as a fine or prison sentences, may compound the issue. Where no sanctions exist, the law may be less effective in acting as a deterrent to the practice.

Legal protections throughout the world have improved significantly. From 1995 to 2018, the proportion of low- and middle-income countries in which the marriage of a girl before the age of 18 years was illegal under general law increased from 78 per cent to 93 per cent, a 15 per cent rise. A moderately greater increase was seen in the proportion of countries that closed the parental consent loophole (23 per cent) and closed judicial/religious loopholes (15 per

cent). Still, more than half of low- and middle-income countries have at least one loophole, and only 1 in 3 countries have closed all loopholes, making marriage before the age of 18 for girls illegal under any circumstances.

From 1995 to 2018, the regions of Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa made the most progress in raising the legal age at marriage for girls and closing loopholes. Surprisingly, Europe and Central Asia was among the regions with the lowest proportion of countries (42 per cent) with laws outlawing marriage of a girl before age 18, under that region's 1995 general law. However, by 2018, 94 per cent of countries in Europe and Central Asia had made child marriage illegal under general law, and the majority (69 per cent) had closed the parental consent loophole. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa also made significant progress, with 43 per cent changing their child marriage laws to make marriage before age 18 with parental consent illegal, raising the proportion of countries that closed that loophole to 67 per



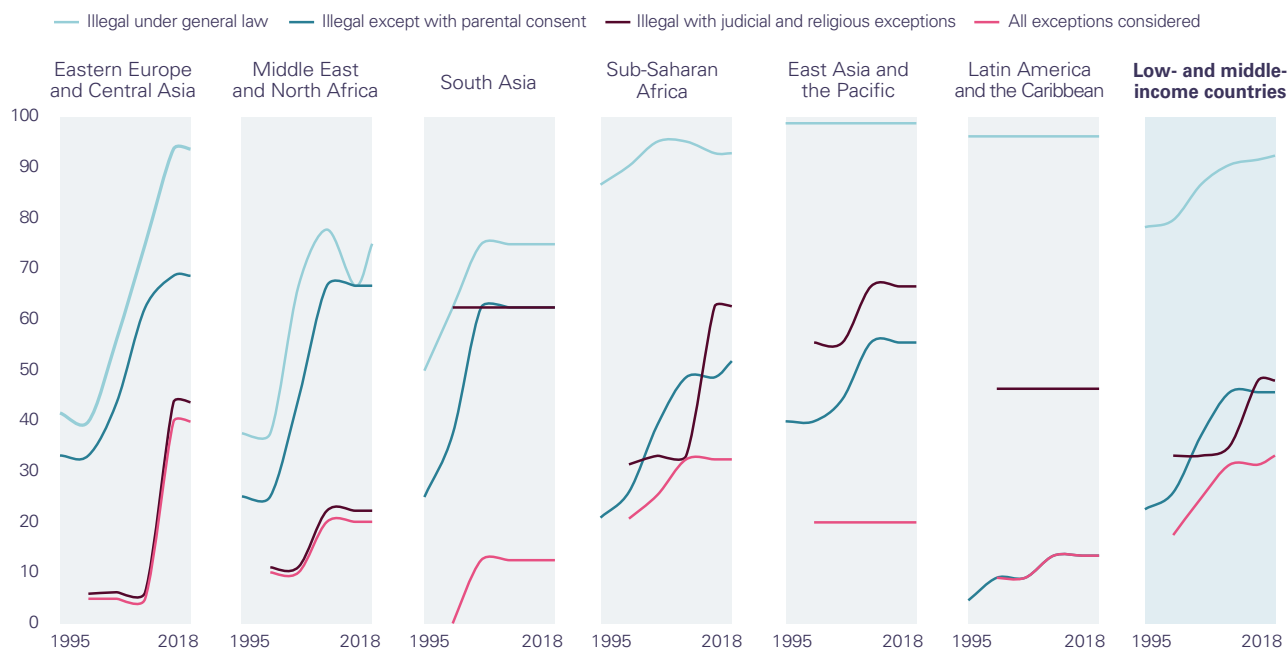
cent. South Asia also advanced in closing loopholes, but it also has the lowest proportion of countries that have made child marriage

illegal under all circumstances (13 per cent). While all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have made child marriage illegal

under general law, the proportion of countries with legal loopholes is close to rates in South Asia.

Countries across all regions closed legal loopholes that allow marriage of girls under age 18. Still, more progress is needed

FIGURE 18 | Proportion of low- and middle-income countries in which marriage for girls under the age of 18 is illegal under general law, is illegal except with parental consent, is illegal with exceptions for judicial consent or religious reasons, and with all exceptions considered



Notes: The data presented here cover a subset of 106 low- and middle-income countries. Data for judicial and religious exceptions are only available from 2000. Source: World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law*, 2021.

04. Profiles of progress

Progress against child marriage can be assessed in different ways. Nine countries are profiled here, each of which has made strides in reducing levels of child marriage.

Decades ago, child marriage was the norm in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and India, with the majority of girls marrying before the age of 18. Today, these countries are among those that have seen the steepest declines in the prevalence of child marriage worldwide, representing a substantial decrease in the risk for individual girls as well as a significant reduction in the number of girls marrying each year. Significant progress has also been achieved by Indonesia, where the practice is half as common today as it was at the beginning of the 1990s. Prevalence in these four countries still remains high. So, despite dramatic progress, there is more work to be done before the practice is eliminated.

Armenia, Eswatini, the Maldives, Rwanda and Tunisia are coming

close to the elimination of child marriage. In these countries, levels have continued to decline, with the practice becoming rare. While it is common for progress to slow as countries approach the last mile (since this usually entails reaching the most vulnerable segments of the population), these countries show that continued progress towards elimination is possible. At the global level, we see that the most progress against child marriage has been enjoyed by girls from wealthier backgrounds, with often minimal benefit to the poorest girls. These five countries are therefore noteworthy for the equitable progress they have made in reducing child marriage, meaning that levels have declined among not just the richest but also the poorest segments of society.

This is not an exhaustive presentation of countries that have made progress in reducing child marriage, but a selection of examples, driven by data availability. For each country, the following pages present: an overview of trends in child marriage; data on how common the practice is, who is most affected, and how it has changed over time; and a review of other socioeconomic shifts that have occurred in these countries over the same period in terms of girls' access to education and employment opportunities, as well as economic development and poverty reduction.



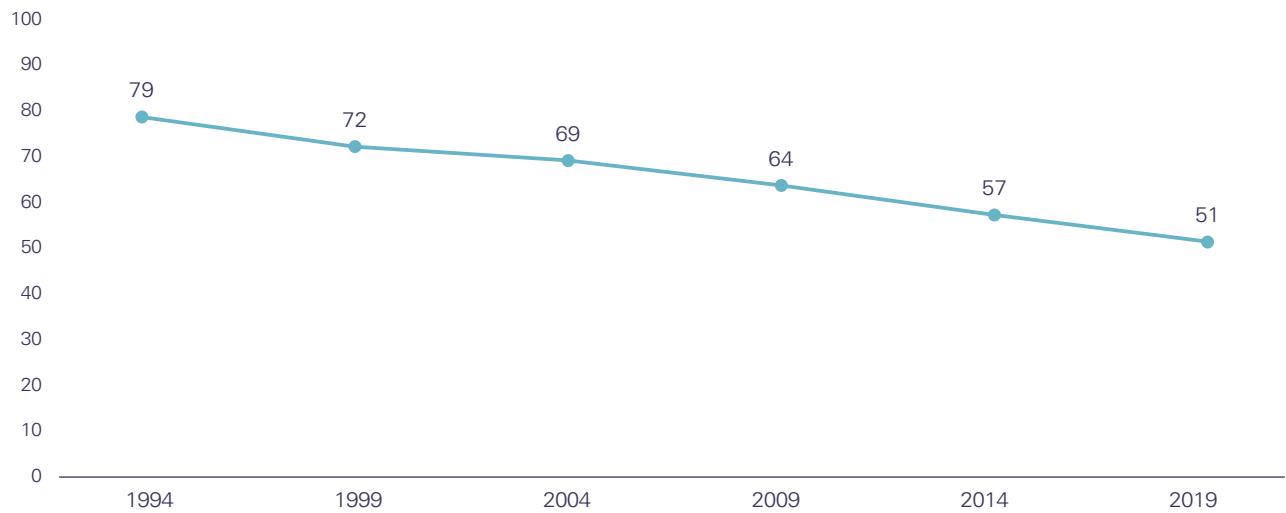
Bangladesh

Legal age at marriage is 18 years old, with exceptions

Bangladesh has seen a marked decrease in the practice of child marriage, experiencing one of the largest absolute declines globally for marriage before age 18. It has also experienced one of the largest absolute declines in marriage before age 15.

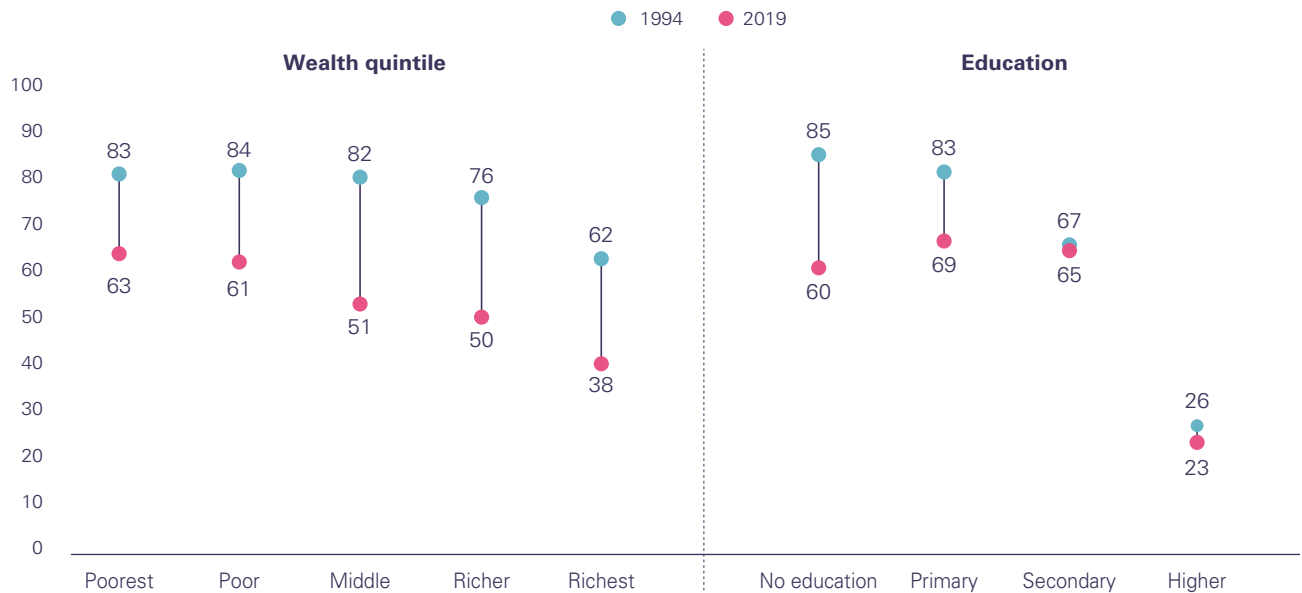
The prevalence of child marriage dropped from close to 80 per cent in 1994 to just over 50 per cent in 2019

FIGURE 19 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



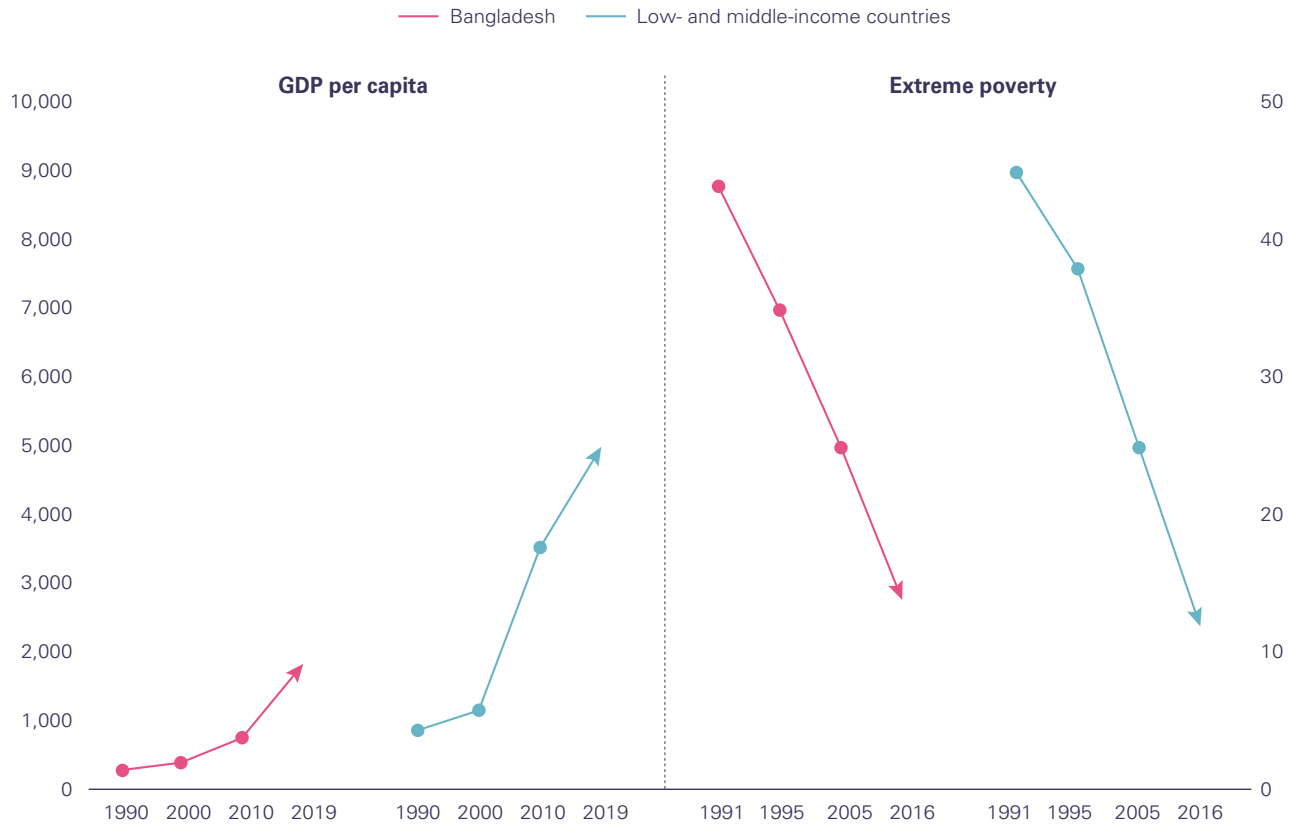
Declines in child marriage have been observed across richer and poorer segments of society and are particularly noteworthy among the least educated

FIGURE 20 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



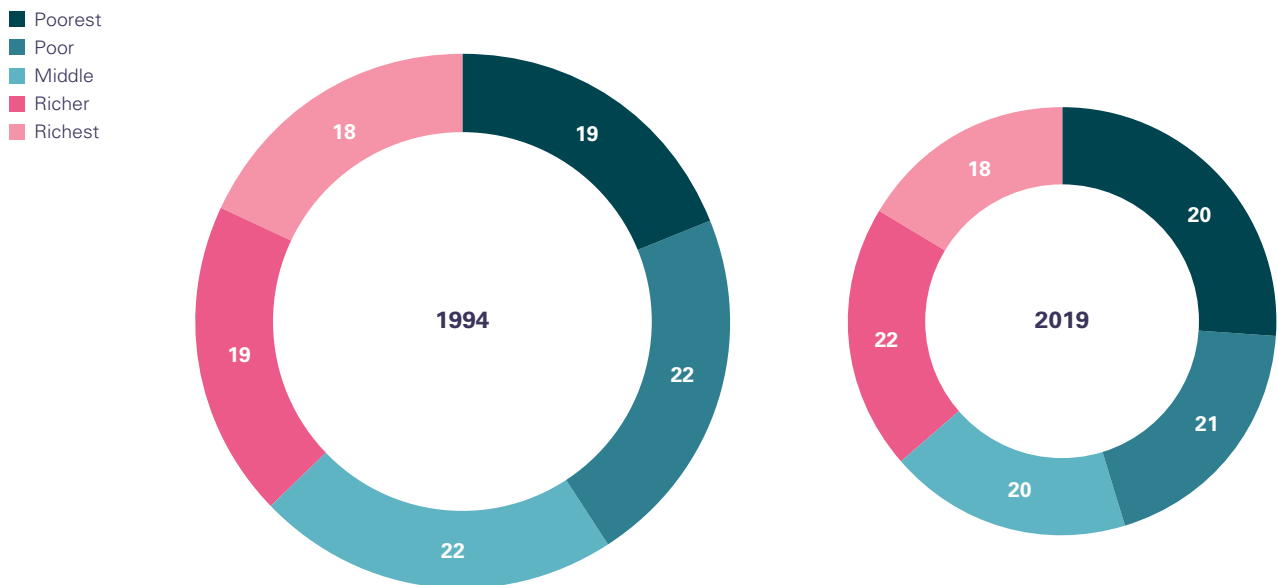
Bangladesh has seen a steep decline in extreme poverty and a rise in GDP per capita

FIGURE 21 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



The economic profile of child brides has remained relatively unchanged over time

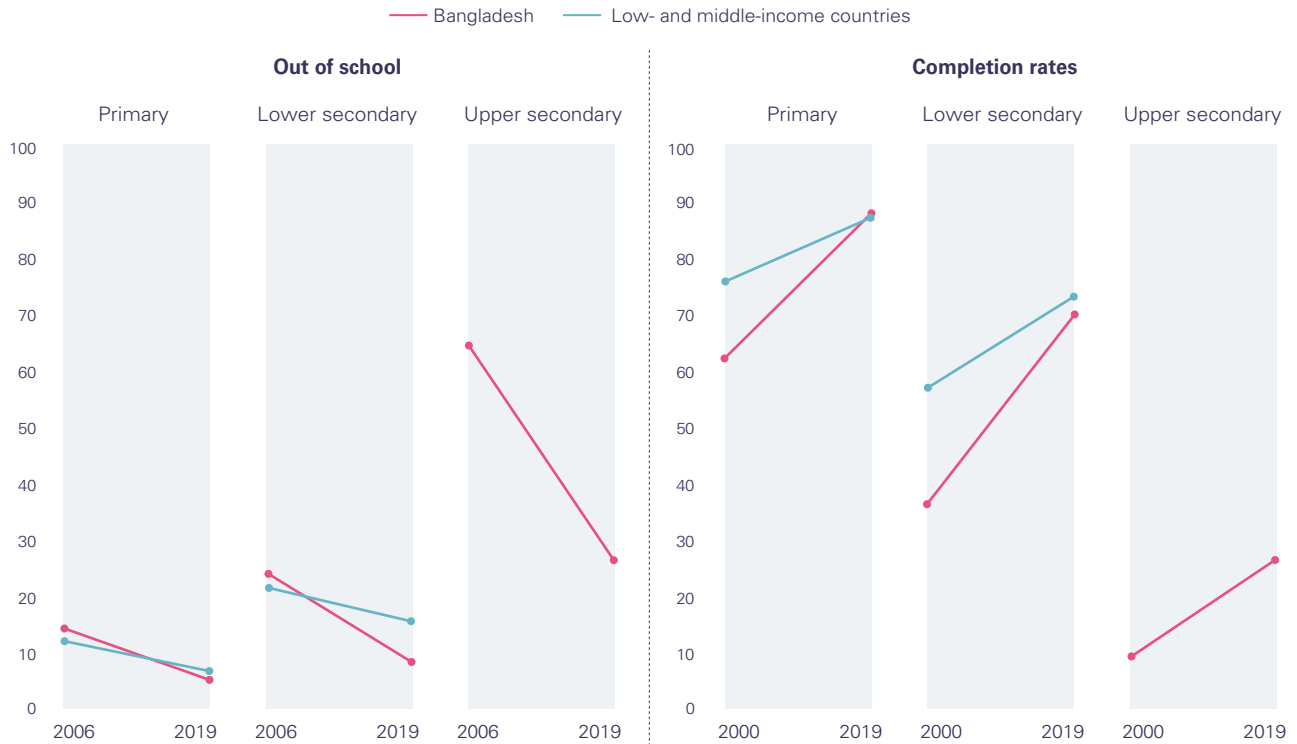
FIGURE 22 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 2019 do not add up to 100.

Bangladesh has seen significant improvements in girls' education, with primary- and lower-secondary-level completion rates catching up to the low- and middle-income country average

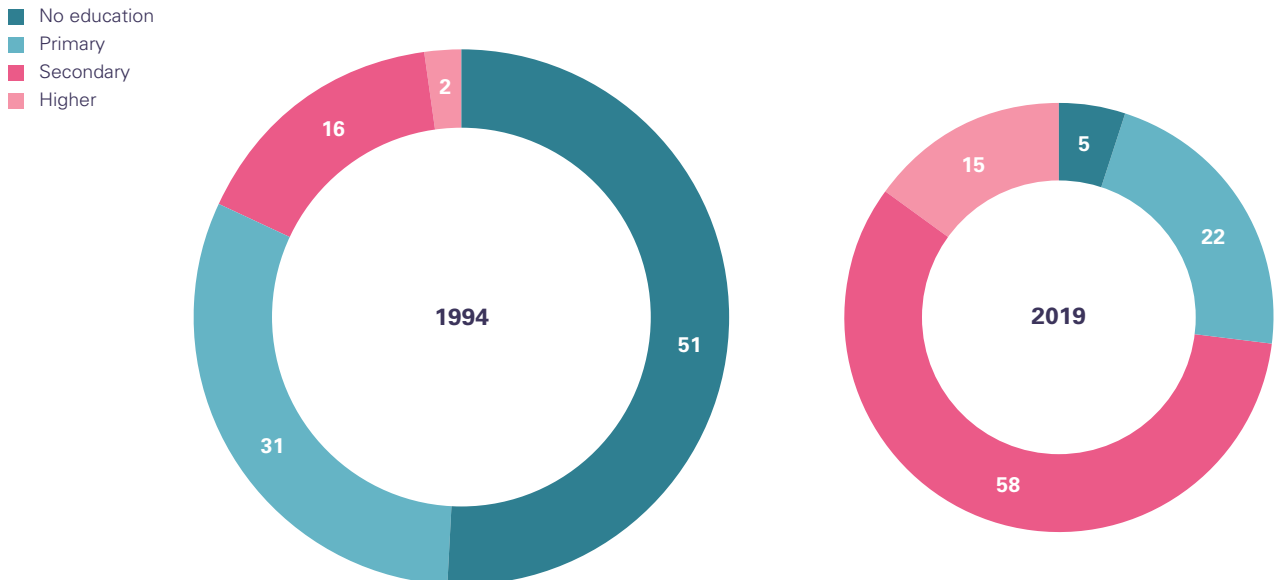
FIGURE 23 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

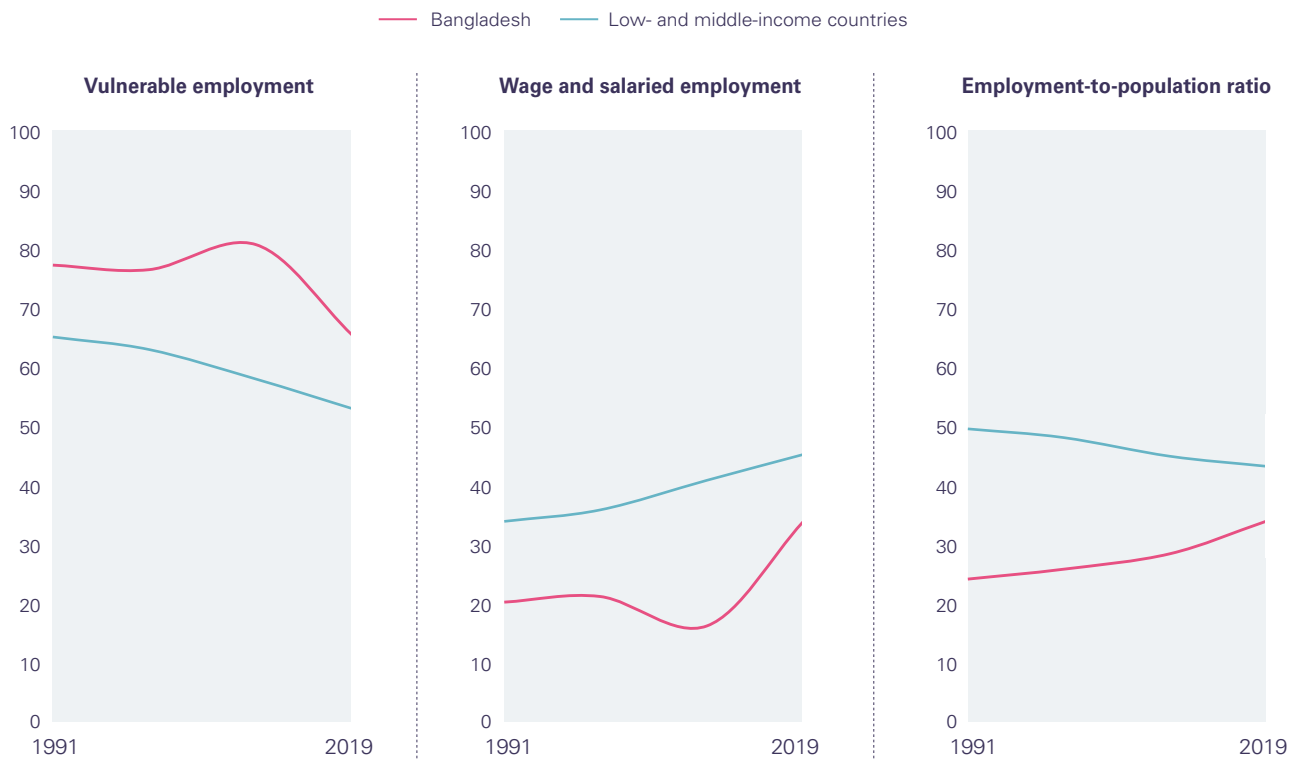
The majority of child brides in 1994 had no education; by 2019, the majority had attended at least secondary school

FIGURE 24 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



The female labour force participation rate has only seen modest increases over the last three decades, but more Bangladeshi women have wage and salaried jobs than ever before

FIGURE 25 | Proportion of vulnerable employment among girls and women aged 15 years and older as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers aged 15 years and older as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



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Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 1993-1994, 1996-1997, 1999-2000, 2004, 2007, 2011 and 2014, and MICS 2006, 2012-2013 and 2019. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

Ethiopia

Legal age at marriage is 18 years, with exceptions

Ethiopia's progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage is one of the strongest among countries in Eastern and Southern Africa. Levels have declined in the past 25 years, with accelerating progress since 2006.

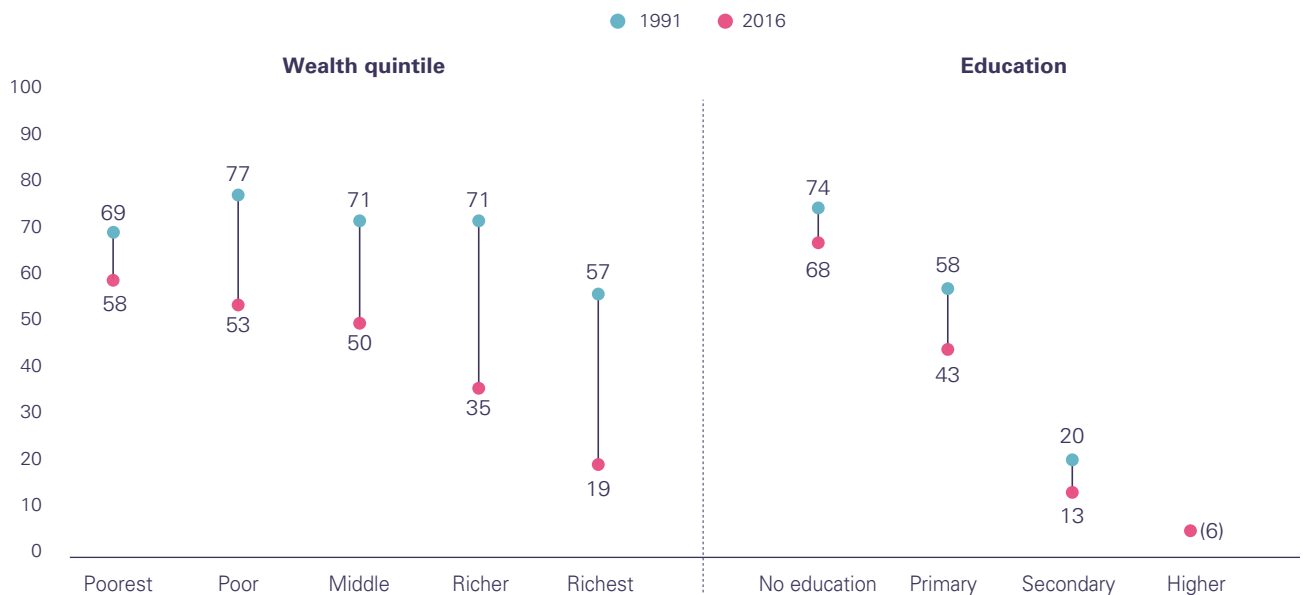
Four in 10 young women were married in childhood in 2016 compared with 7 in 10 in 1991

FIGURE 26 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Progress in child marriage has mostly benefited the richest and more educated girls

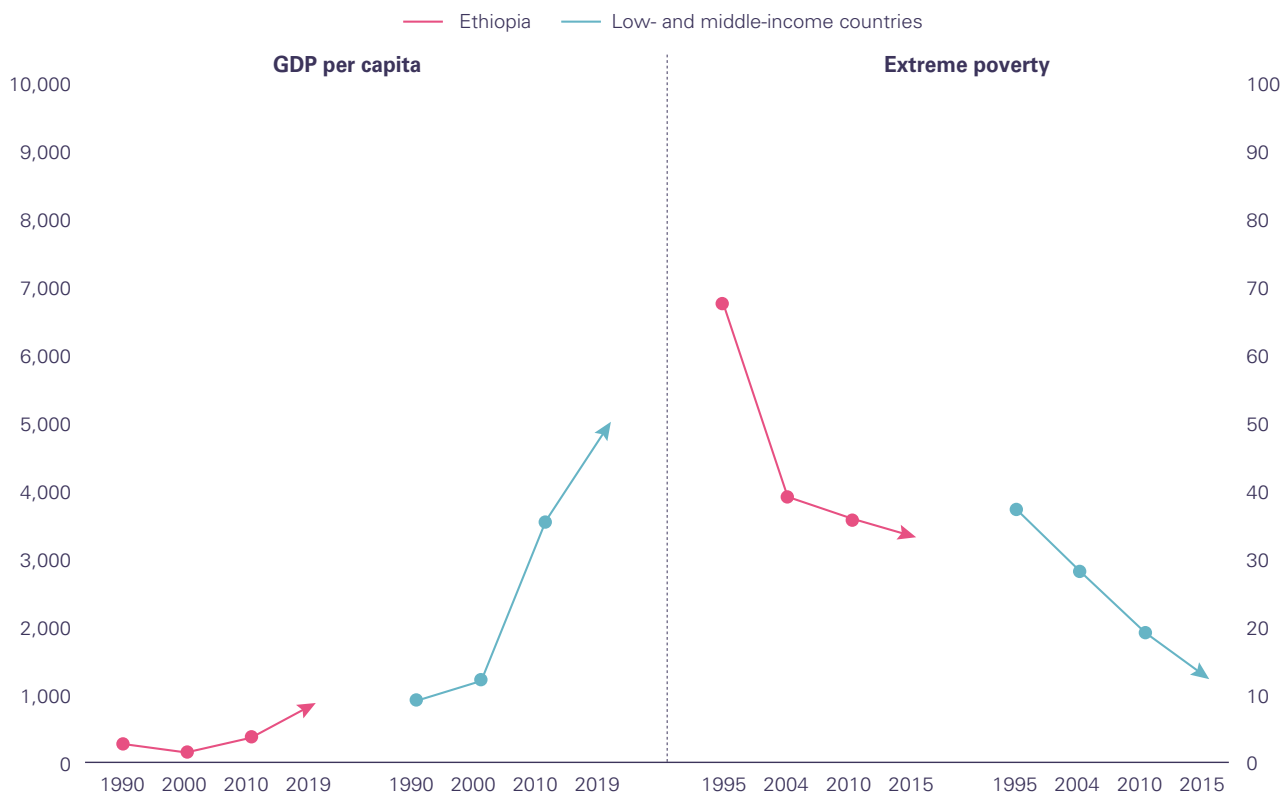
FIGURE 27 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



Notes: The value for 'higher education' for 1991 was suppressed because of the small number of observations. Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

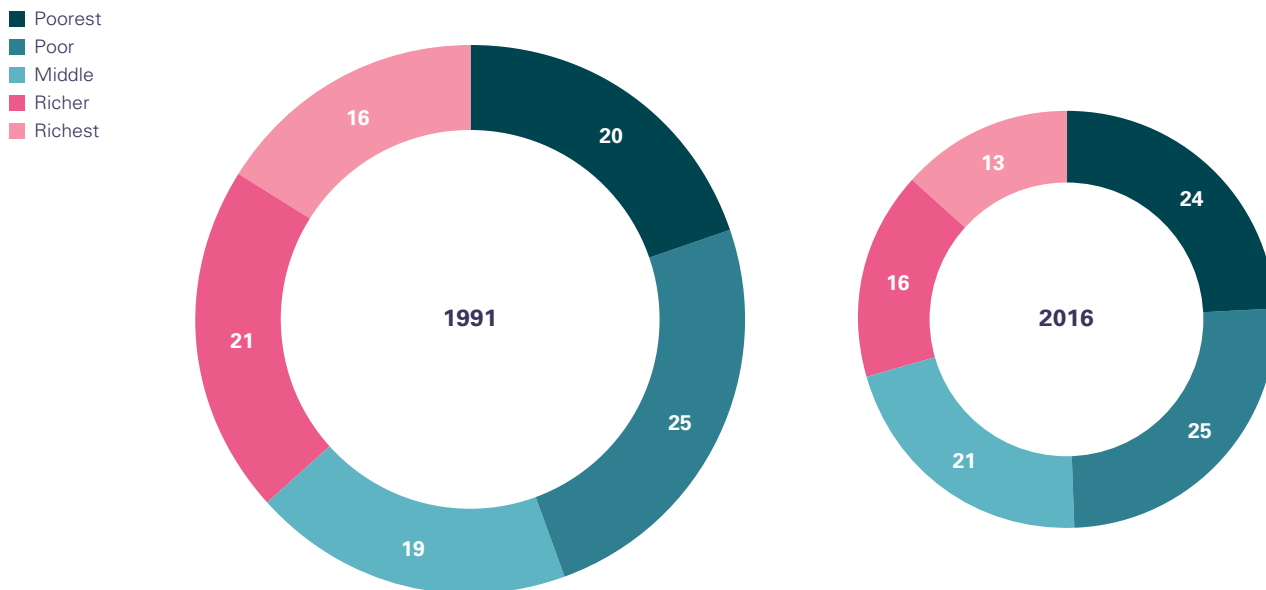
While many Ethiopians still live in extreme poverty, the share has dropped significantly, and the country's GDP per capita has nearly tripled in the last three decades

FIGURE 28 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Child brides in 2016 were slightly poorer than those in 1991

FIGURE 29 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not add up to 100.

In the past 20 years, Ethiopia has made marked progress in education, particularly in lowering the percentage of girls out of school across all age groups; still, much more progress is needed

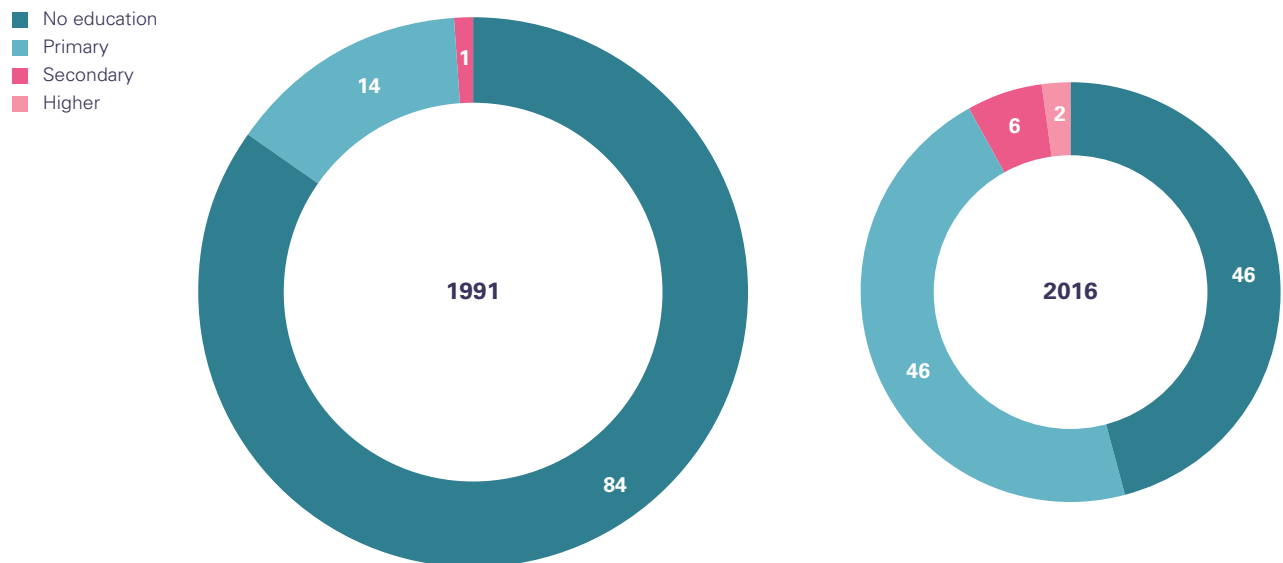
FIGURE 30 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

Less than half of child brides in 2016 had no education compared with 84 per cent 25 years ago

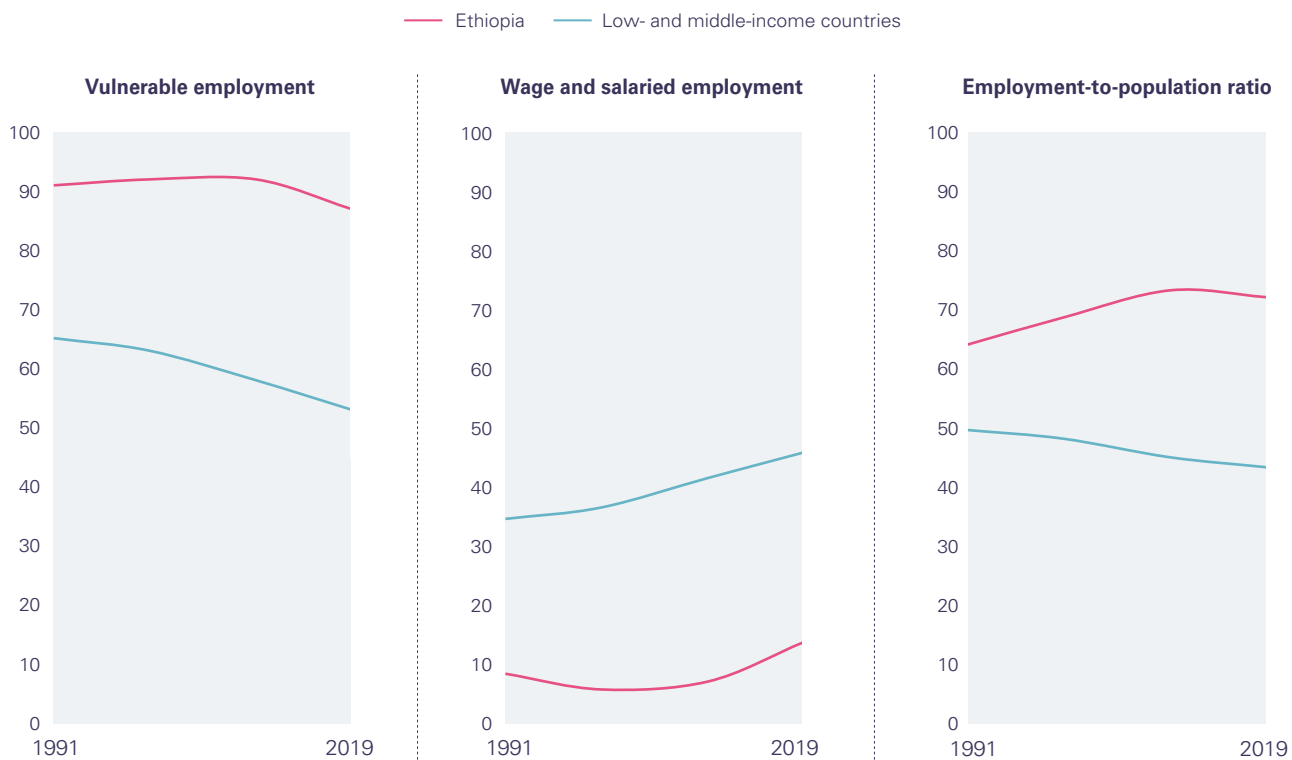
FIGURE 31 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 1991 do not add up to 100.

The last 30 years saw a slight decline in vulnerable employment and a small increase in wage employment and the employment-to-population ratio

FIGURE 32 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



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Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 2000, 2005, 2011 and 2016. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

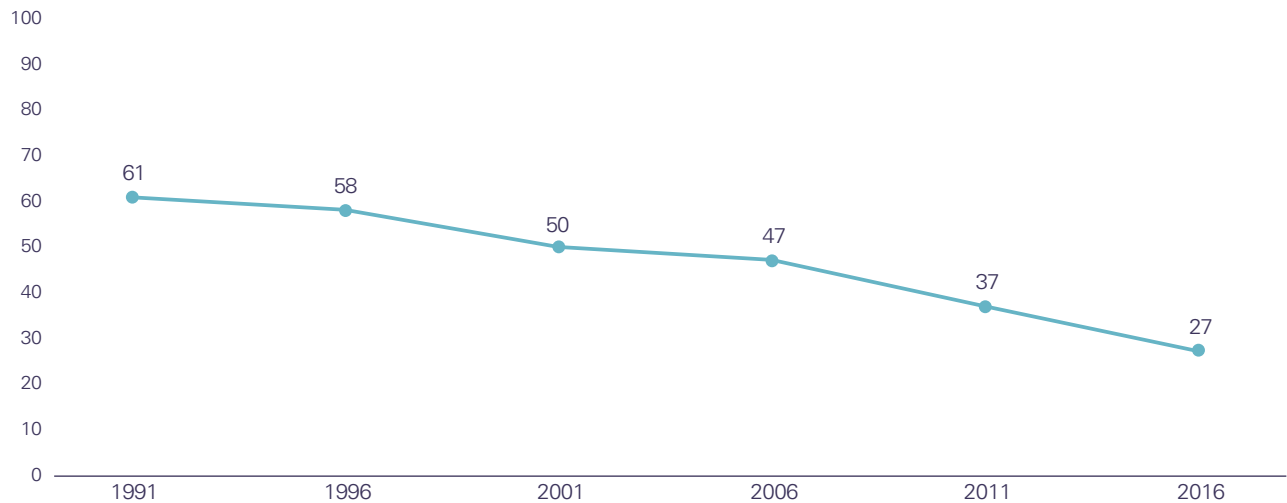
India

Legal age at marriage is 18 years old, without exceptions

The biggest decline in the number and percentage of young women married in childhood in the last 10 years has occurred in South Asia, mainly due to progress in India. Given its large population, India's progress has had a substantial impact in reducing the global number of girls subjected to the practice.

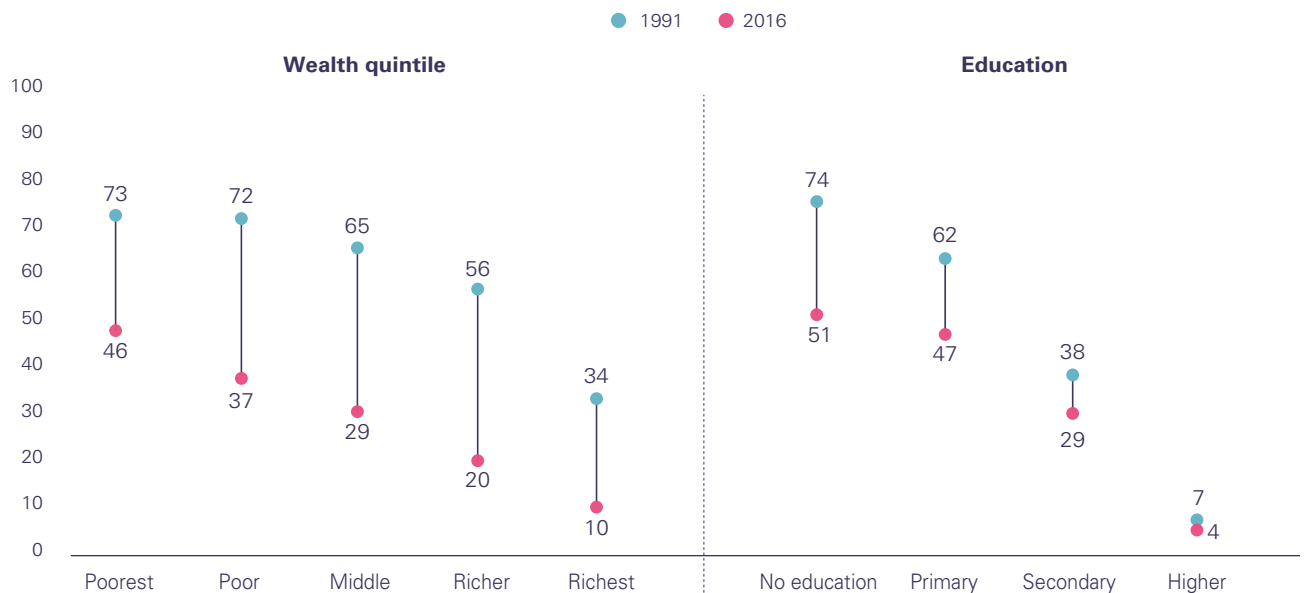
One in 4 young women were married in childhood in 2016 compared with 6 in 10 in 1991

FIGURE 33 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



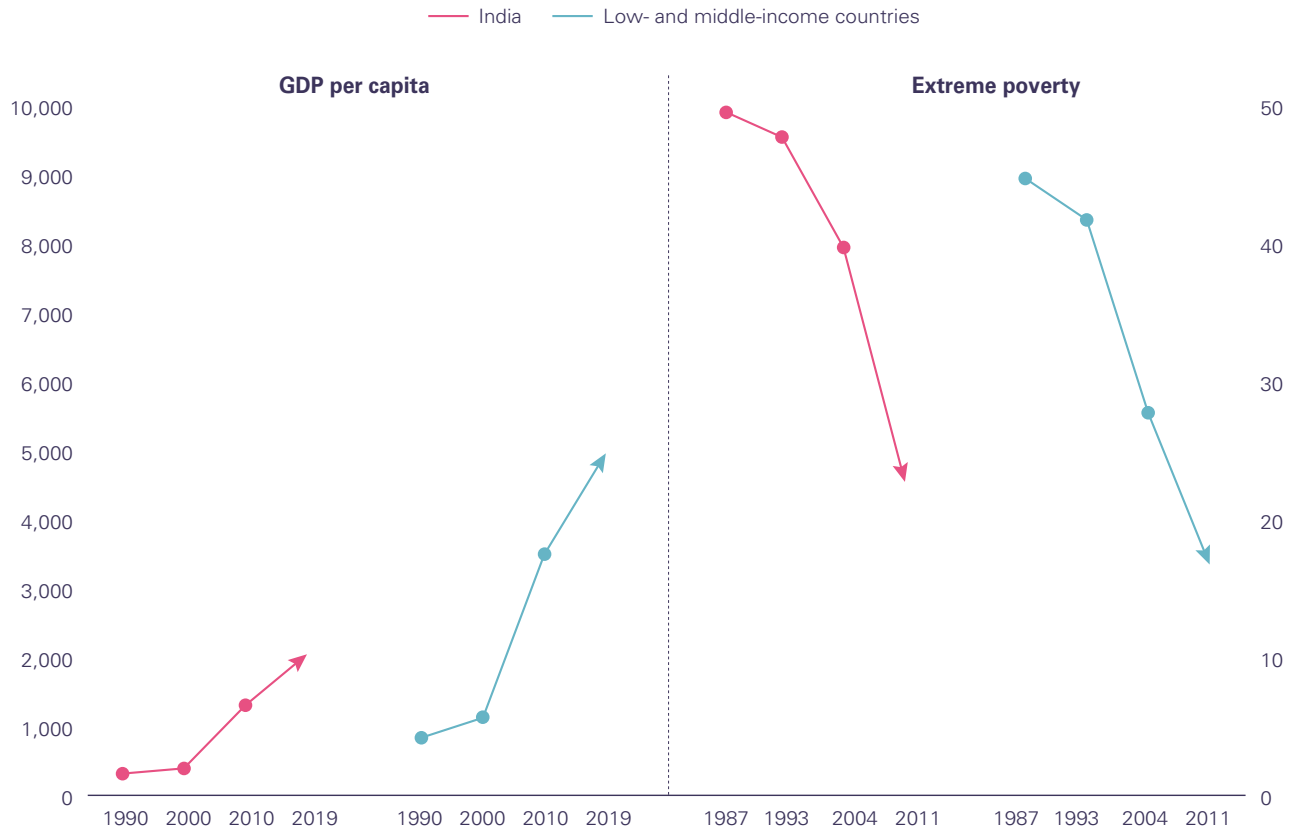
While the prevalence of child marriage has declined across all population groups, progress has been fastest among the wealthiest; as a result, gaps in prevalence have widened

FIGURE 34 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



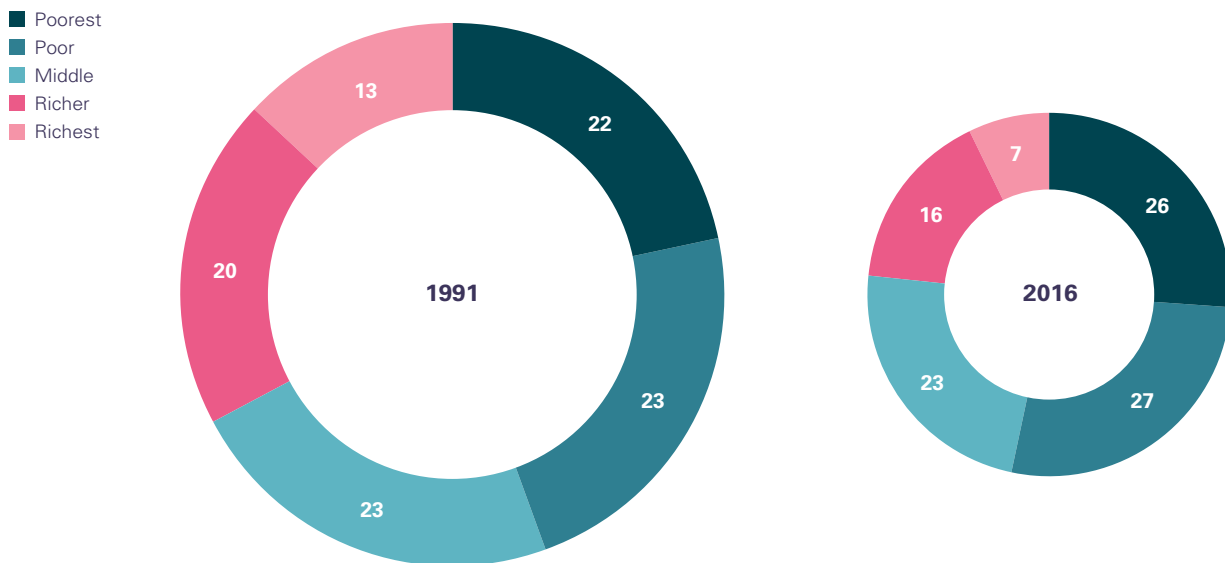
India has succeeded in decreasing extreme poverty and increasing its GDP per capita

FIGURE 35 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Child brides in 2016 were poorer than those 25 years earlier

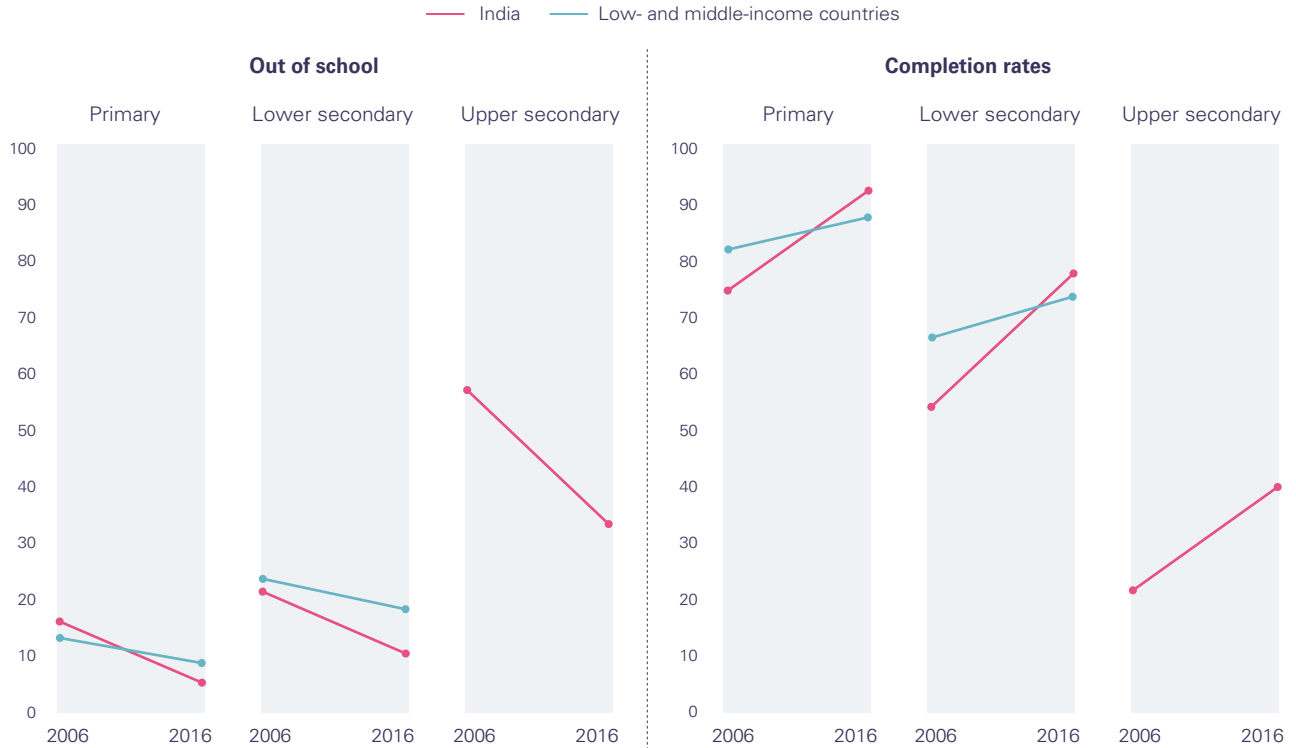
FIGURE 36 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not add up to 100.

India's progress in completion rates for primary and lower-secondary education has outpaced the low- and middle-income country average

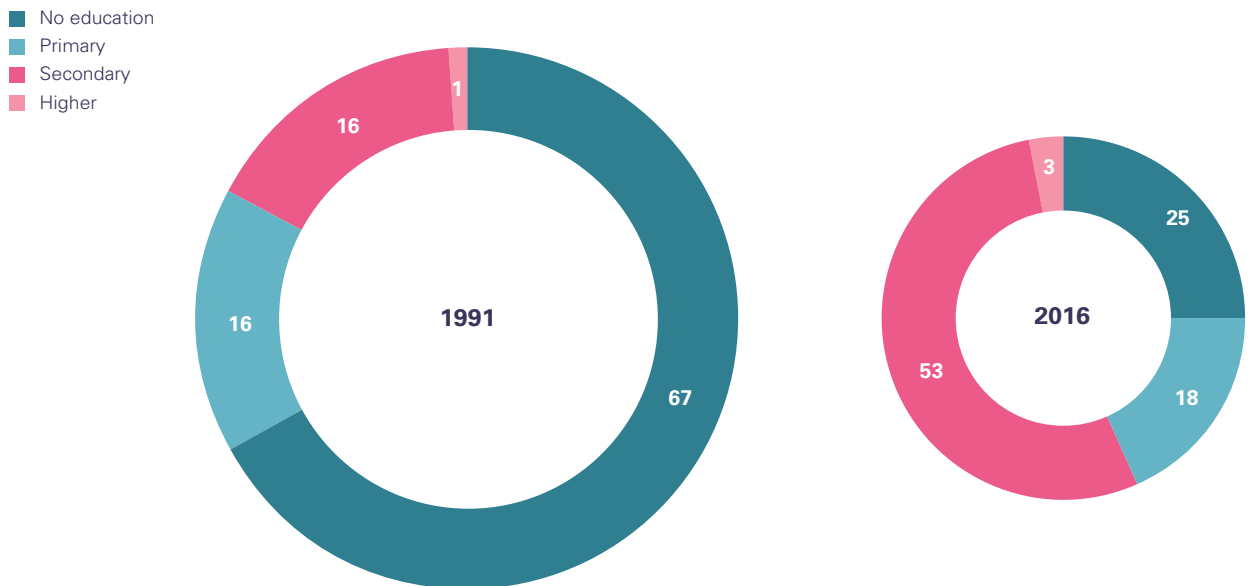
FIGURE 37 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

A significantly higher proportion of child brides now have an education

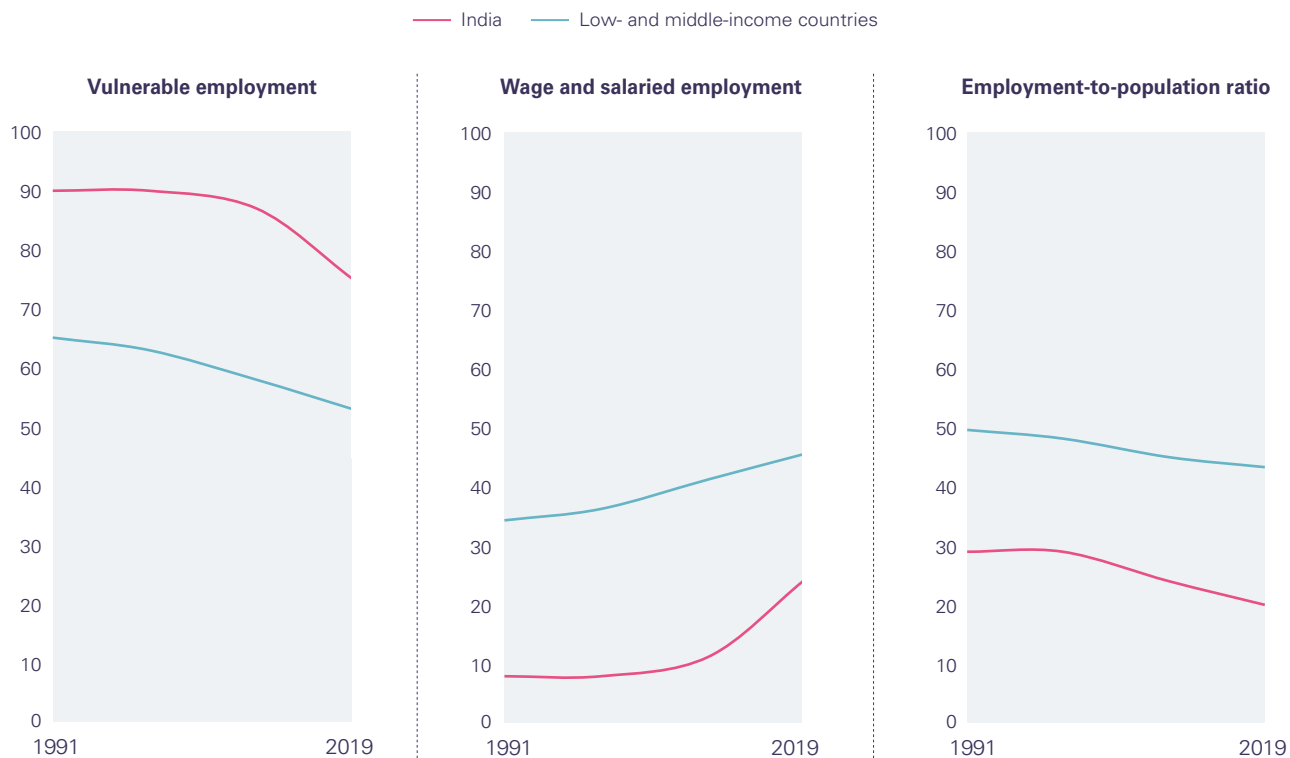
FIGURE 38 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 2016 do not add up to 100.

While female employment levels have dropped by one third over the last 25 years, more women are in wage and salaried jobs

FIGURE 39 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of 1992-1993, 1998-1999, 2005-2006 and 2015-2016. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

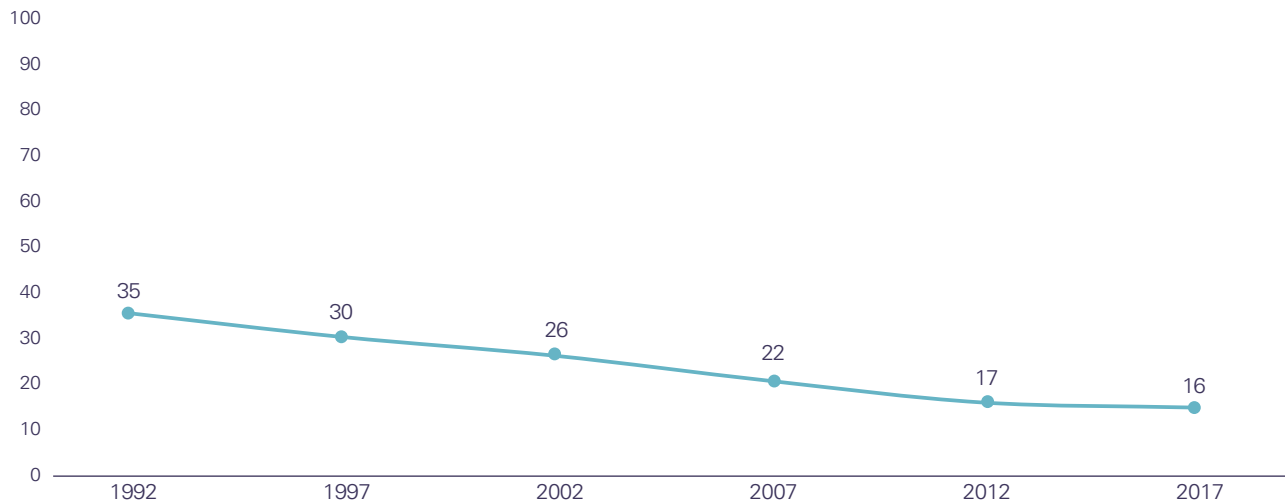
Indonesia

Legal age at marriage is 21, with exceptions

The practice of child marriage has declined steadily in Indonesia, with prevalence halved in the past 25 years. Progress has not been limited to the richest: Since the 1990s, the prevalence of child marriage has also declined among the poorest girls, though less dramatically.

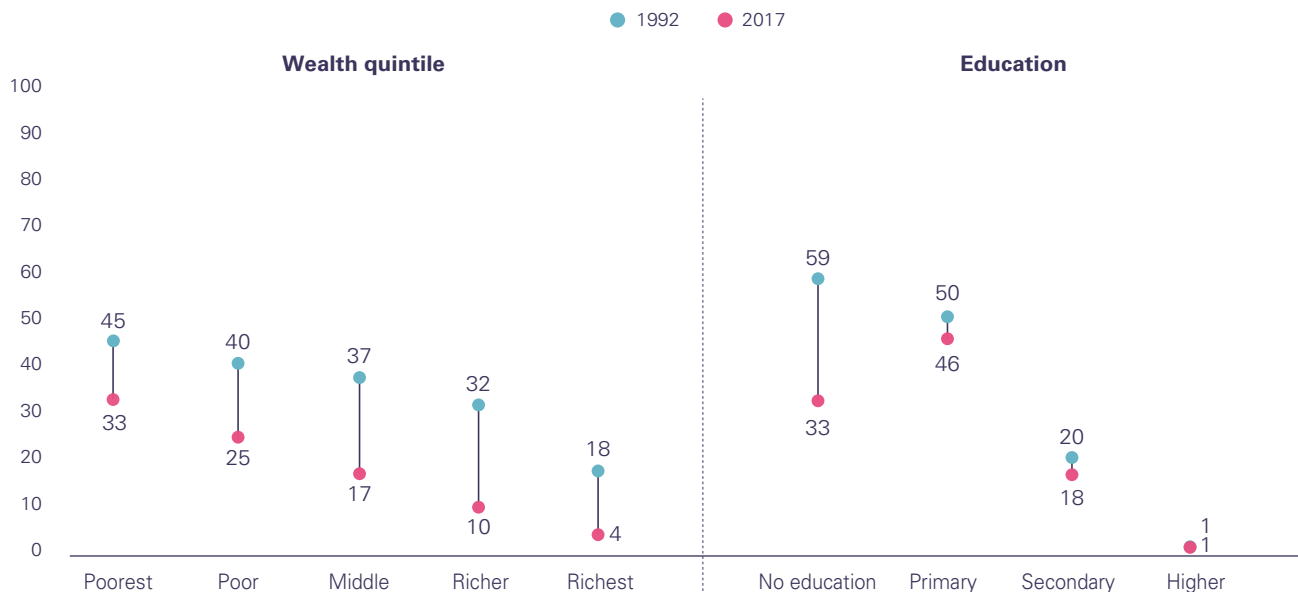
Child marriage rates were cut in half over a period of 25 years

FIGURE 40 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



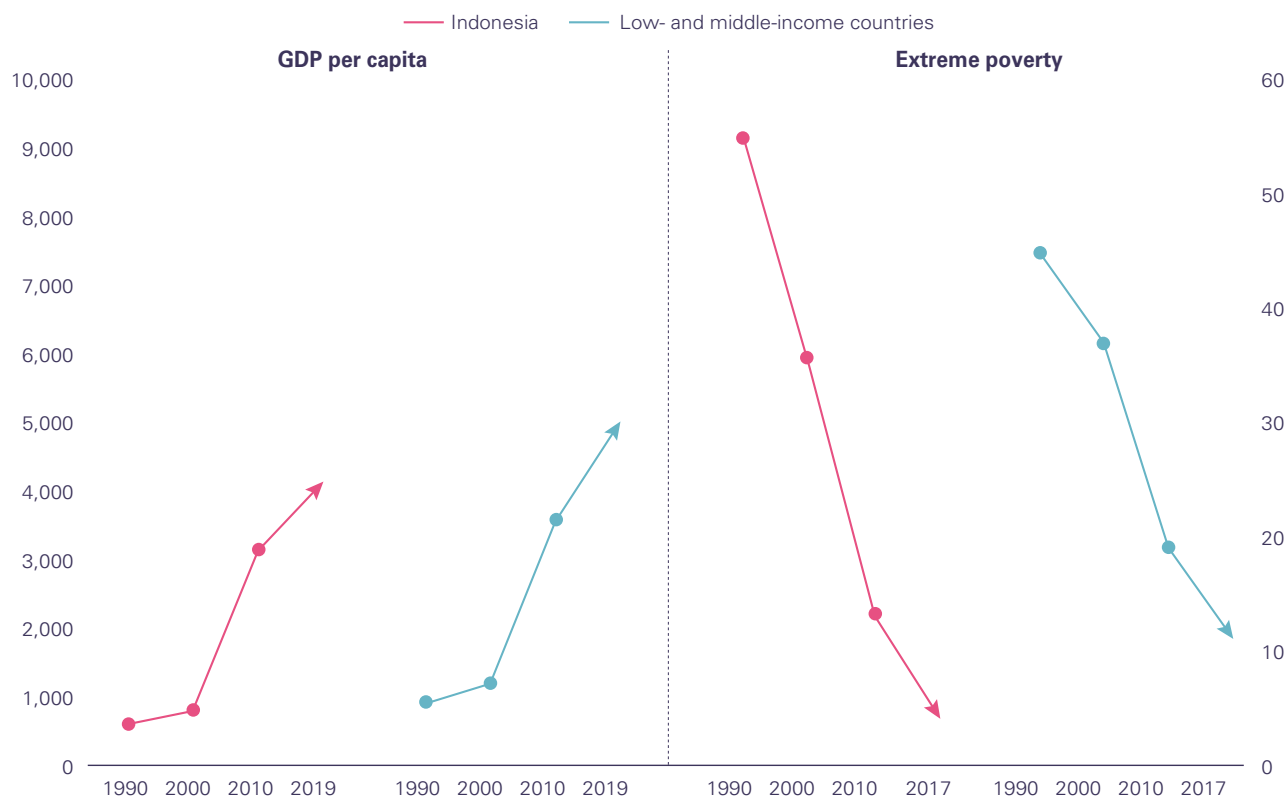
The prevalence of child marriage has declined across all wealth quintiles

FIGURE 41 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



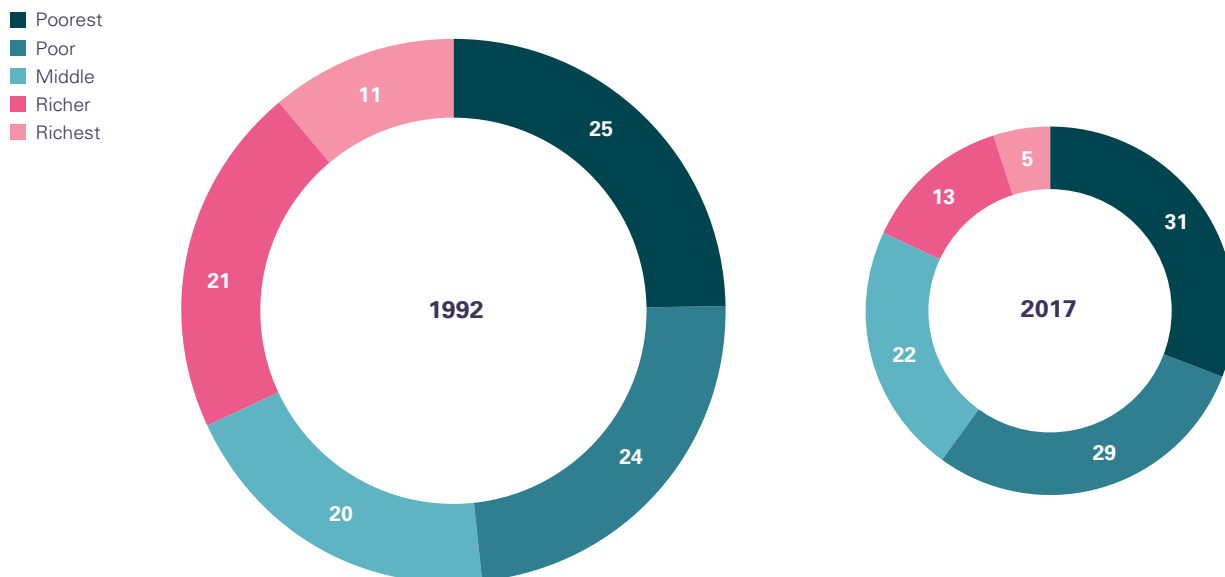
Indonesia has seen a dramatic decrease in extreme poverty over the last three decades; at the same time, growth in GDP per capita has kept pace with the low- and middle-income country average

FIGURE 42 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Sixty per cent of child brides were poor in 2017 compared with almost half 25 years earlier

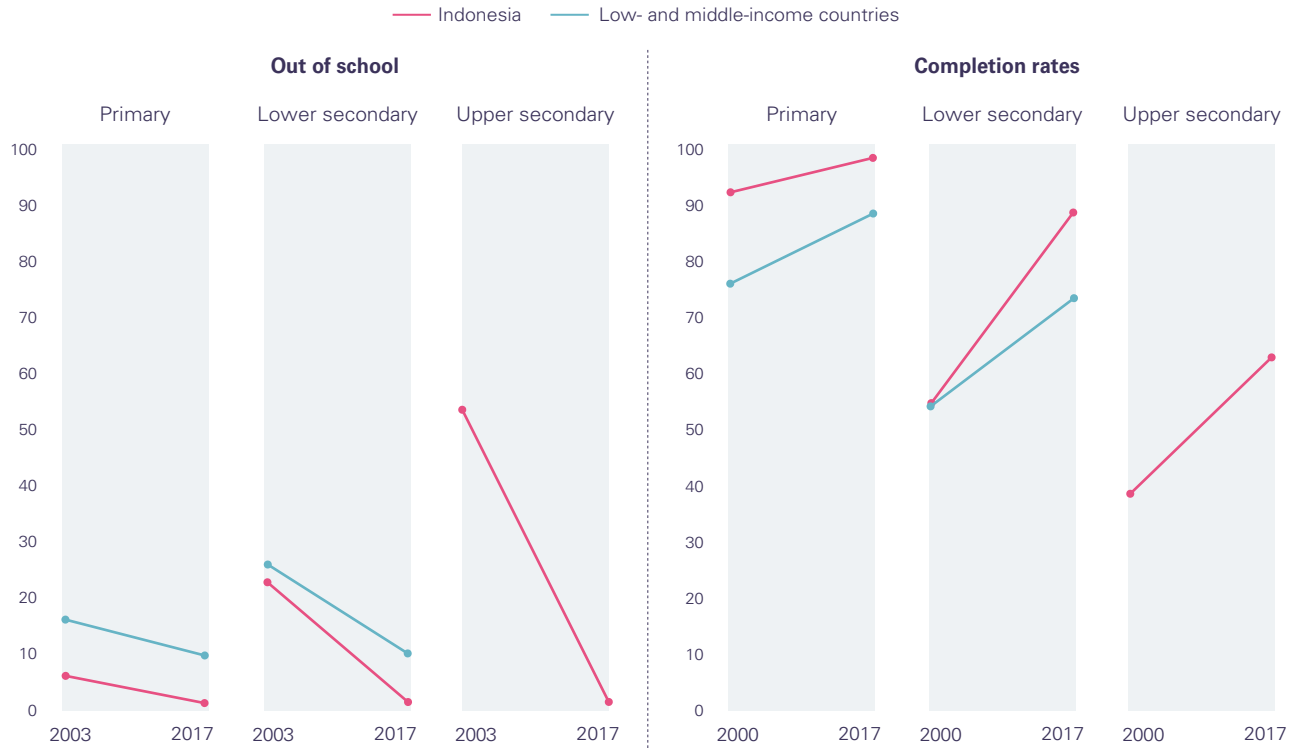
FIGURE 43 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 1992 do not add up to 100.

In the past 25 years, Indonesia has made significant strides in increasing school completion rates

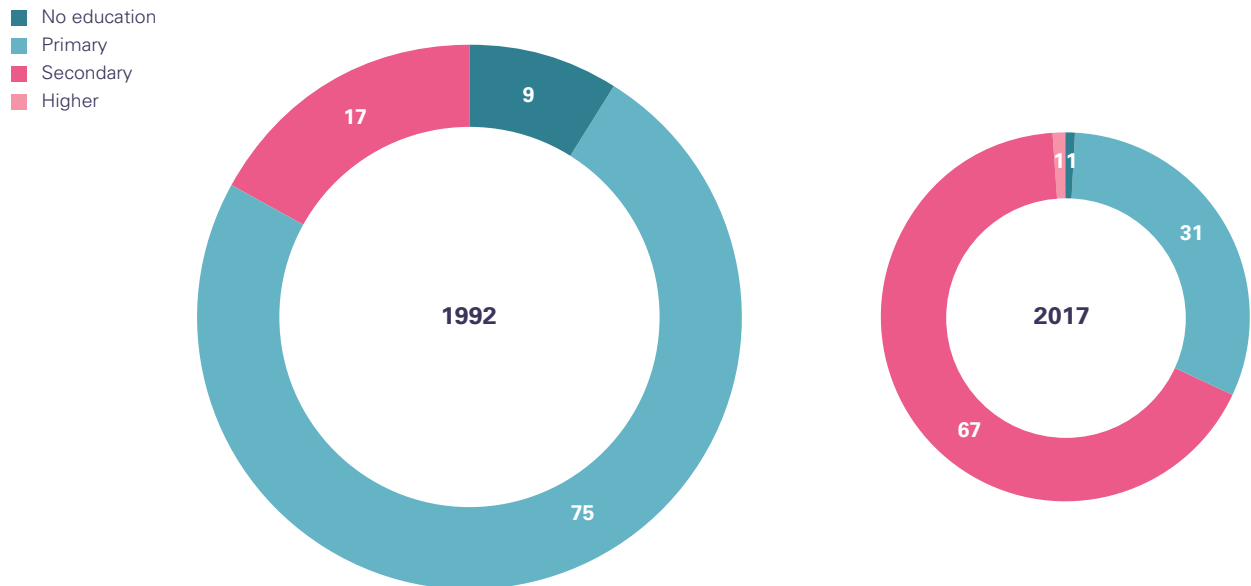
FIGURE 44 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

The proportion of child brides with a secondary education rose from 17 per cent in 1992 to 67 per cent in 2017

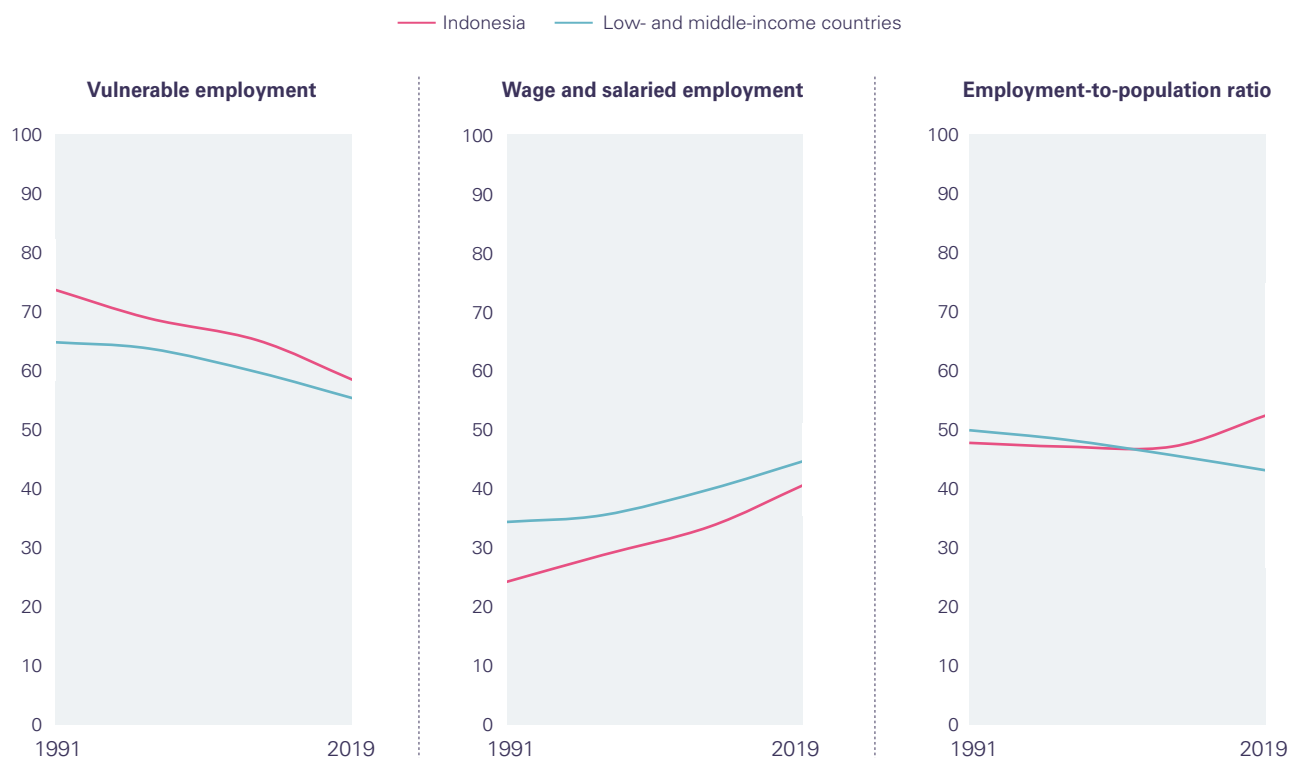
FIGURE 45 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 1992 do not add up to 100.

More Indonesian women have wage and salaried jobs than ever before

FIGURE 46 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 1991, 1994, 1997, 2002-2003, 2007, 2012 and 2017. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

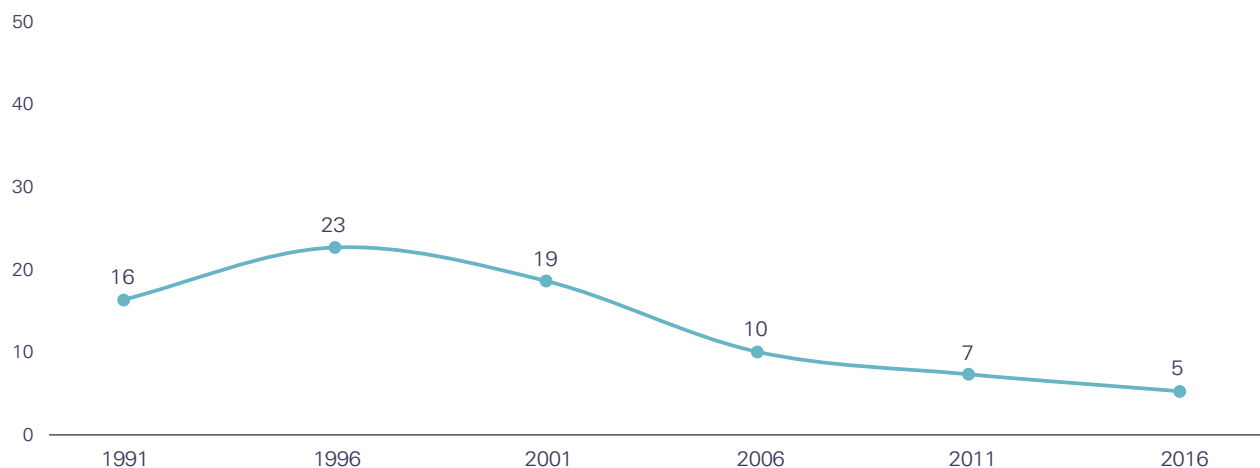
Armenia

Legal age at marriage is 18 years old, with exceptions

Armenia ranks among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of the rate of decline in the prevalence of child marriage since 2001. While it has nearly ended the practice, some acceleration of progress will still be required to reach the 2030 target. Efforts are particularly needed to reach populations where the practice remains most common, namely among the poorest and least educated segments of society.

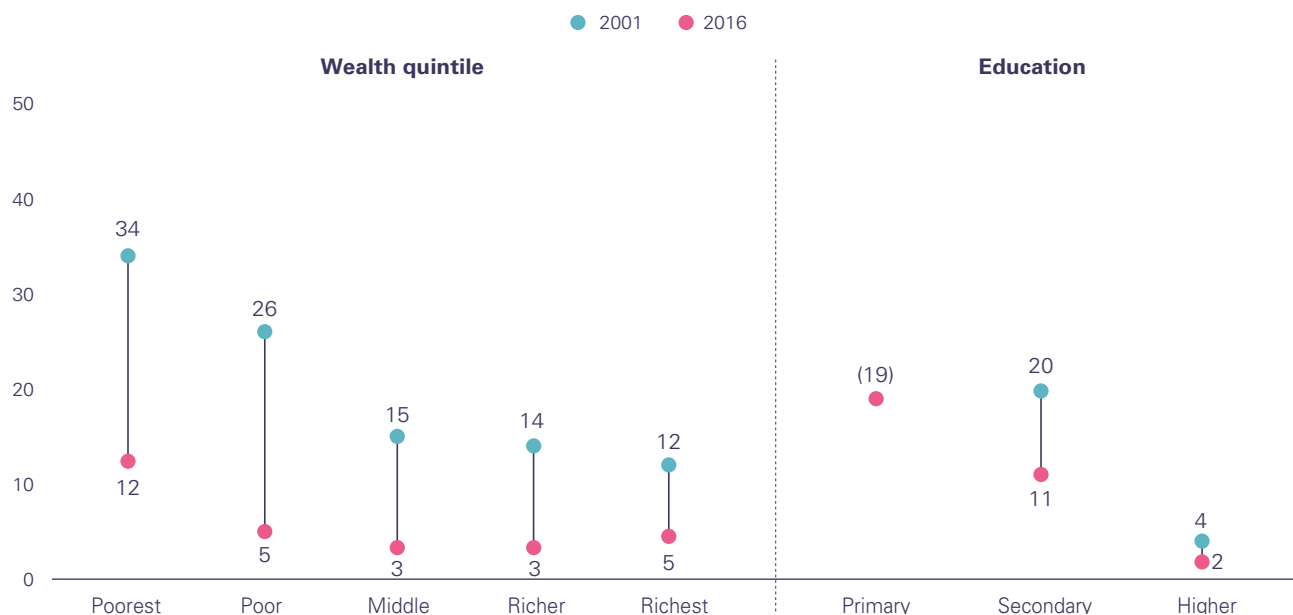
Levels of child marriage have dropped dramatically since 2001

FIGURE 47 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



The gap in child marriage prevalence between the poorest and richest women has been shrinking

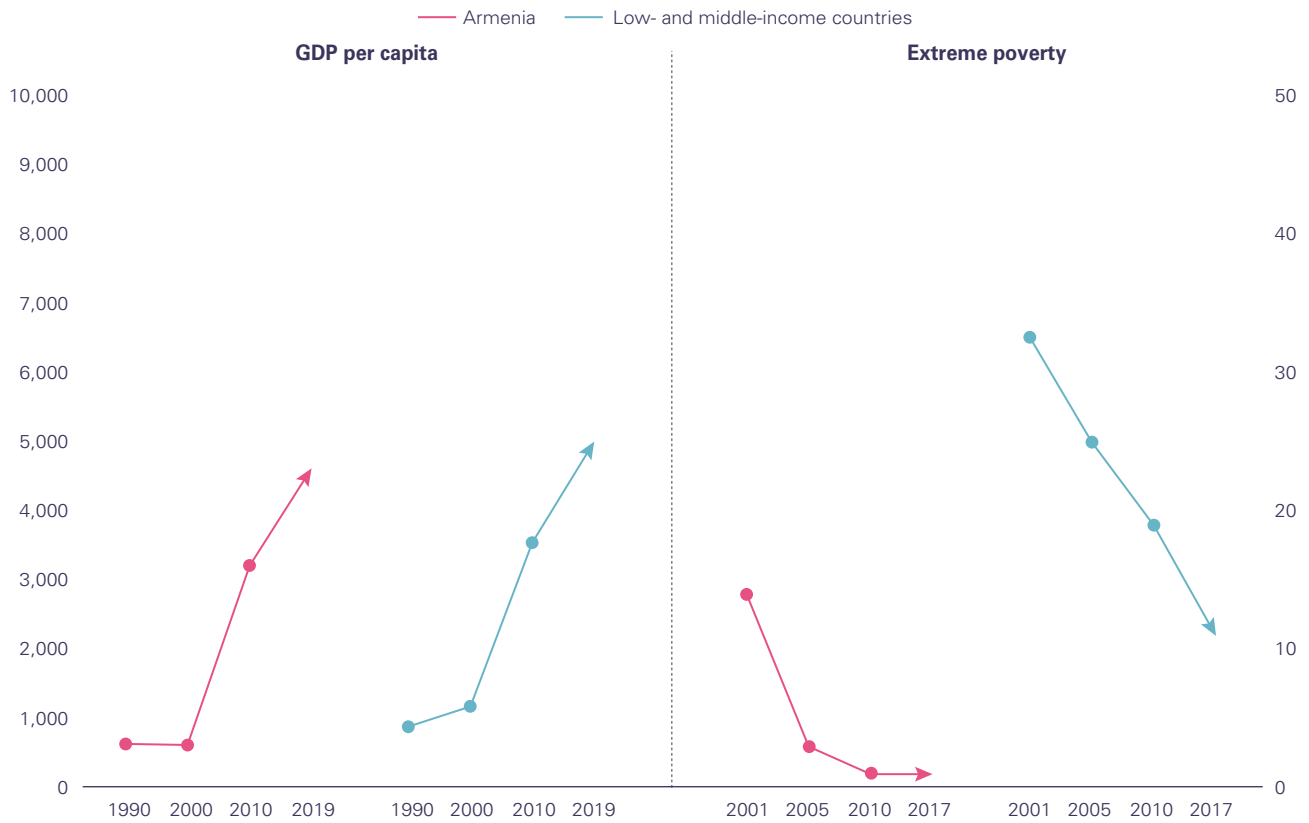
FIGURE 48 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



Note: The value for 'primary education' for 2001 was suppressed because of the small number of observations. Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

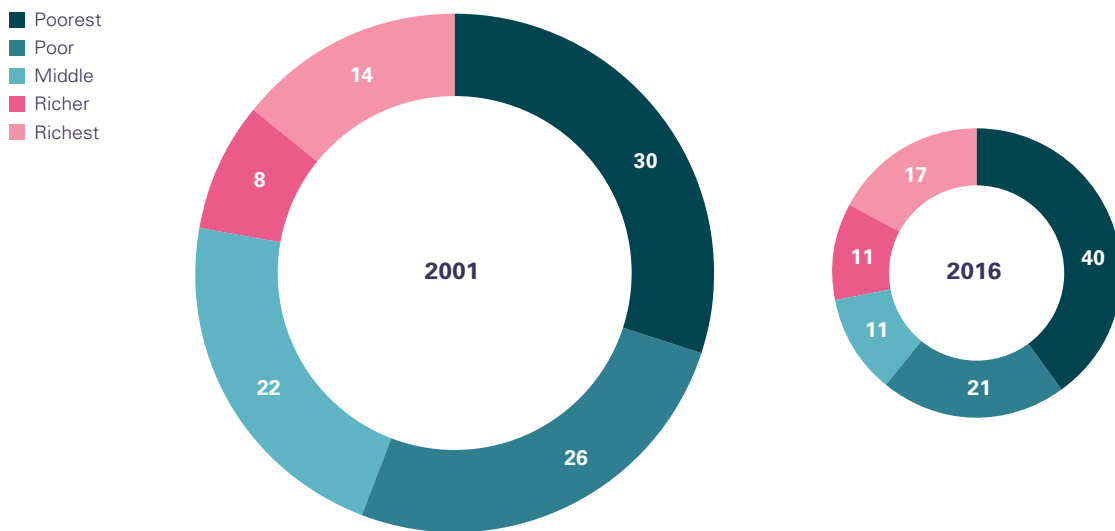
Armenia has seen a seven-fold increase in GDP per capita over the last 30 years and has reduced the share of its population in extreme poverty to just 1 per cent

FIGURE 49 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



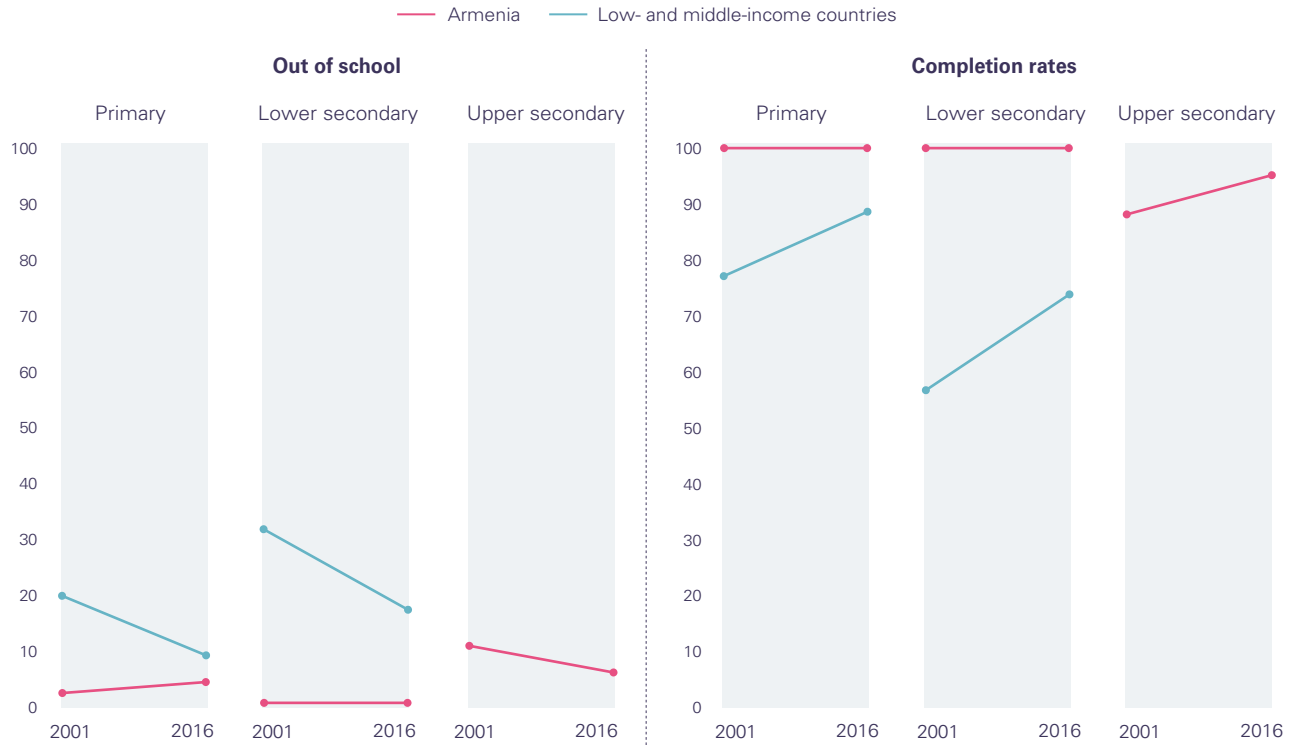
Sixty-one per cent of child brides in 2016 were poor, compared with 56 per cent in 2001

FIGURE 50 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Armenia has maintained high completion rates across all school levels

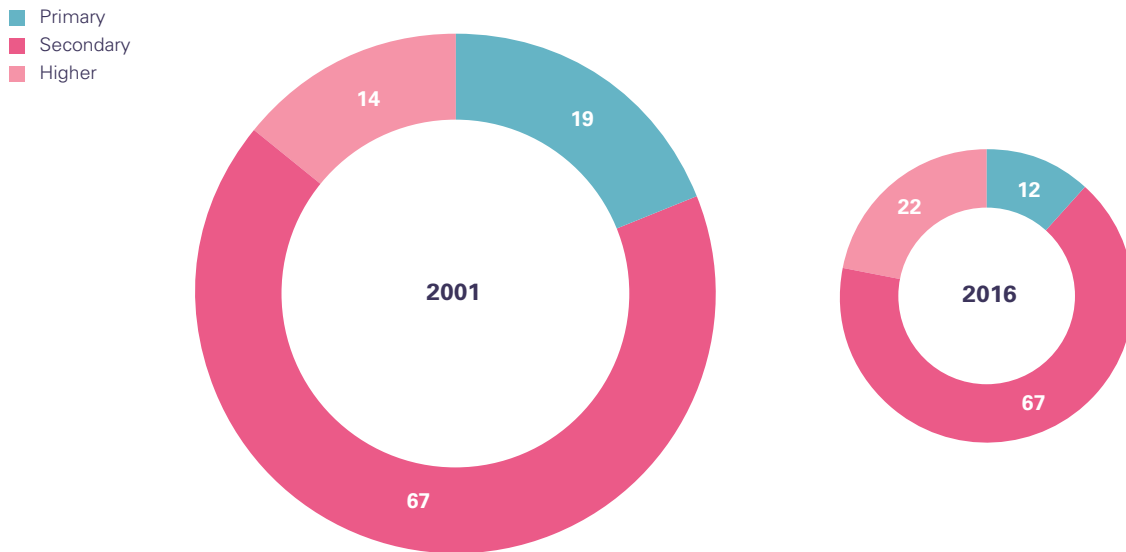
FIGURE 51 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

The proportion of child brides who attended only primary education decreased after 2001

FIGURE 52 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 2016 do not add up to 100.

Similar to child marriage prevalence, rates of vulnerable and wage employment fluctuated in the 1990s. Still, Armenia shows trends towards more women working in wage and salaried jobs and fewer in vulnerable positions

FIGURE 53 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



© UNICEF/UNI363755/Babajanyan/VII Photo

Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015-2016. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on the legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

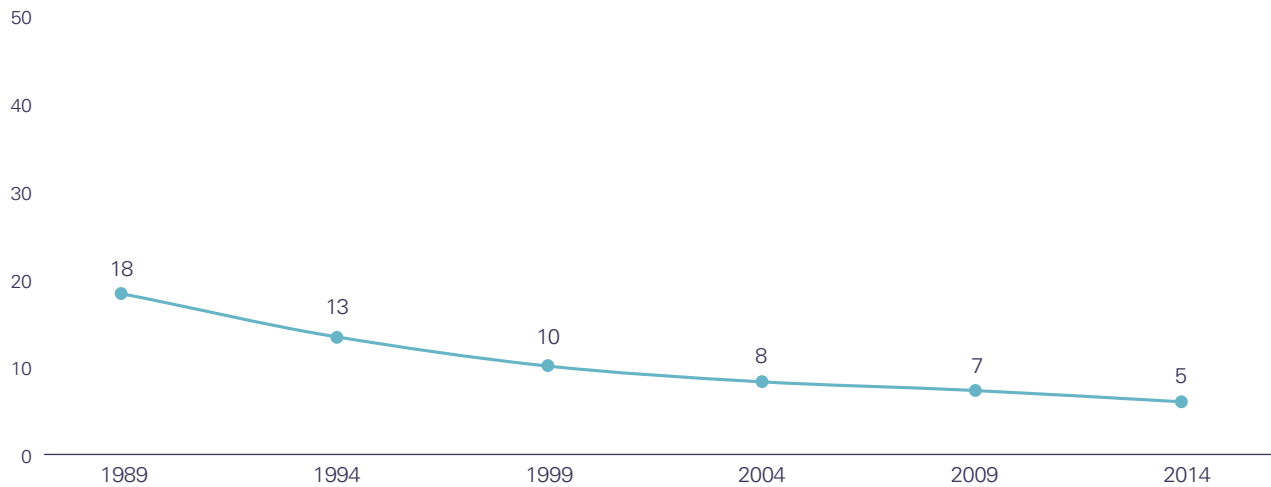
Eswatini

Legal age at marriage is 21 years old, with exceptions

Eswatini has seen a steady decline in the prevalence of child marriage. Today it has one of the lowest rates in sub-Saharan Africa. However, acceleration of progress will be required to reach the 2030 target of eliminating child marriage.

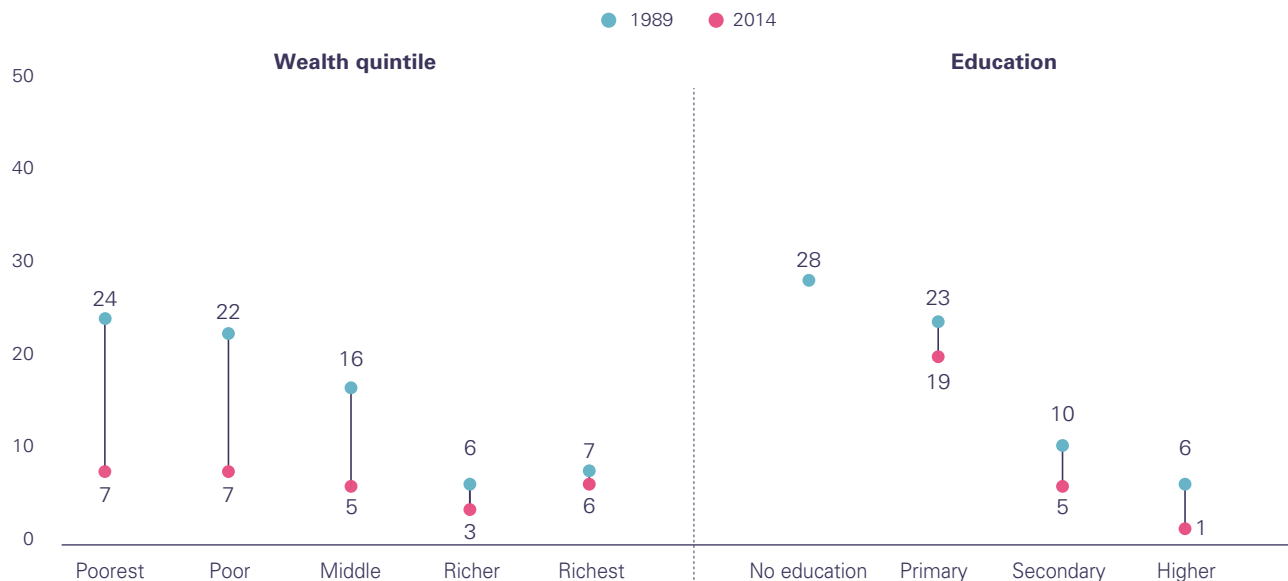
One in 20 young women were married in childhood in 2014 compared with nearly 1 in 5 in 1989

FIGURE 54 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Progress in reducing child marriage has benefited the poorest quintiles; as a result, the gap in the prevalence of child marriage has been closed

FIGURE 55 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



Note: The value for 'no education' for 2014 was suppressed because of the small number of observations.

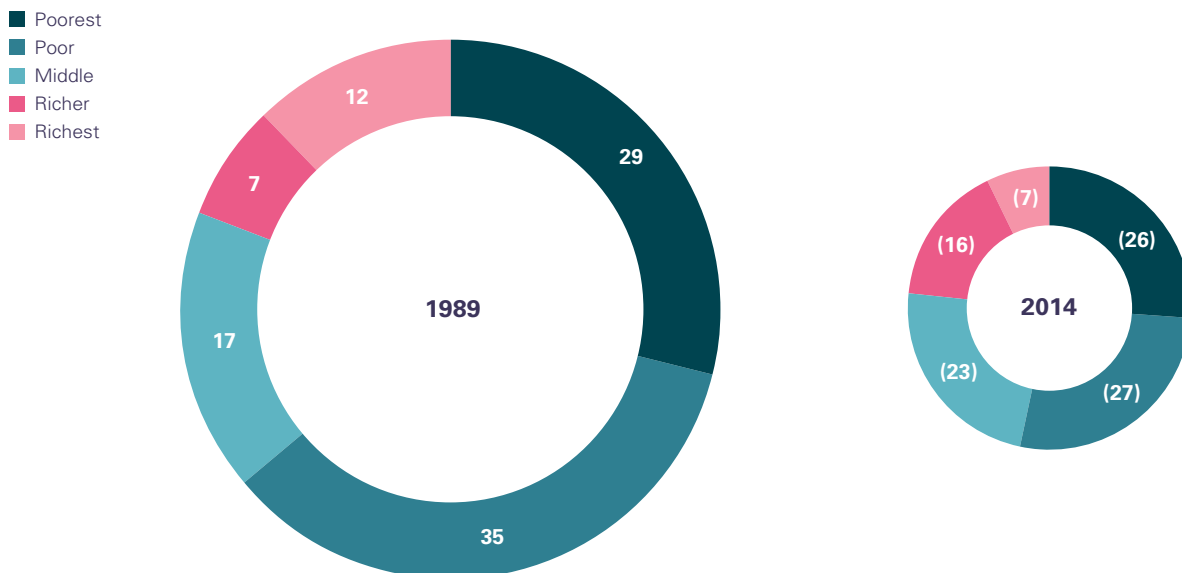
Eswatini has seen a dramatic reduction in extreme poverty

FIGURE 56 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Two in three child brides came from the poorest 40 per cent of households in 1989 compared with approximately half in 2014

FIGURE 57 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Notes: Due to rounding, numbers for 2014 do not add up to 100. Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

Eswatini has made notable progress in education

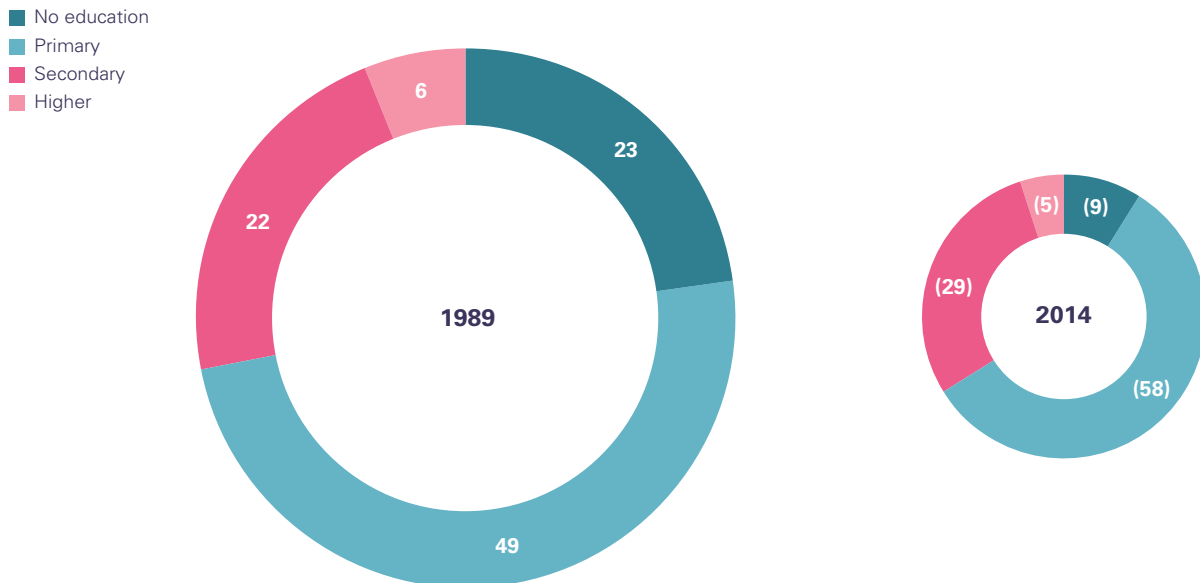
FIGURE 58 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

Nine in 10 child brides in 2014 attended at least primary school compared with nearly 8 in 10 in 1989

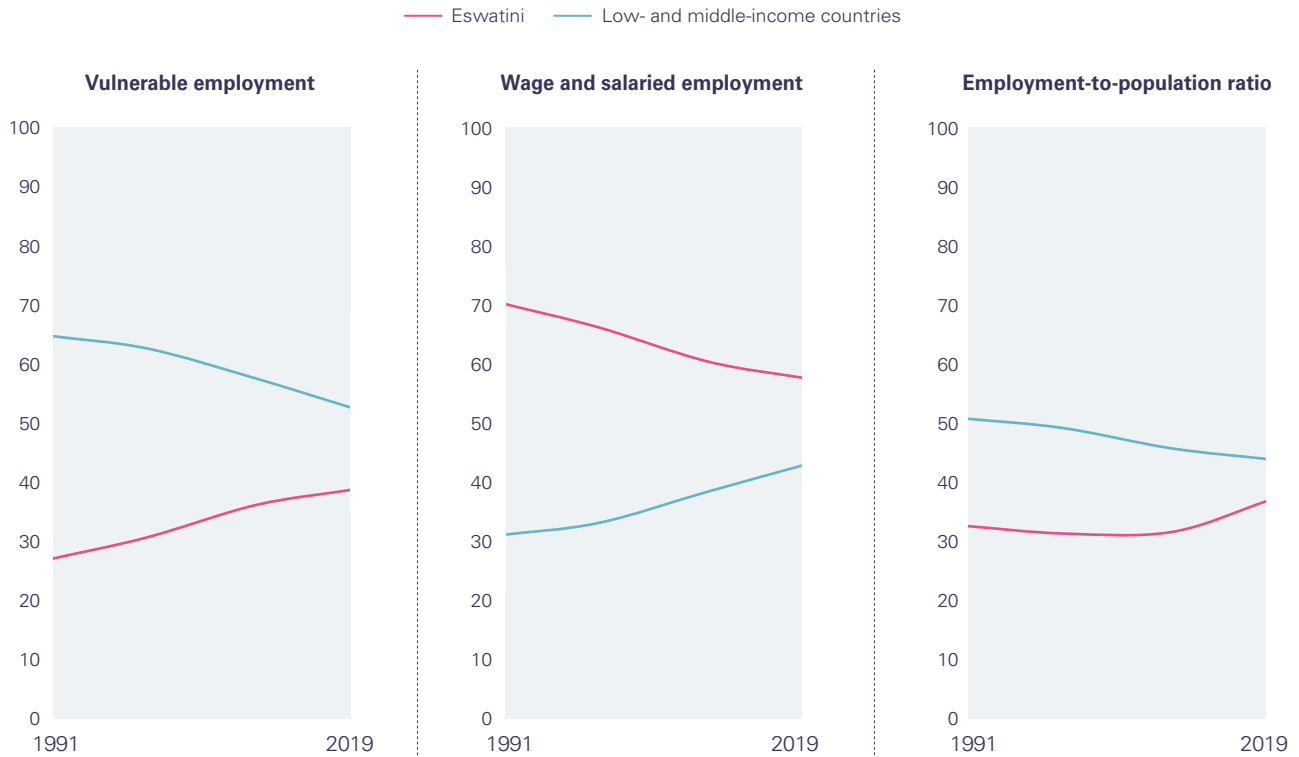
FIGURE 59 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Note: Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

Eswatini has seen an increase in vulnerable employment among women over the past three decades

FIGURE 60 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



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Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 2006-2007 and the MICS 2010 and 2014. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

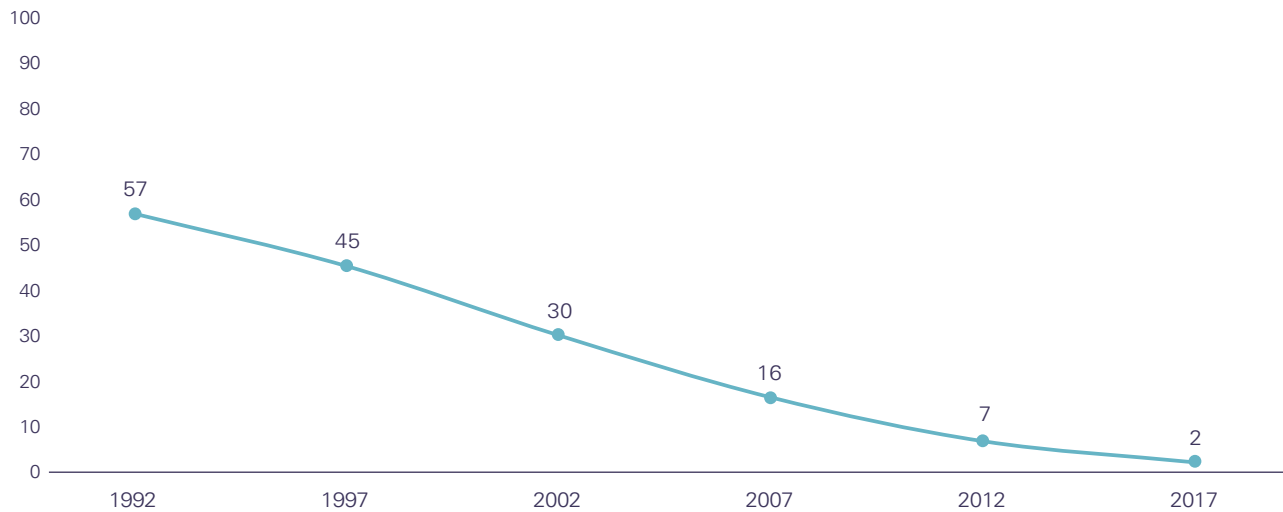
Maldives

Legal age at marriage is 18 years old, with exceptions

The Maldives has experienced one of the most dramatic declines in child marriage globally, with a prevalence 25 times lower in 2017 than in 1992. The country is on track to eliminate the practice by 2030.

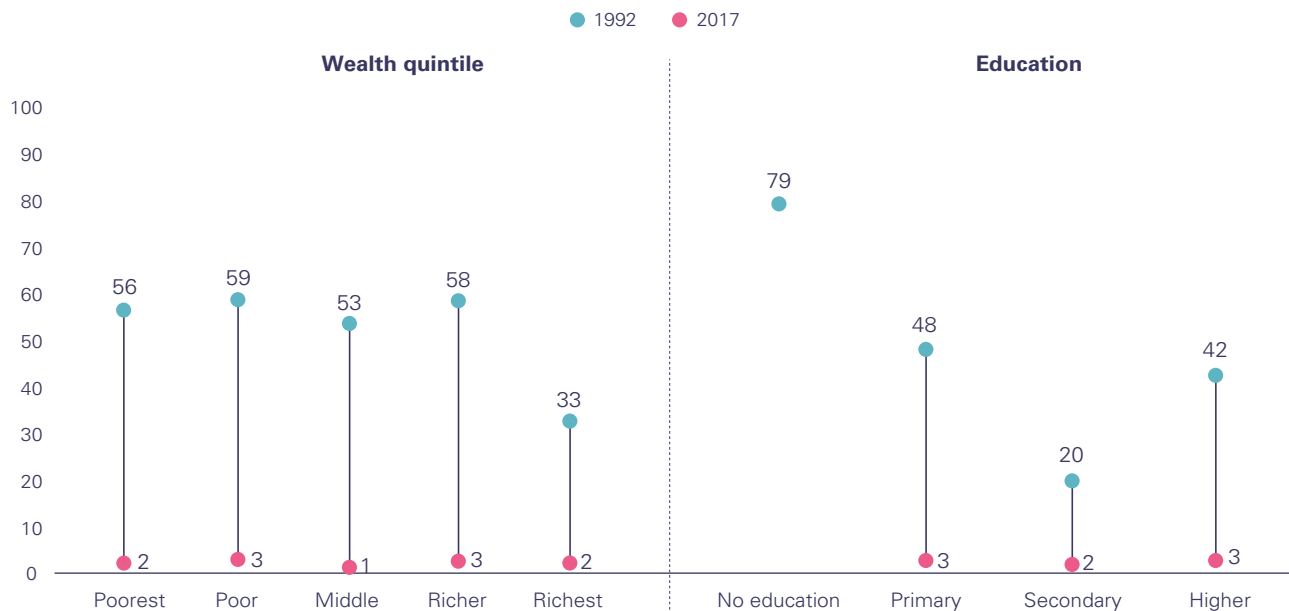
Only 2 per cent of young women were married in childhood in 2017 compared with nearly 60 per cent in 1992

FIGURE 61 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



The practice of child marriage is now rare across all population groups

FIGURE 62 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



Note: The value for 'no education' for 2017 was suppressed because of the small number of observations.

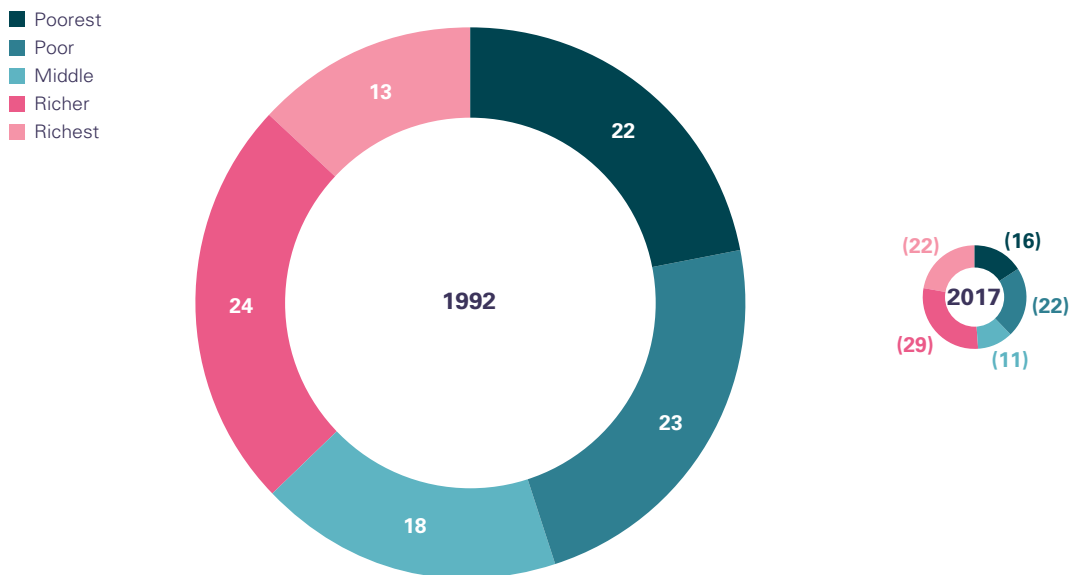
The country's GDP per capita increased dramatically in the past three decades, significantly outpacing the low- and middle-income country average

FIGURE 63 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Child brides in 2017 were slightly richer than those in 1992

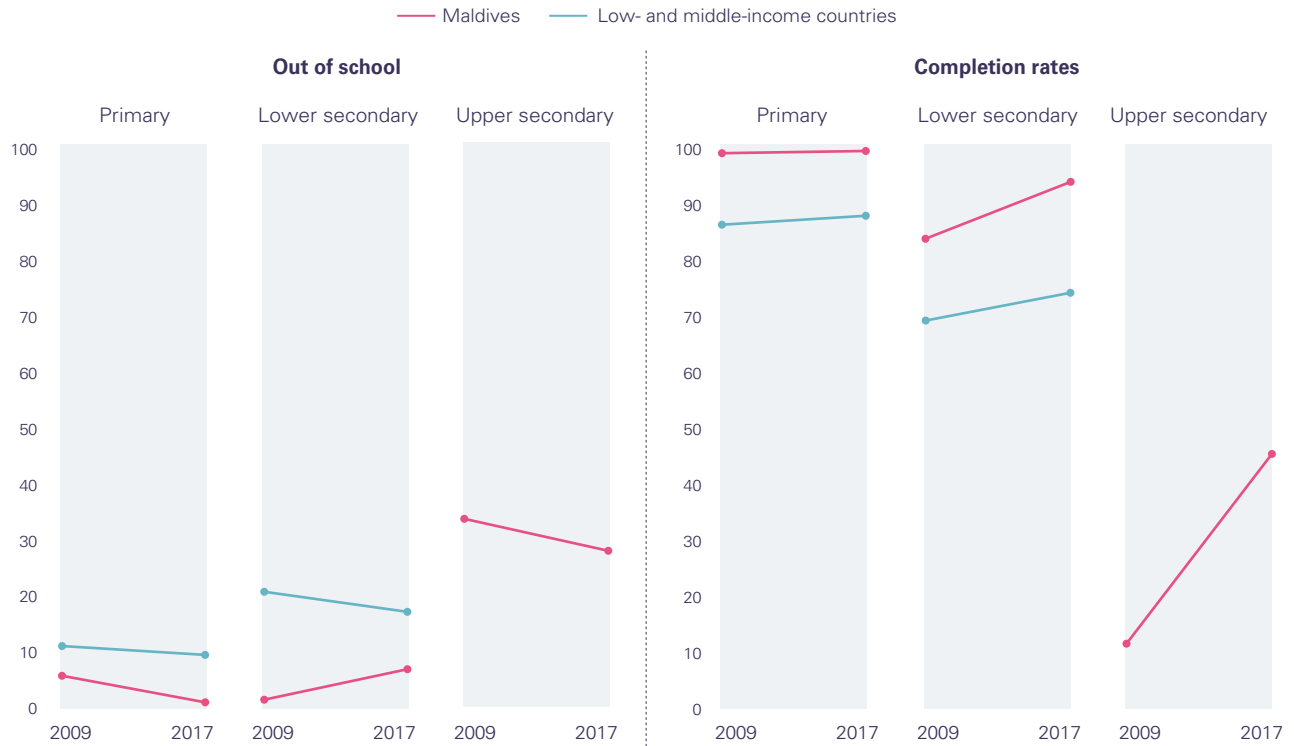
FIGURE 64 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Note: Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

Upper-secondary completion rates for girls reached nearly 50 per cent in 2017

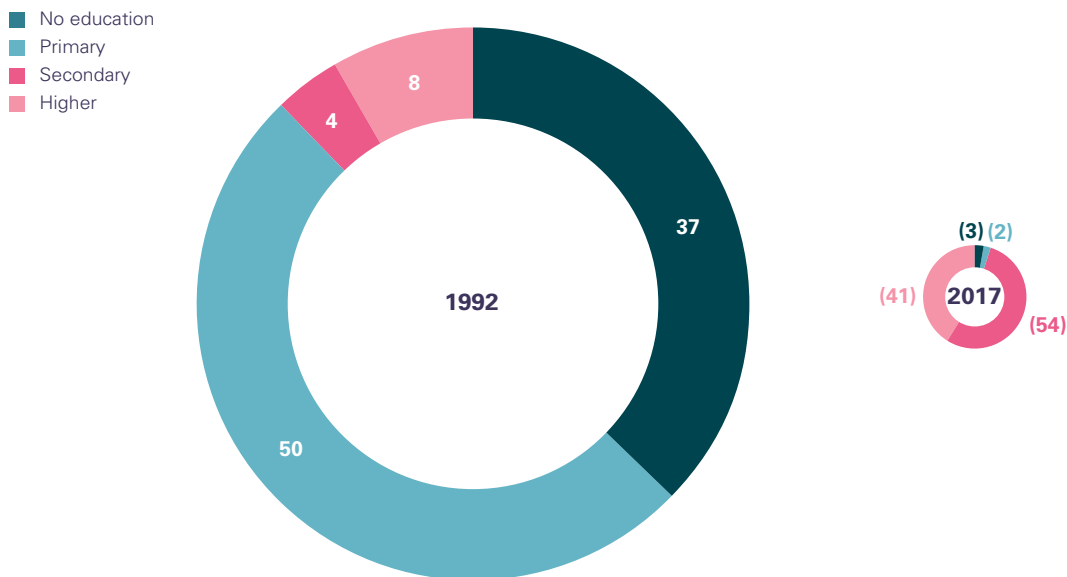
FIGURE 65 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

Nine in 10 child brides in 2017 attended at least secondary school, compared with about 1 in 10 in 1992

FIGURE 66 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Notes: Due to rounding, numbers for 1992 do not add up to 100. Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

Although female labour force participation in the Maldives is lower than the low- and middle-income country average, it is one of the few countries that saw more women enter the workforce over the past 30 years as the quality of women’s work improved

FIGURE 67 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 2009 and 2016-2017. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

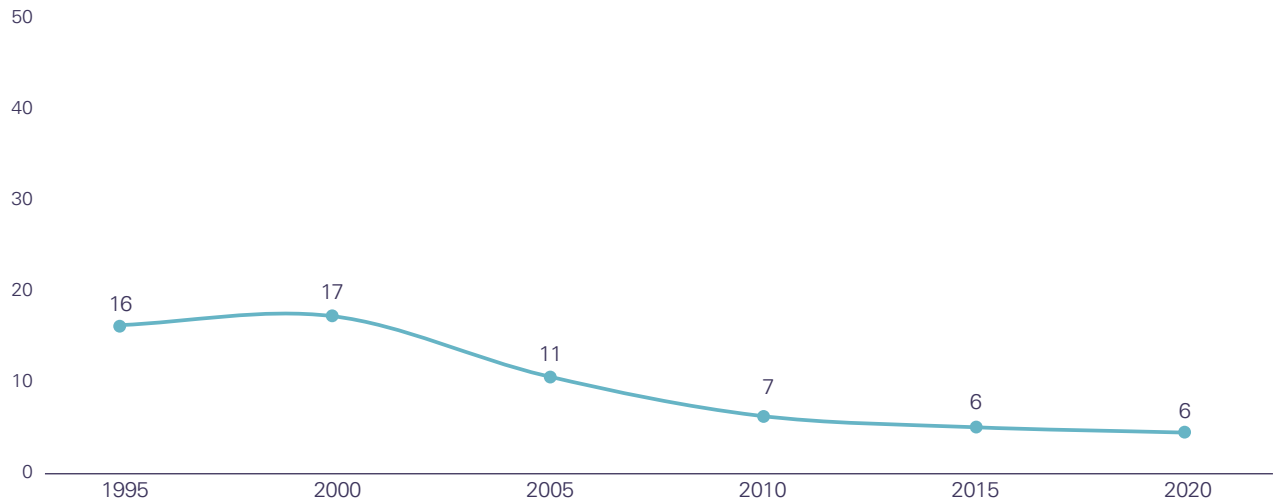
Rwanda

Legal age at marriage is 21 years old, without exceptions

Rwanda's rate of decline in child marriage is one of the fastest in Eastern and Southern Africa, with rates today that are 2.5 times lower than in 1995.

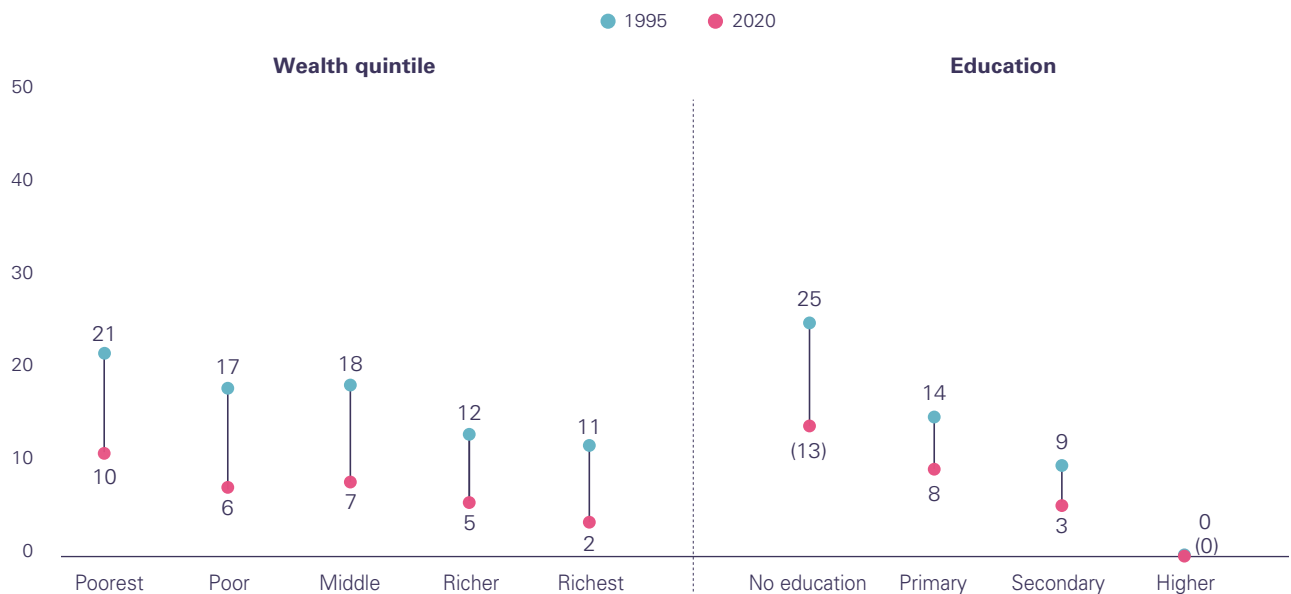
One in 6 young women were married in childhood in 1995 compared with 1 in 17 in 2020

FIGURE 68 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



The prevalence of child marriage has declined across all population groups

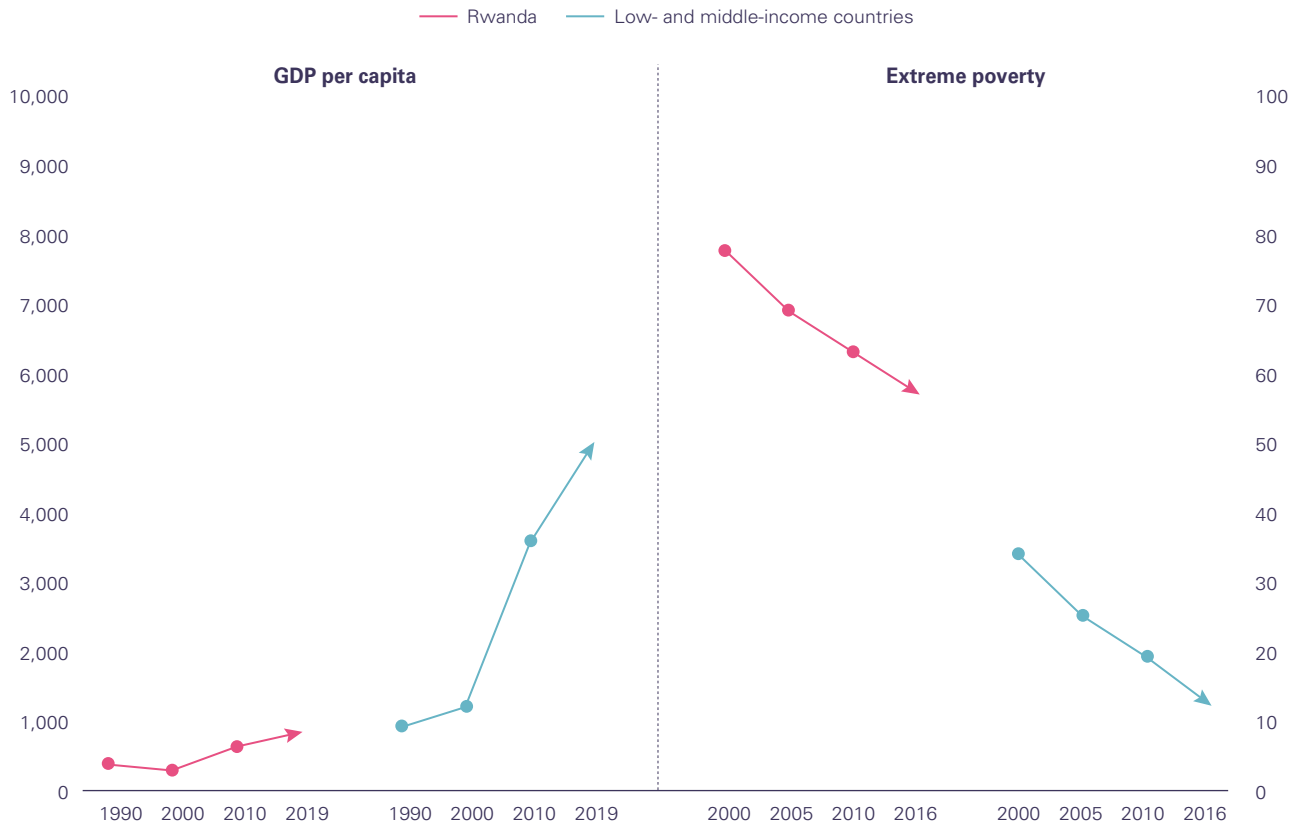
FIGURE 69 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



Note: Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

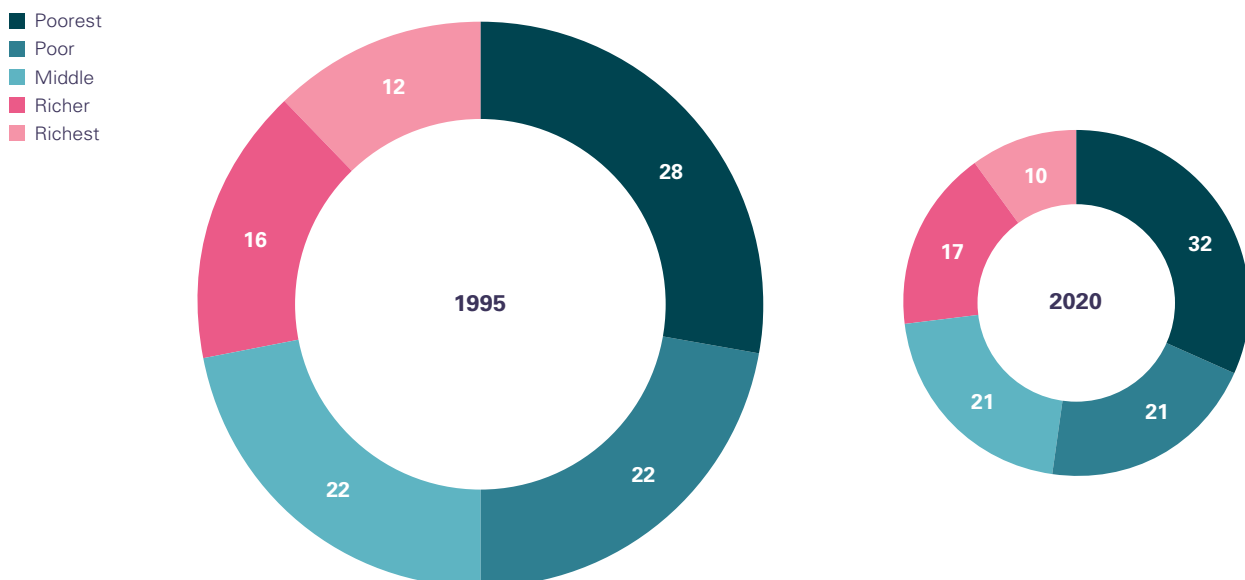
Nearly 1 in 4 Rwandans have lifted themselves out of extreme poverty over the past two decades, with extreme poverty declining from 78 per cent in 2000 to 57 per cent in 2016

FIGURE 70 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



The economic profile of child brides has remained relatively unchanged

FIGURE 71 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Note: Due to rounding, numbers for 2020 do not add up to 100.

Dramatic increases in completion rates were seen over the past two decades and a significant proportion of girls were brought into school

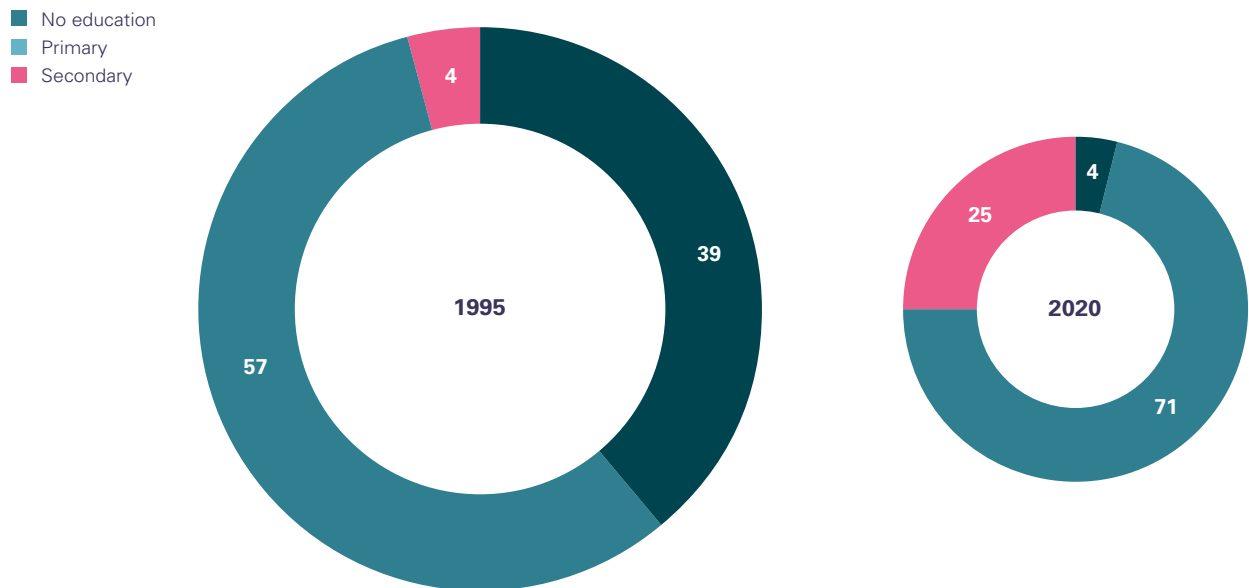
FIGURE 72 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

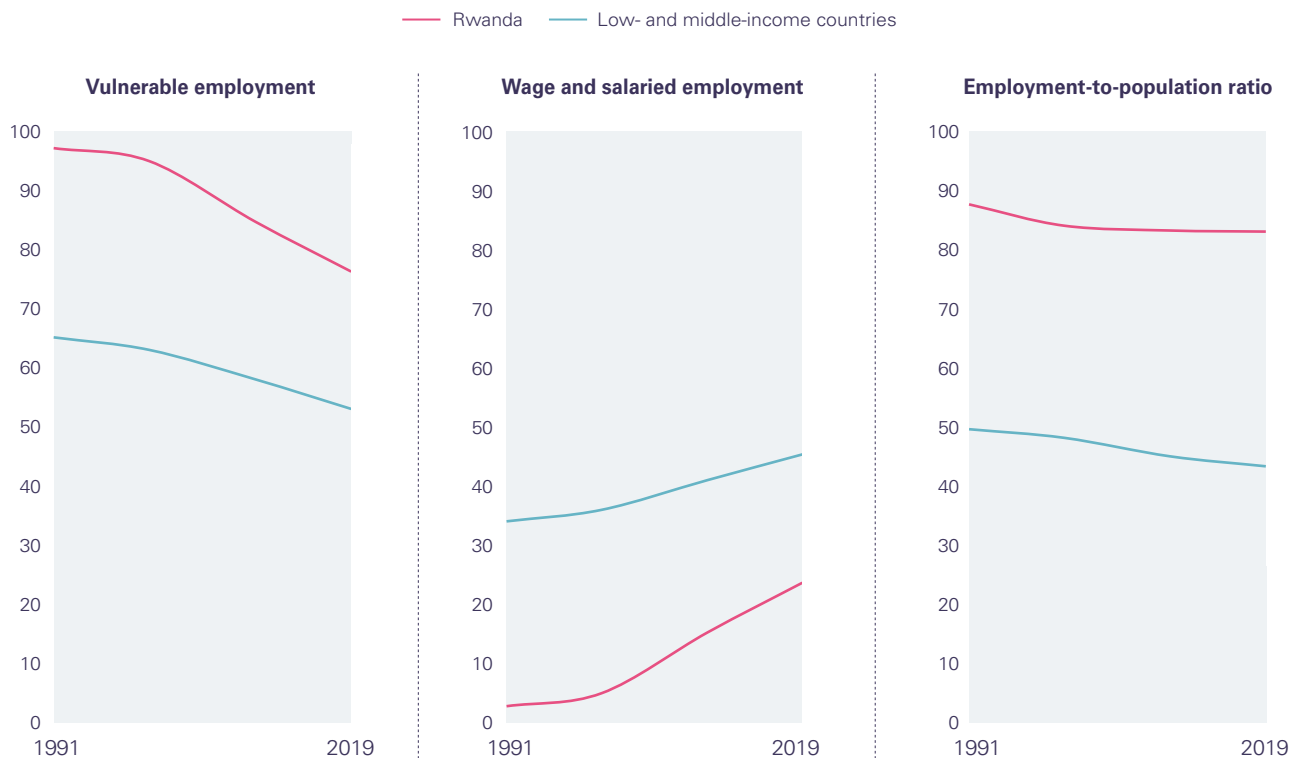
Child brides in 2020 were more educated than their peers 25 years earlier

FIGURE 73 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Rwanda has seen a marked increase in the percentage of women in wage and salaried jobs; still, 8 in 10 employed women work in jobs classified as vulnerable

FIGURE 74 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in the DHS 1992, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2014-2015 and 2019-2020. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

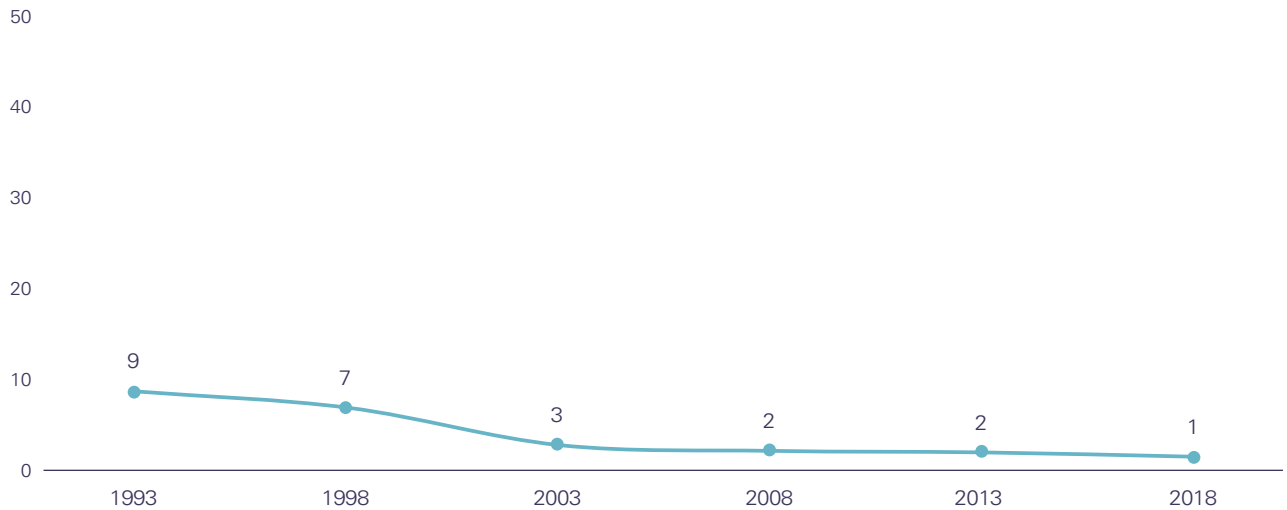
Tunisia

Legal age at marriage is 18 years old, with exceptions

Tunisia's rate of decline in child marriage ranks among the top five in the world, setting it on track to eliminate the practice by 2030.

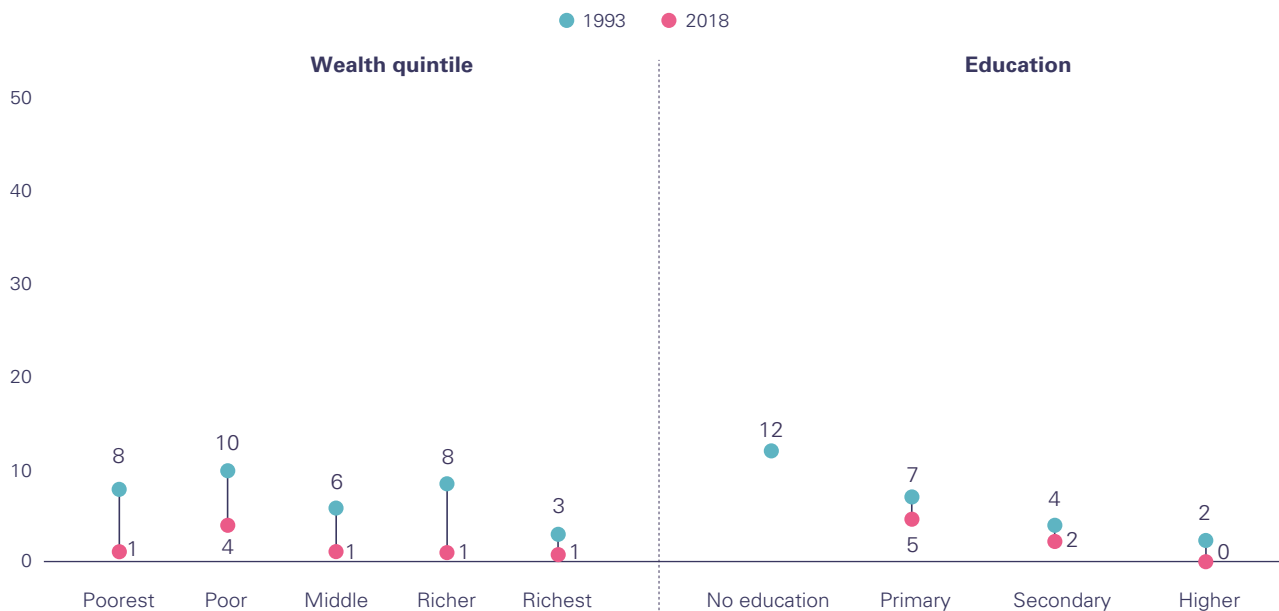
Nearly 1 in 10 young women were married in childhood in 1993 compared with 1 in 100 in 2018

FIGURE 75 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



The prevalence of child marriage has declined across all population groups

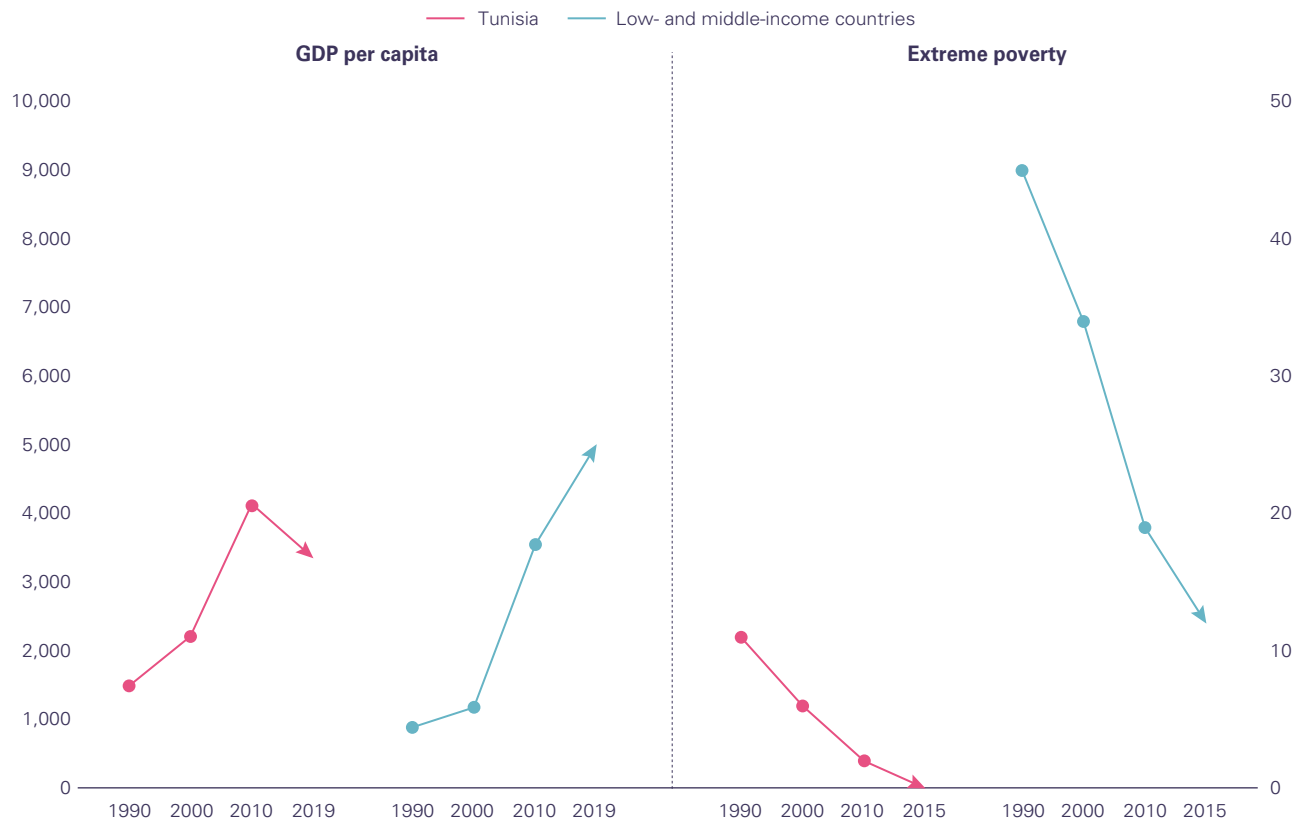
FIGURE 76 | Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile and education



Note: The value for 'no education' for 2018 was suppressed because of the small number of observations.

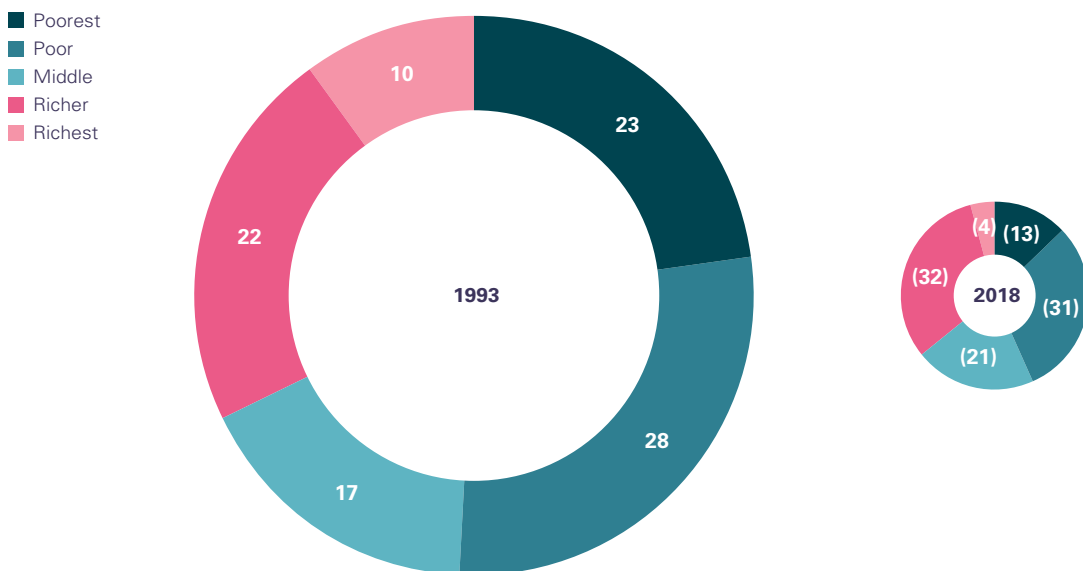
Extreme poverty declined to less than 1 per cent by 2015

FIGURE 77 | GDP per capita (current US\$) and percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day (2011 purchasing power parity)



Overall, the economic profile of child brides has remained relatively unchanged over time

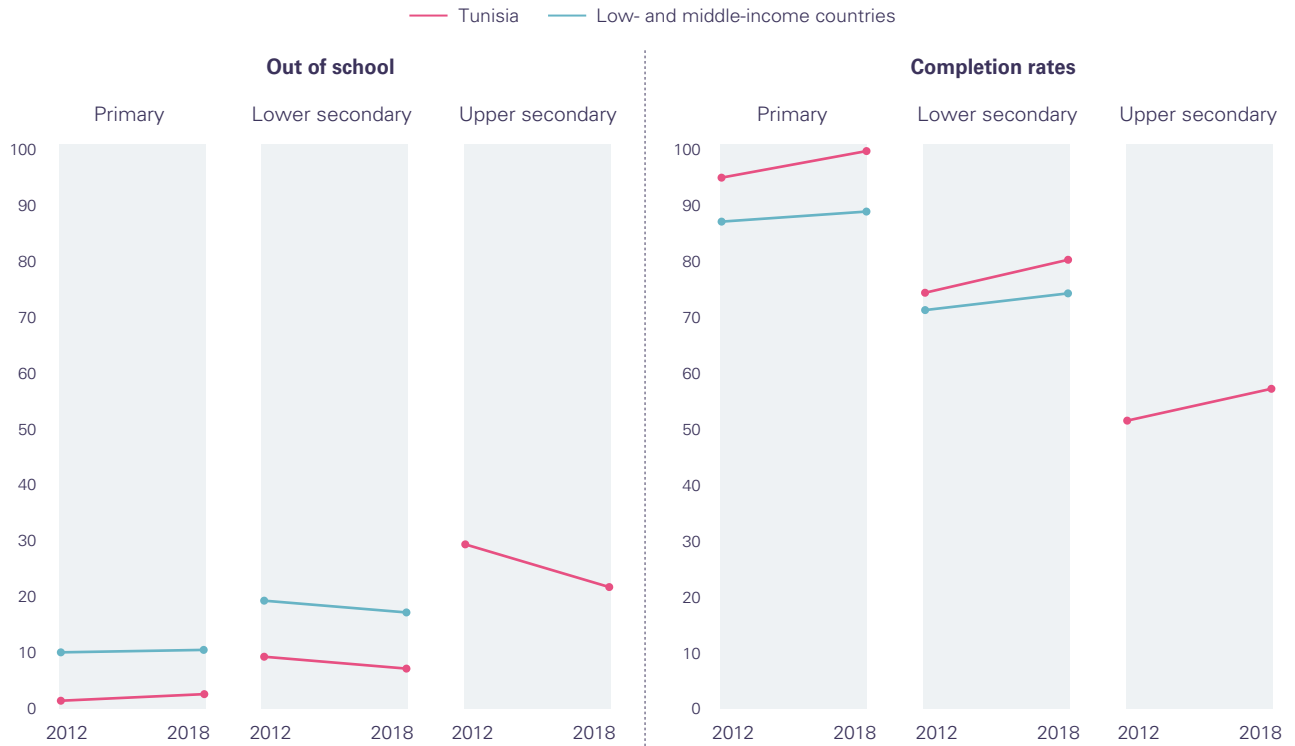
FIGURE 78 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile



Notes: Due to rounding, numbers for 2018 do not add up to 100. Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

Tunisian girls have experienced significant improvements in education

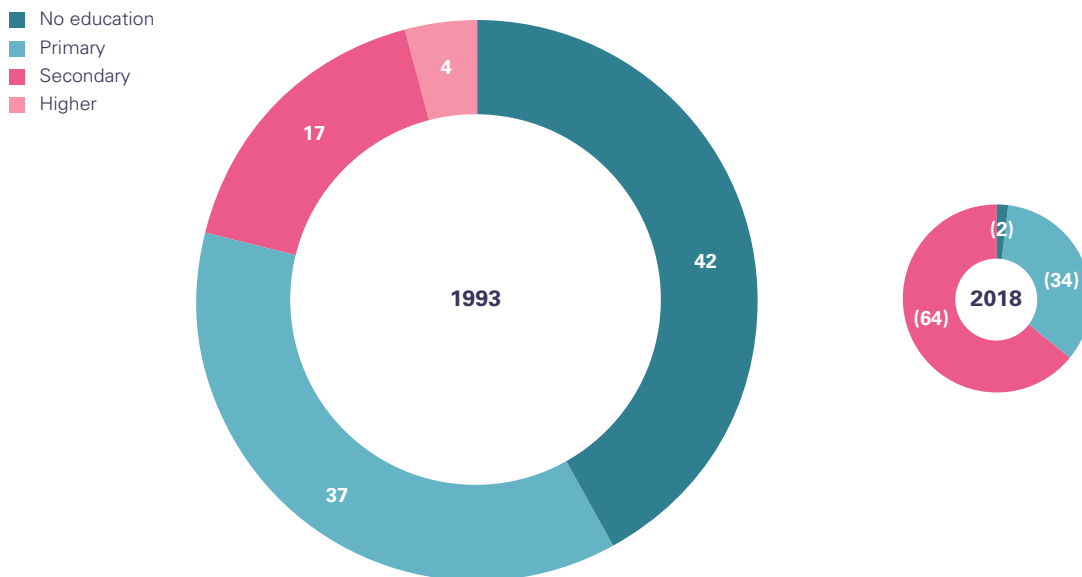
FIGURE 79 | Percentage of girls out of school and percentage of girls who successfully completed their education, by level



Note: Values for upper-secondary education are not available for low- and middle-income countries.

The latest generation of child brides are educated, and most of them have attended secondary school

FIGURE 80 | Percentage distribution of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by highest education level attended



Note: Values in parentheses are based on 25 to 49 observations.

While female employment in Tunisia is lower than the low- and middle-income country average, nearly 90 per cent of all Tunisian women in the workforce are employed in wage and salaried jobs

FIGURE 81 | Proportion of vulnerable employment as a percentage of female employment, proportion of wage and salaried female workers as a percentage of female employment, and employment-to-population ratio for girls and women aged 15 years and older



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Data sources: The analysis on trends in child marriage is based on the prevalence of the practice as measured in MICS 2011-2012 and 2018. Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021. Data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021. Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021. Information on legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021. More details on methods and data sources can be found in the technical notes.

05.

Towards ending child marriage

Ending child marriage is now a global priority. Thanks to increased evidence and advocacy, it is well embedded in not only the SDGs but also in the national agendas, policies and commitments of a growing number of countries. This increased attention has been accompanied by accelerating declines in prevalence.

Over the past decade, the proportion of young women who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from 1 in 4 to about 1 in 5. However, while the global reduction in child marriage is to be celebrated, no region is yet on track to meet the SDG target of eliminating this harmful practice by 2030. For child marriage to end globally by this date, the rate of progress would need to be 15 times faster than the pace recorded over the last decade. What's more, over the next 10 years, up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even as commitments and interventions on child marriage are proliferating, few programmes are operating at scale, and the evidence on successful strategies that have been scaled up remains limited. Furthermore, it is not clear whether programmes are always reaching the most vulnerable girls or the areas that have the highest prevalence or burden of child marriage. Rigorous empirical evidence on what drives large-scale population-level changes in child marriage is also lacking. The factors that contribute to a girl's risk of child marriage have been studied extensively when it comes to influences at the individual and household level. Yet there are also societal factors at play that affect

levels of child marriage across the population. Looking beyond the individual and considering factors outside of each girl and her family are necessary for a more complete understanding of the context in which decisions about marriage are made.

The analysis presented in this report touches on this broader context in a subset of countries that have made impressive strides in reducing child marriage. In addition to progress against child marriage at the societal level, these countries, typically, have also seen improvements in economic development and poverty reduction, access to employment and educational attainment.

While the relationship between child marriage and socioeconomic development is intuitive, important nuances can be found by delving deeper into the data. For example, for greater national wealth to translate into reduced rates of child marriage, economic growth must be inclusive and its benefits equitably shared. The tax revenues such growth generates must also be invested in programmes and services that make a difference for children, particularly in education and social protection.

Labour force participation is another area where its general relationship with child marriage is



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less meaningful than the detailed findings. Both the literature on this subject and the analysis in this report indicate that the availability of any type of work for women is not sufficient to reduce child marriage, particularly if it is in the informal sector. It is the availability of more reliable, often skilled work in the formal sector that is correlated with a reduction in child marriage, likely because it provides a more promising pathway for girls.

Similar distinctions can be found in the domain of education. At the individual level, the literature suggests that the level of educational attainment that is protective against child marriage varies by context. At the population level, primary-school completion is protective against child marriage, but this relationship appears to have weakened with rising education levels in recent

decades; secondary-school completion is now emerging as a more strongly correlated factor. Greater improvements at the upper-secondary level could mean continued declines in levels of child marriage across all regions, as more girls achieve the higher educational attainment typically associated with delayed marriage. The analysis, however, also shows that increasing access to education alone is not enough. Rather, improved access needs to go hand in hand with opportunities for reliable and skilled employment. Child marriage becomes a less attractive option as other (and more lucrative) alternatives become available. Countries in which advances in girls' education have not been accompanied by improved access to earnings through female employment have been able to delay the age at marriage for some girls, but not for all.

The analysis in this report is not meant to establish causal links but to foster a deeper understanding of the association between shifts in child marriage rates and key macro-level factors. Its findings are also intended to inform the research agenda, by highlighting patterns in trends and dynamics of change that warrant further investigation. A promising area for future research, for example, is the relationship between macro-level factors and programmatic interventions already known to influence child marriage.

Although improvements in economic development, education and the labour market imply large and sustained investments nationally, action at this level is essential, and should complement programmatic efforts targeting girls at risk, if the promise to end child marriage in this decade is to be realized.

06.

Technical notes

Data sources

Data on child marriage are drawn from UNICEF global databases, 2021 (<https://data.unicef.org/>). These databases include estimates derived primarily from nationally representative household surveys such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).

Data on GNI per capita and data on poverty are from the World Bank, 2021 (<https://data.worldbank.org/>). Data on GDP per capita are from the World Bank and OECD, 2021 (<https://data.worldbank.org/>). Data on education are from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020 (<https://www.education-inequalities.org/>). Data on labour are from the ILO, 2021 (<https://ilostat.ilo.org/>). Data on the HDI are from UNDP, 2021 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>). Information on the legal age at marriage was obtained from the World Bank, 2021 (<https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data>). Demographic data are from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2019 revision* (DVD Edition). Data on adolescent fertility are from UNPD, 2019 (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/data-landing-page>). Data on family planning are from UNPD, 2020 (<https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/contraception/wcu2020.asp>).

Indicators, calculation of estimates and trends

To assess the prevalence of child marriage, this analysis used SDG indicator 5.3.1 – the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18. All references to ‘marriage’ include both formal marriages and informal unions in which women started living together with a partner as if married. The global burden of child marriage is defined as the number of girls under age 18 who have already married plus the number of adult women who were married before age 18. The global and regional estimates of the prevalence of child marriage are calculated on the basis of the latest available data for each country. National values are extrapolated to a common reference year.

Trends in the prevalence of child marriage in the nine countries documented in this report were calculated by taking into account all available data sources and the prevalence of child marriage across age cohorts. Estimates for each age cohort were validated across surveys, and on this basis some data points were excluded from the trend calculation when results across surveys were not consistent.



07. References







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