

## Trends and patterns of child marriage in Mozambique: Evidence from the 2017 Census

### Key points

- The 2017 population census has contributed to fill a key gap in gender statistics by generating representative indicators for monitoring the trends and patterns of child marriage across Mozambique, including for small territorial units.
- The prevalence of child marriage has only modestly decreased since 1997, with a persisting North-South divide. While in the majority of districts the occurrence of child marriage has become less frequent between 2007 and 2017, there are 60 districts where there was an increase or no substantive change in the proportion of ever married girls.
- The Census confirms that child marriage is frequently associated with teenage pregnancies.
- Large social inequalities characterize the occurrence of child marriage in Mozambique. Girls aged 15-17 who are in school are about 8 times less likely to marry as a child than girls who have never attended or have left school.

### Introduction

Recent surveys (DHS 2011, IMASIDA 2015) exposed the large prevalence of child marriage in Mozambique, indicating that 1 in 2 girls get married before turning 18. However, efforts to monitor the prevalence of child marriage and other harmful practices are still undermined by significant gaps in the availability of data and statistics, especially because of the reliance on infrequent household surveys. The population census contributes to fill this gap by generating sex-disaggregated data for key socio-economic indicators, including for small territorial units. The census does not collect retrospective information on the age at marriage, but provides data on the percentage of adolescents who are (or were previously) married or living in de facto union at the time of the enumeration. This information does not capture the total prevalence of child marriage amongst the cohort who were

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underage at the time of the census – because some of these children got married before turning 18 in the years following the census – but provides a representative indicator to monitor the key trends and patterns of child marriage across Mozambique.

This data briefing establishes some key trends and facts about child marriage in Mozambique based on emerging evidence from the 2017 Census.

### Trends and territorial patterns of child marriage

The prevalence of child marriage has only modestly decreased over a period of 20 years. In 2017, 28% of teenage girls 15-17 had already been married or in a union, down only 2 percentage points since 1997 (fig. 1). A large gender difference in the age of marriage also persists, as only 4% of boys in the same age group are married or cohabiting with their partner.

There is a clear north-south divide in the prevalence of child marriage. The proportion of ever married girls in 2017 was about 40% in the Northern provinces, compared to 5-15% in Maputo and the provinces of the South. In most central and northern provinces there has been little change in the prevalence of child marriage over the last inter-censal period (2007-2017).

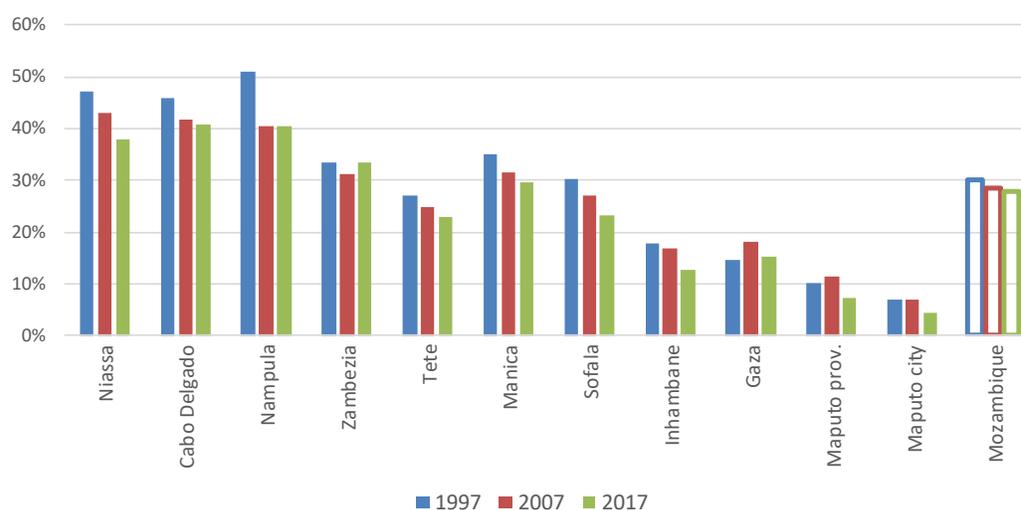
District-level analysis sheds further lights on the territorial patterns of child marriage in Mozambique (see Annex). It confirms that the top 10 districts with the highest proportion of ever married girls aged 15-17 (at least 1 in 2) are located in the Northern Provinces: Namuno (Cabo Delgado); Murrupula, Muecate, Moma, Lalaua, Larde and Mogovolas (Nampula); Nipepe, Metarica and Maúa (Niassa). However, the proportion of ever married girls is higher than 40% also in 10 districts of the central region - 6 in Zambezia, 2 in Sofala and 2 in Manica.

Furthermore, the inter-censal variation (2007-17) in the proportion of ever married girls aged 15-17 at district level demonstrates that there has not been a consistent reduction in the practice of child marriage across Mozambique. While in the majority of districts the occurrence of child marriage has become less frequent, there are 60 districts where there was an increase or no substantive change in the proportion of ever married girls. In 15 of these districts (5 located in the Southern

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Provinces) the percentage of ever married girls has increased by more than 5 percentage points between 2007 and 2017. The uneven progress towards the eradication of child marriage is also testified by the fact that within all provinces there are some districts where the prevalence of child marriage has increased.

Figure 1 – Percentage of ever married girls aged 15-17, by province, 1997-2017



Source: National Statistics Institute, Population Censuses, and IPUMS

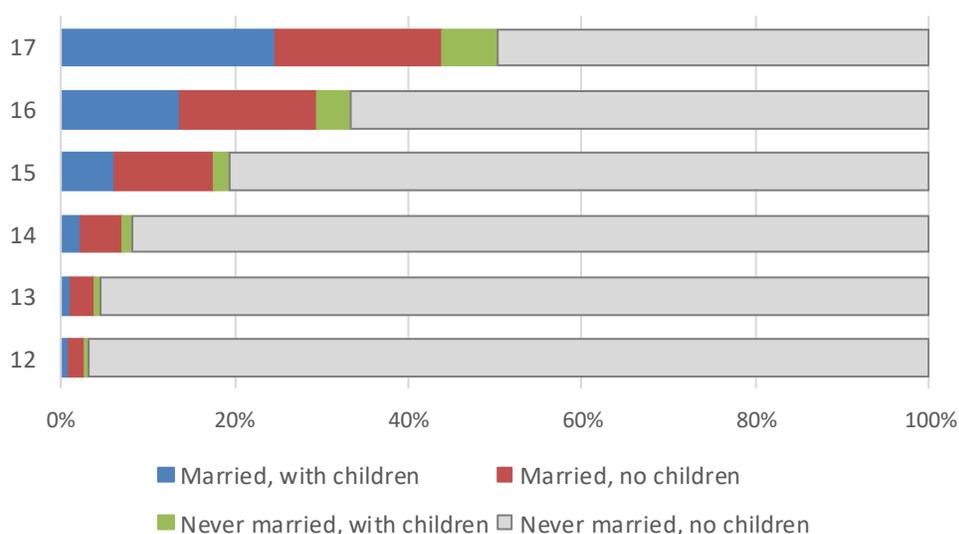
## Relationships between child marriage and early pregnancies

The 2017 census data corroborate existing evidence that in the majority of cases the entry in a marital union is concomitant with or soon followed by the birth of the first child. Overall, 14% of girls aged 15-17 already gave birth to at least one child (about the same proportion as in 2007). This is consistent with the trend estimated by surveys of the DHS program which shows only limited fluctuations in the adolescent fertility rate. As shown in figure 2, the percentage of adolescent girls who had been married, had children, or both, rapidly increases between age 12 and age 17. By age 17, the majority of married girls had children. It is noteworthy

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that the percentage of unmarried girls with children also increases with age, reaching 6% amongst 17 year-old girls.

**Figure 2 – Distribution of girls (aged 12-17) by marital and motherhood status, 2017**



Source: National Statistics Institute, 2017 Population Census

### Social inequalities in child marriage

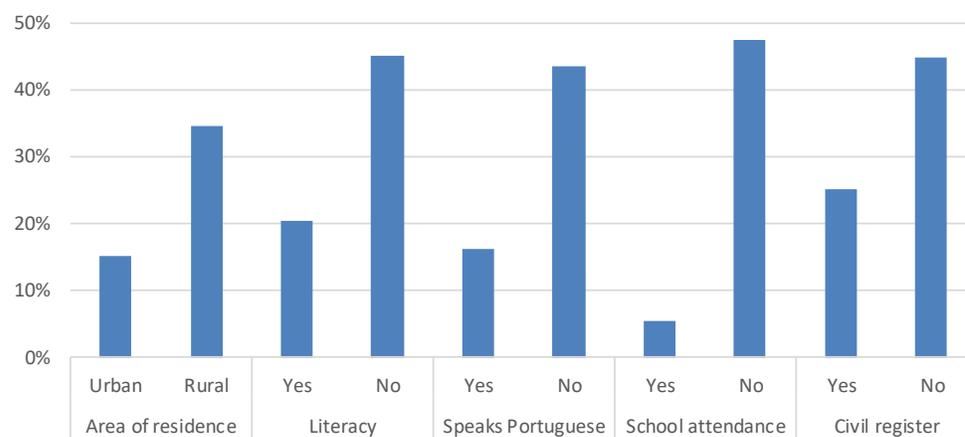
Large social inequalities characterize the occurrence of child marriage in Mozambique (see fig. 3). The prevalence of child marriage is more than twice as high in rural areas (35% of ever married girls aged 15-17) as in urban areas (15%). There is also a large gap in the likelihood to marry before turning 18 amongst girls who are illiterate or do not speak Portuguese.

However, the factor that appears to have the largest impact on the prevalence of child marriage is school attendance: only 6% of girls aged 15-17 attending school had been married, compared to almost half of girls who have never attended or have left school. A noticeable result is also that girls are significantly more likely to marry as a child if they are not registered at the 'Registo Civil'.

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**Figure 3 – Percentage of ever married girls aged 15-17 by background characteristics, 2017**

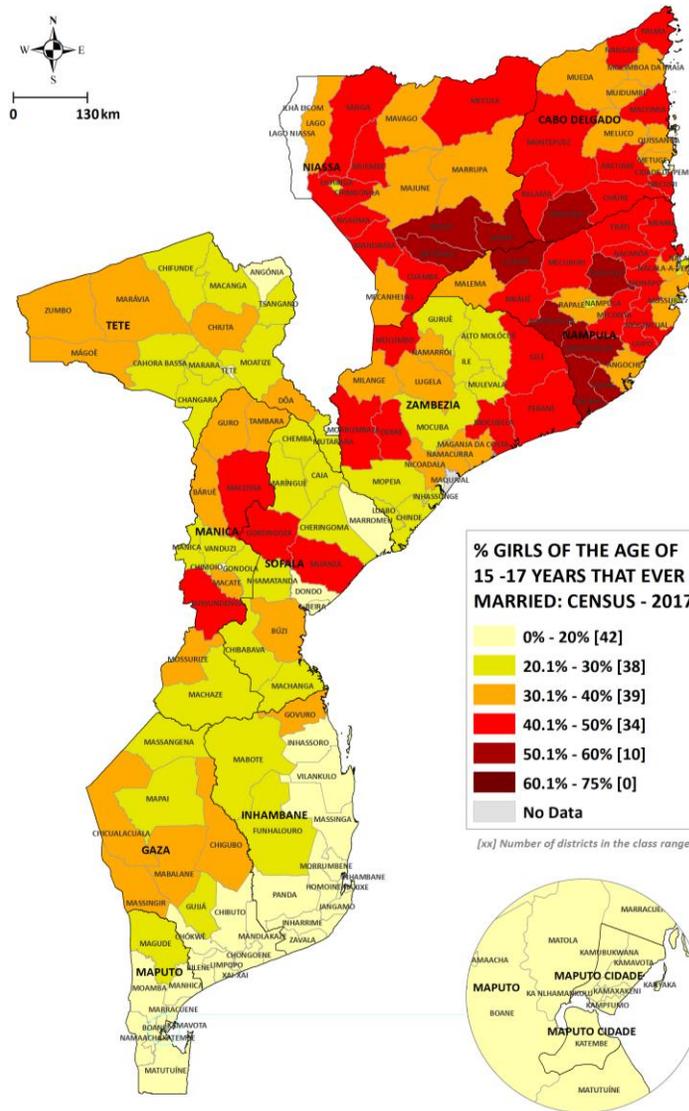


Source: National Statistics Institute, 2017 Population Census

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Annex

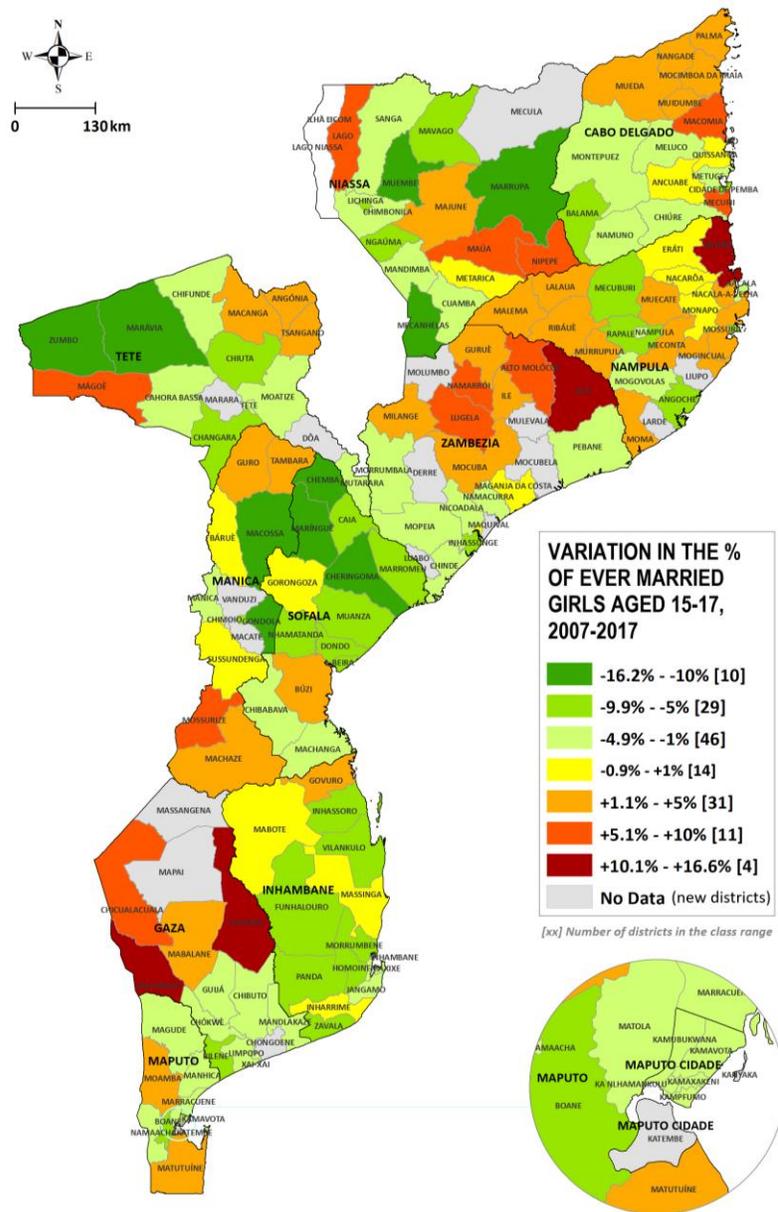
Figure A1 – Percentage of ever married girls aged 15-17 in 2017, by district



Source: National Statistics Institute, 2017 Population Census

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Figure A2 – Variation in the percentage of ever married girls aged 15-17, 2007-2017, by district



Source: National Statistics Institute, Population Censuses, and IPUMS