



# FULFILLING THE COMMITMENT TO CHILD PROTECTION IN SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# FOREWORD

On 14 May 1991, Sao Tome and Principe ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a binding human rights treaty that recognizes children as individual subjects of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. State Parties to the Convention have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfill all rights for all children under their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind and at all times. Those who violate child rights must be held to account.

A lot of progress has since been made in the area of child protection in the country, particularly with regards to legislation and regulation with the adoption of a new Family Law in 2018, the Code of Guardianship Organization for Minors in the same year, the new Labor Code in 2019 and the adoption of the National Child Protection Policy in 2016. Advances are especially visible in the area of birth registration, with almost all children under age 5 having their births registered. Yet, despite these results, physical, psychological and sexual violence against children remains a challenge in the country, whether taking place at home, in the community, in schools or online. Usually such violence is an invisible problem, a secret. People normalize it or do not report it out of fear or shame. When unaddressed, however, it can undermine children's emotional, psychological and cognitive development, cause them to develop violent behaviours and undermine progress at societal level.

Strategic data can shed light on the invisible face of violence and unpack whether current interventions are working to ensure the protection of all children, especially the most disadvantaged. Evidence-based planning means that the best available data, information and knowledge are used to make decisions, ensuring that planned interventions are linked to results.

It is our hope that the findings in this report will constitute a key reference to support our joint efforts, contributing to the development, improvement and reinforcement of prevention and response strategies to combat violence against children and youth as part of a broader, more comprehensive and multisectoral approach for the protection of all children.

**Eva Millas**  
**UNICEF Deputy Representative, Sao Tome and Principe**

**CHILD PROTECTION  
AND THE GLOBAL  
DEVELOPMENT AGENDA**

## GOAL 5



### Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

#### Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

- Indicator 5.2.1: Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months
- Indicator 5.2.2: Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months

#### Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

- Indicator 5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18
- Indicator 5.3.2: Proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation

## GOAL 8



### Provide sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

#### Target 8.7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

- Indicator 8.7.1: Proportion and number of children aged 5-17 years engaged in child labour

## GOAL 16



### Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

#### Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

- Indicator 16.2.1: Proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month
- Indicator 16.2.3: Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18

#### Target 16.9: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

- Indicator 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority



# KEY FACTS ON CHILD PROTECTION IN SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE





**Almost all children under age 5 (98 per cent) have had their births registered, although the poorest children have lower levels of birth registration.**

**Half of children live in households with both their biological parents and 42 per cent have at least one parent living abroad or in another part of the country.**

**Eight in ten children experience violent discipline; 14 per cent experience severe physical punishment.**

**One in ten children are involved in child labour, and these children disproportionately come from poor households.**

**More than one in four young women were married before turning 18; child marriage has been declining slowly since the 1980s but projections fall short of the SDG target of eliminating the practice by 2030.**

# 1. BIRTH REGISTRATION



**Birth registration – the process of providing legal proof of a child’s existence – is a fundamental human right. Not only does it create an official record of each child, it also facilitates access to other rights, such as health, education and protection from child labour and violence.**

In Sao Tome and Principe, registration of births is mandatory in accordance with the Civil Registration Code of 1967. Declaring the birth of a child for the purpose of registration may be done by one or both parents, by caregivers or by any other person with proof of a child’s birth and the identity cards of his/her mother and/or father. Children must be registered in the district (or region) of their birth and within the first year of life. Beginning in 2017, birth registration was made free until 12 months of age, after which the following costs apply: from 1 year to 1 year and 3 months old – Dbs.100,00 (US\$4.80); from 1 year and 4 months to 14 years old – Dbs.150,00 (US\$7.30); and over 14 years old – Dbs.500,00 (US\$24.30). The latter is considered late registration and follows a special process.

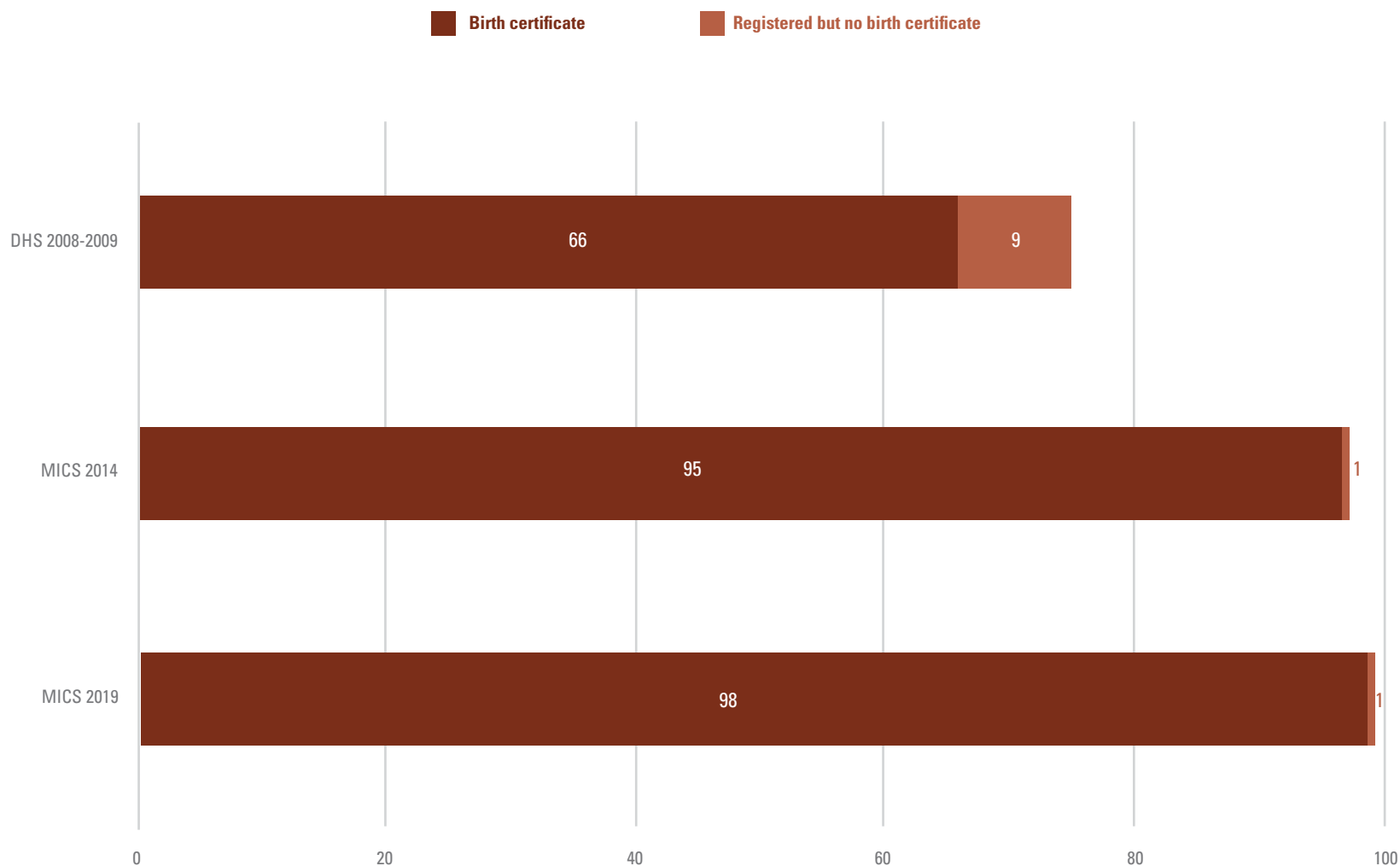
Due to the high rate of institutional delivery in the country (around 95 per cent in 2019<sup>1</sup>), UNICEF has advocated for collaborative work between maternal and newborn health services and those in charge of birth registration. Such efforts led to the adoption of the National Strategy for Permanent Birth Registration (ENRPN) in 2009. The strategy, implemented from January 2010, aims to create procedures for making the registration of children’s births a permanent service in maternity wards, health centres, civil registry

offices and similar services, and involves three ministries in key sectors (Justice, Health and Planning) and the National Institute of Statistics. Since October 2018, birth registration services are also delivered via a new computer system – the Integrated System of Records Management (SIGA) – and initial results seem to suggest this is working well. Overall, the implementation of successive birth registration campaigns, the establishment of fixed and mobile registration posts closer to communities, particularly in rural areas, and the digitalization of civil registration services have greatly improved people’s access to birth registration in the country.

Despite these advances, there are still some challenges to overcome in order to reach the last 1 to 2 per cent of unregistered children. These include cultural norms and a lack of awareness of the importance of birth registration. The Civil Registry Directorate is considering creating permanent mobile posts next to health centres that serve children in order to identify those who have not had their births registered. The country is currently navigating a period of transition from manual registration to digital services, and there must be continued strengthening of partnerships between health services, the civil registry and the education sector.

## Sao Tome and Principe has successfully increased birth registration, with almost all children under age 5 today registered and having a birth certificate

Figure 1.1. Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, by whether or not they have a birth certificate

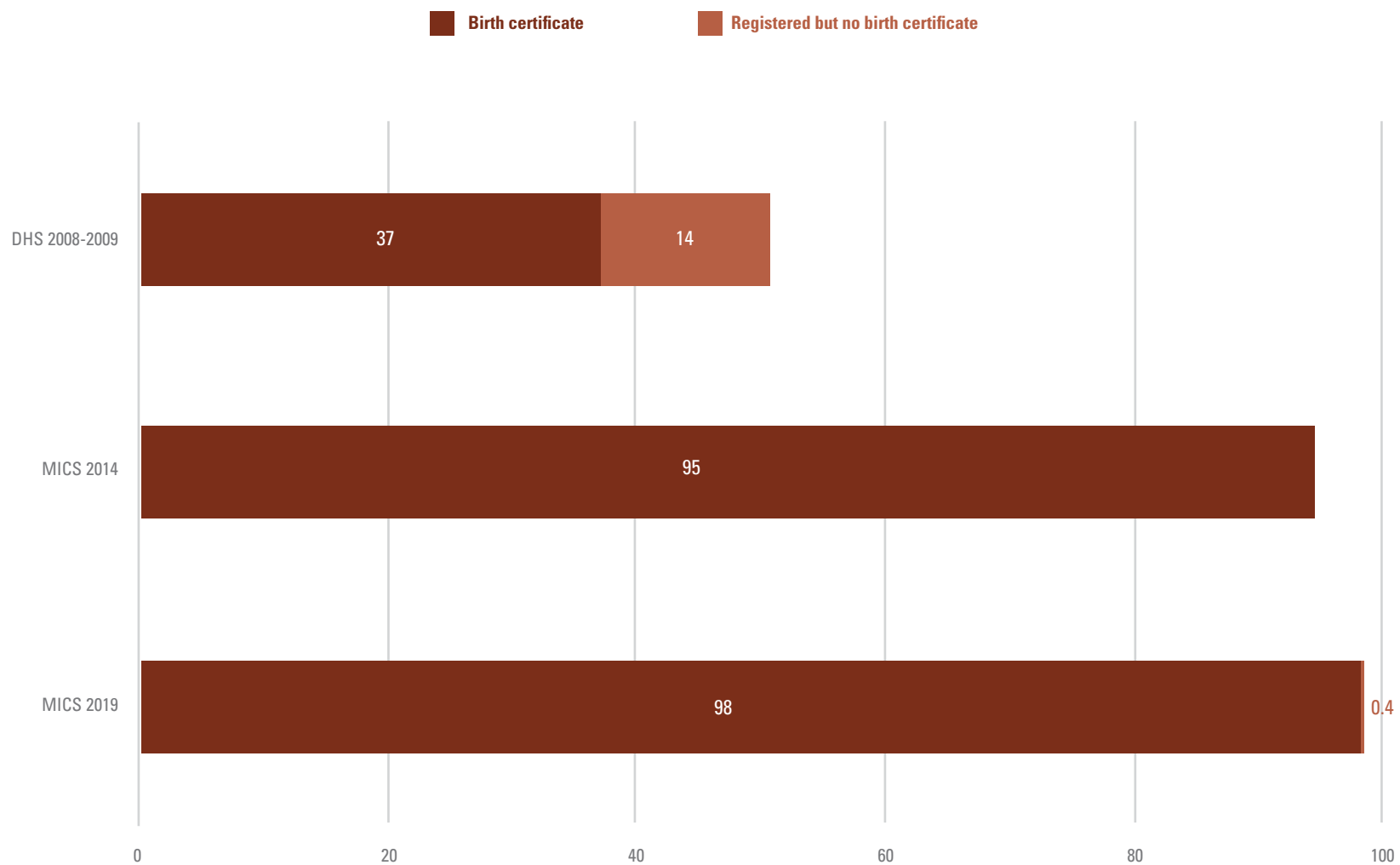


Sources: Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2008-2009, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2014 and 2019.



## Most children are registered before age 1

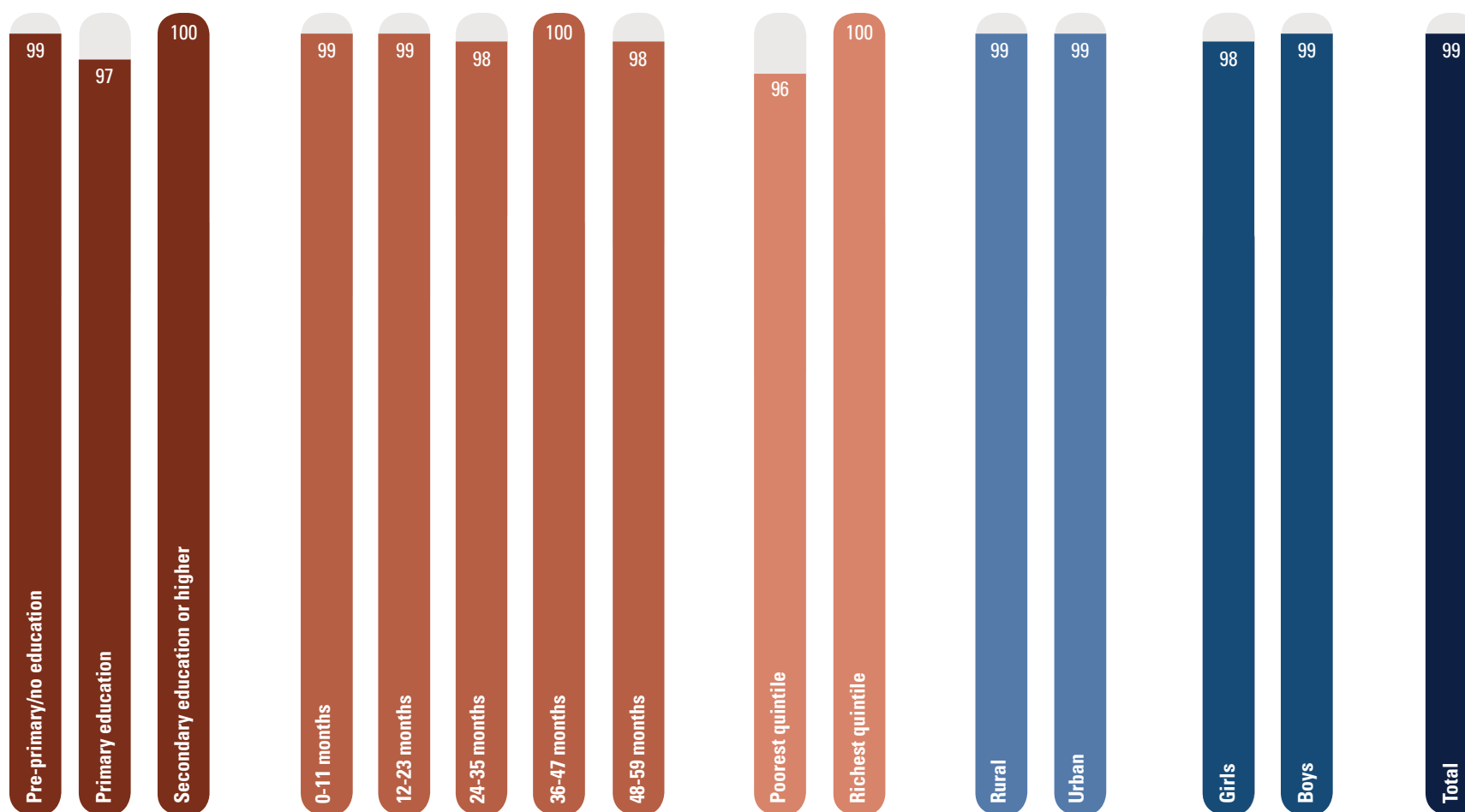
Figure 1.2. Percentage of children under age 1 whose births are registered, by whether or not they have a birth certificate



Sources: DHS 2008-2009, MICS 2014 and 2019.

## Because birth registration levels are so high in the country, there are no differences among children of different backgrounds, with the exception of household wealth

Figure 1.3. Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, by background characteristics



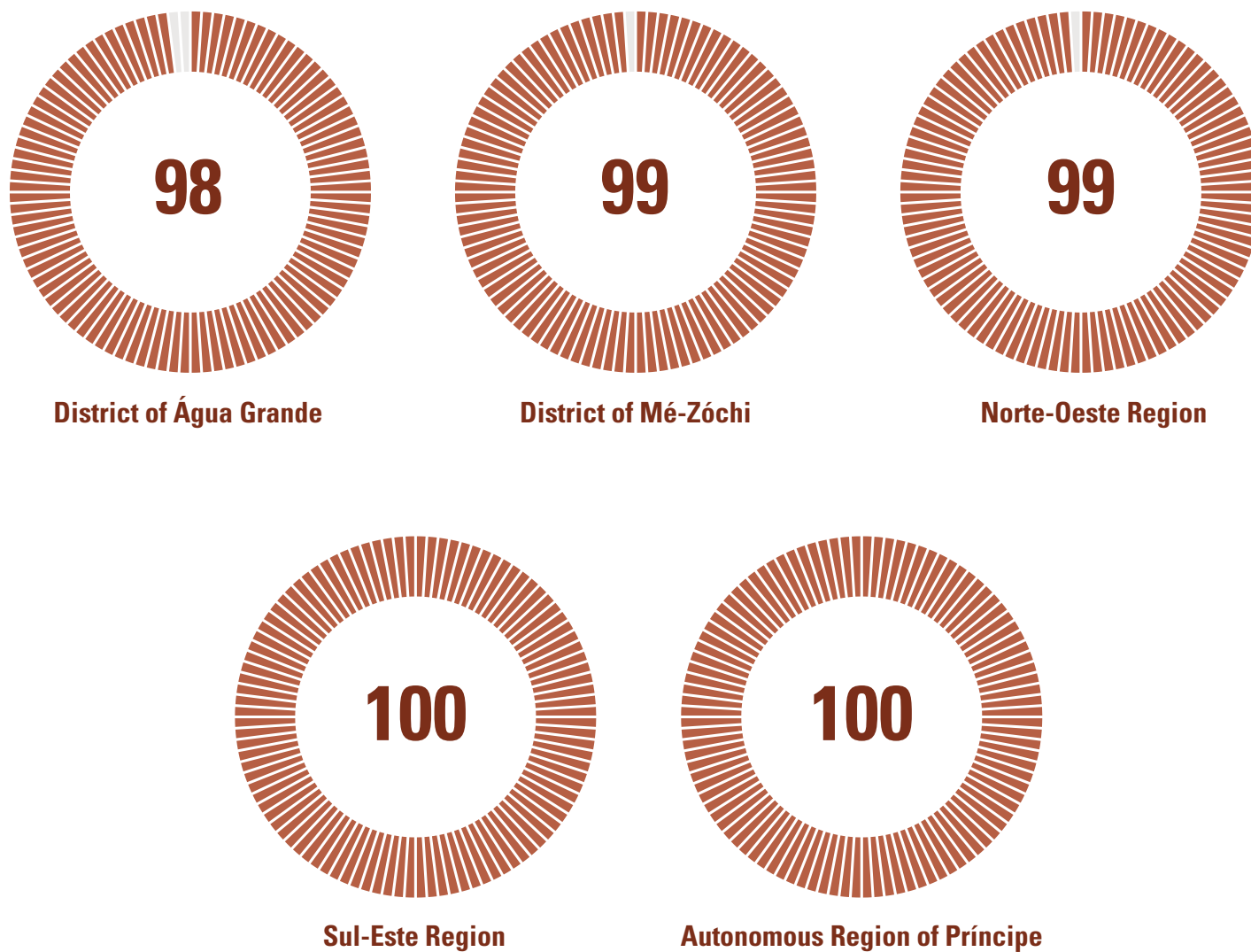
Note: Data on education refer to the education level of the mother.

Source: MICS 2019.



## Birth registration levels are high across all regions of the country

Figure 1.4. Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, by region



Source: MICS 2019.

## 2. CHILDREN LIVING WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE



**Children have the right to live and grow in a supportive family environment. Nurturing and stimulating care are critical components of a child's healthy development and growth.**

When remaining with the family is not in a child's best interest or when he/she becomes separated from his/her family for reasons of poverty, household conflict, abuse or other possible stressors, it is the responsibility of the State to step in and provide temporary or permanent care.<sup>2</sup>

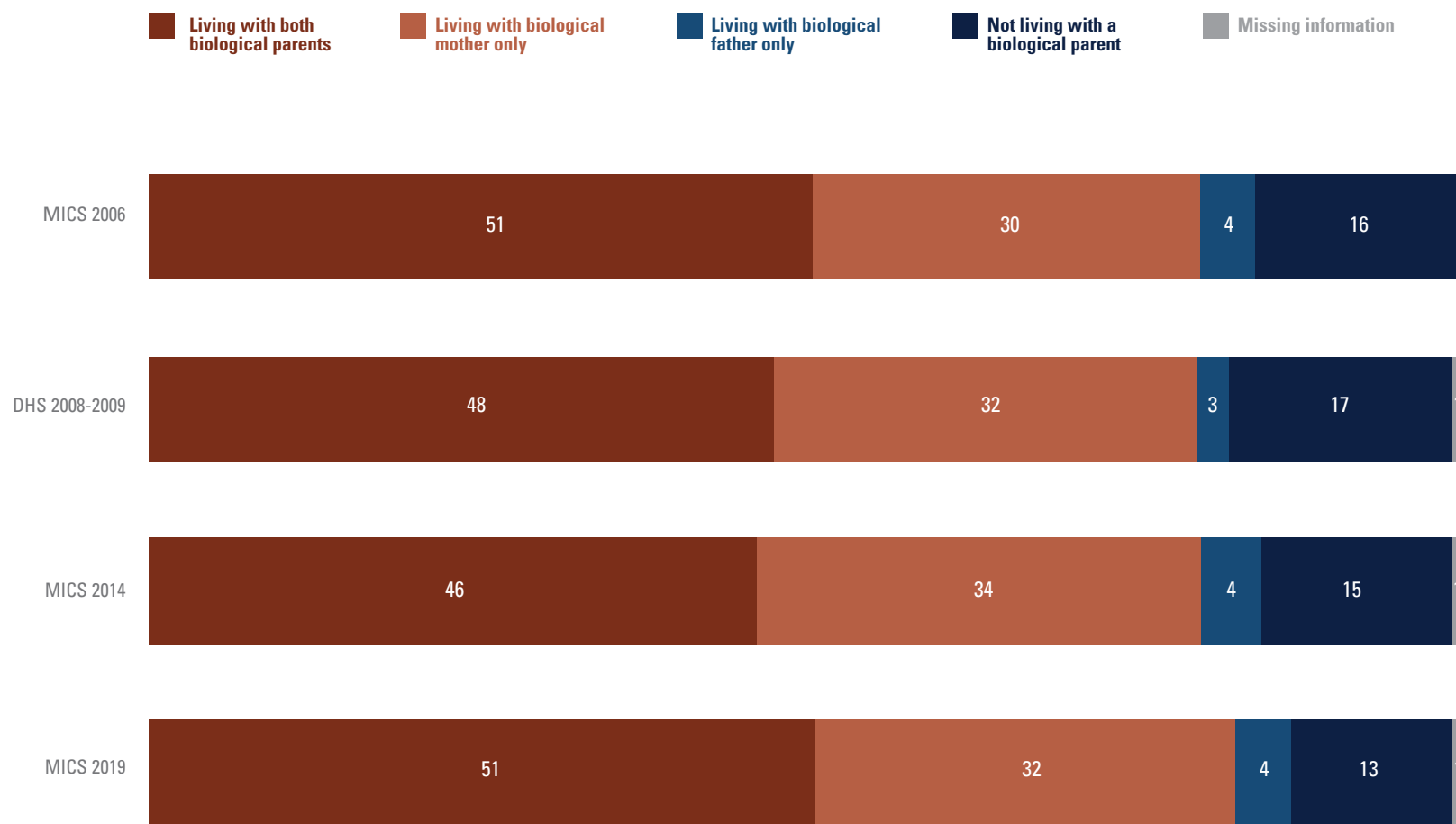
Sao Tome and Principe has never had a national policy to frame the issue of children living without parental care. It has been speculated that one main reason for family separation in the country is the degradation of the family structure and values, particularly in its role as provider of a protective environment for children. Shedding light on the scope and nature of this issue may create an opportunity to initiate a multi-sectoral and multi-level dialogue in order to identify solutions to mitigate the challenges faced by children without parental care.

Currently, the social protection system in the country does not specifically address the needs of children but is based on the prevention, reduction and elimination of economic and social vulnerabilities resulting from poverty and deprivation. The Directorate of Social Protection, Solidarity and Family, in collaboration with partners such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and others, is working to make the mechanisms of coordination operational and to monitor the national system of social protection. This system effectively protects all citizens against the negative effects of risks and vulnerabilities originating from external and internal shocks. Services include family benefits for vulnerable families, social payments and community work programmes.



## Thirteen per cent of children do not live with their biological parents

Figure 2.1. Percentage distribution of children aged 0 to 17 years, by living arrangement

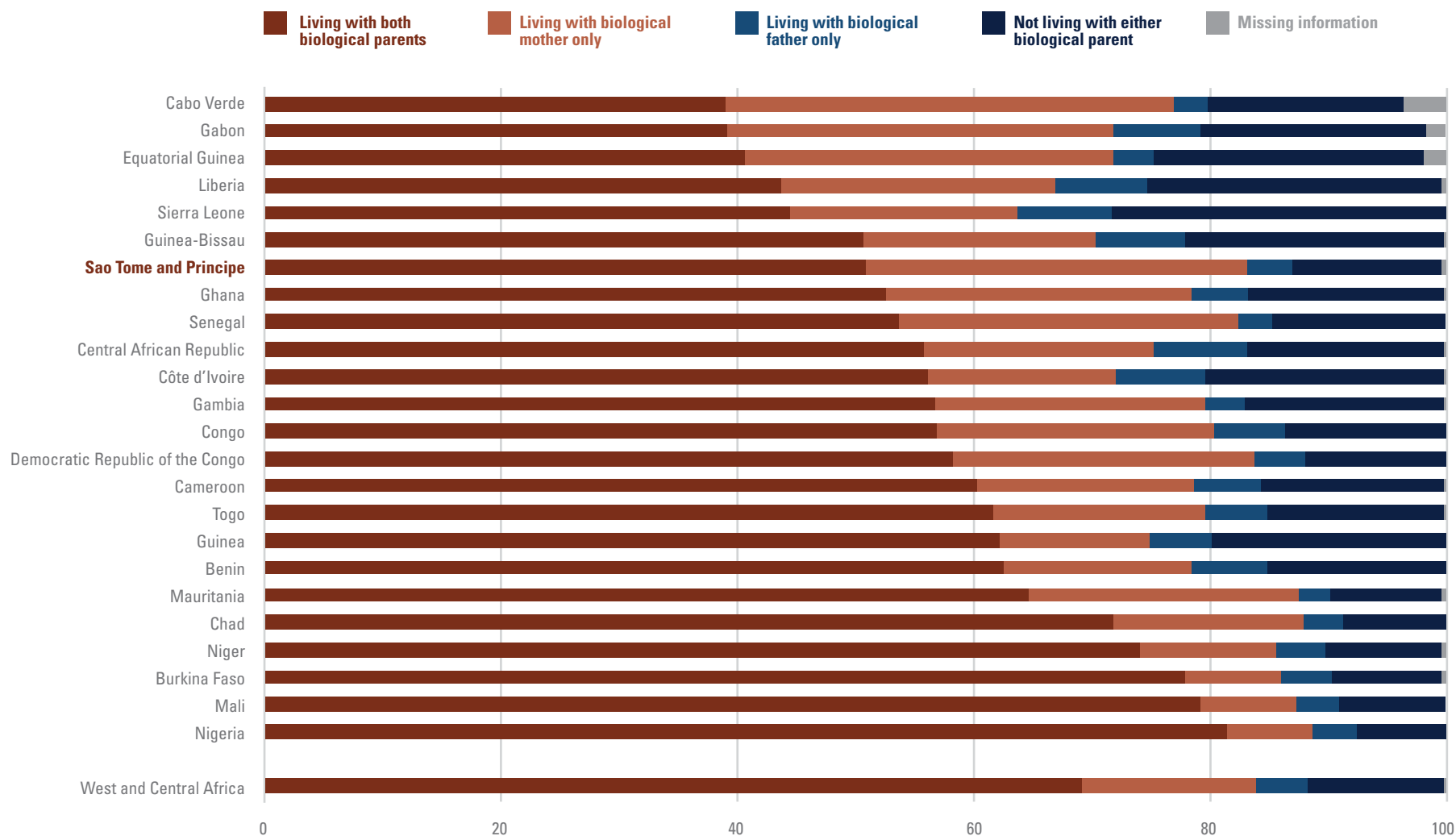


Notes: These data refer to the population of children living in households. Values do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Sources: DHS 2008-2009 and MICS 2006, 2014 and 2019.

## In comparison to West and Central Africa as a whole and most other countries in the region, Sao Tome and Principe has a lower proportion of children living with both biological parents and a higher proportion of those living only with their biological mothers

Figure 2.2. Percentage distribution of children aged 0 to 17 years, by living arrangement, countries in West and Central Africa

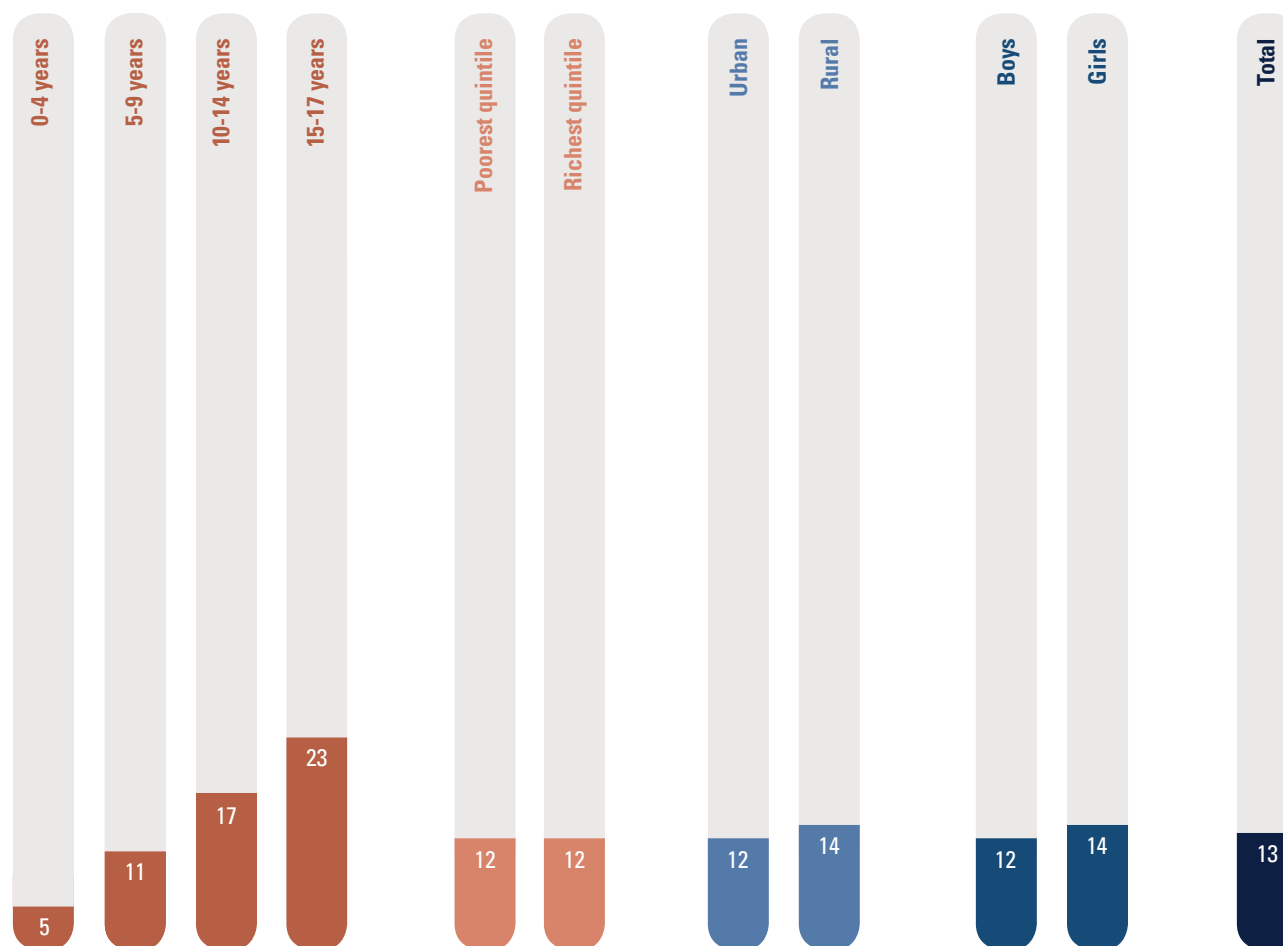


Note: These data refer to the population of children living in households.

Sources: MICS and DHS, 2005-2019.

## It is more common for older children to be living without a biological parent

Figure 2.3. Percentage of children aged 0 to 17 years not living with a biological parent, by background characteristics



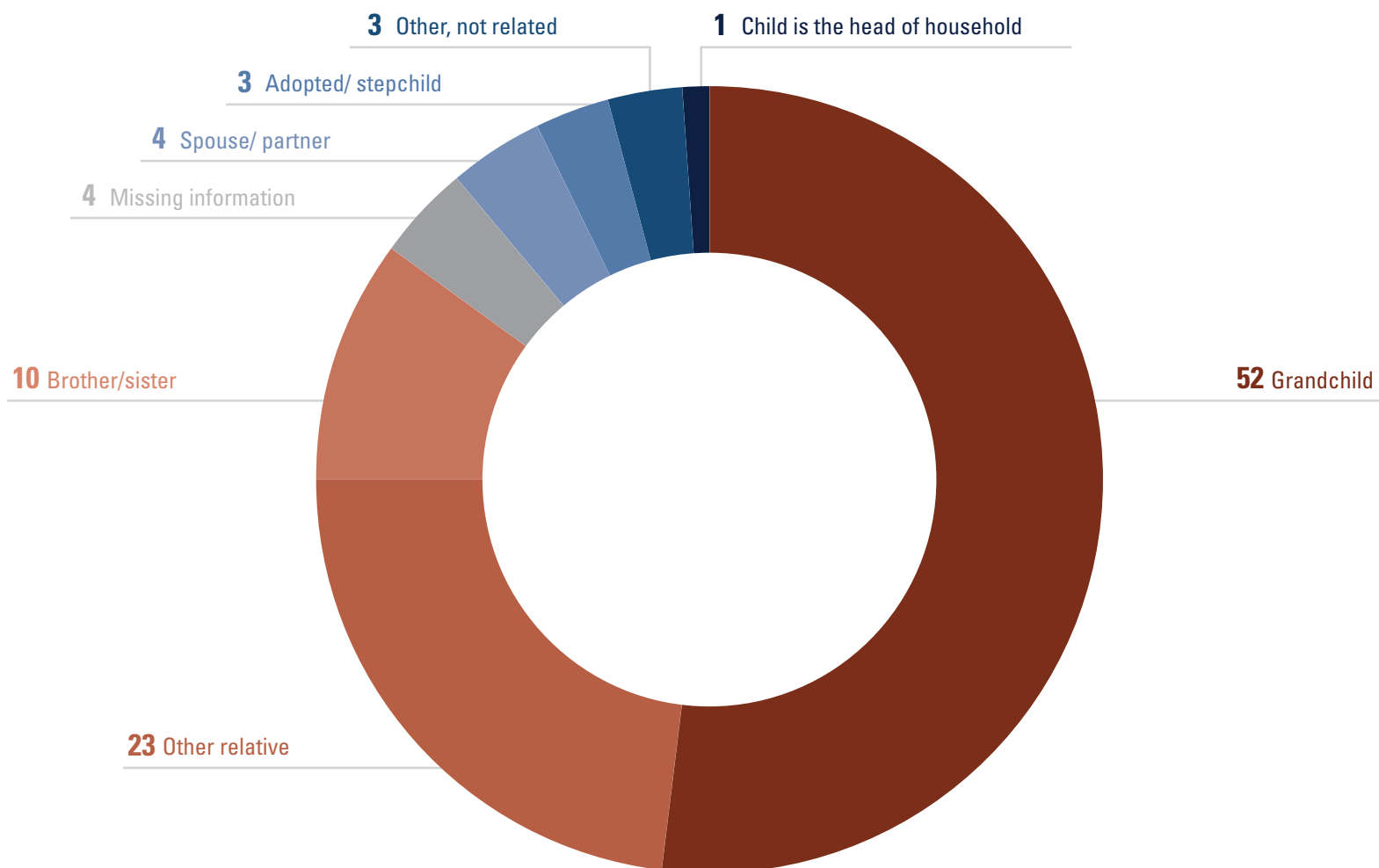
Note: These data refer to the population of children living in households.

Source: MICS 2019.



## More than half of all children living in households without a biological parent live with grandparents

Figure 2.4. Percentage distribution of children aged 0 to 17 years not living with a biological parent, according to their relationship to the head of the household

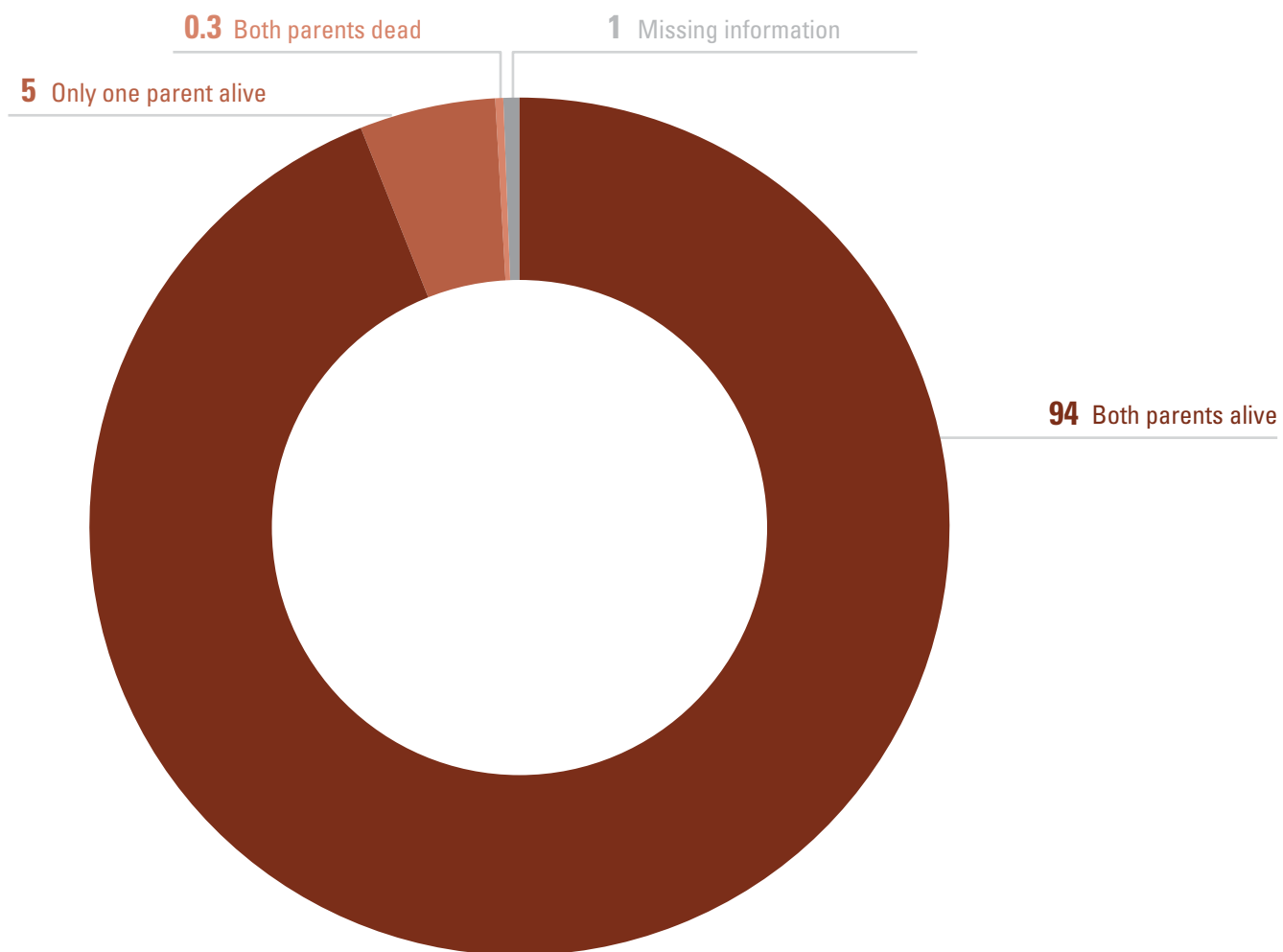


Note: These data refer to the population of children living in households.

Source: MICS 2019.

## For the vast majority of children, both their parents are alive

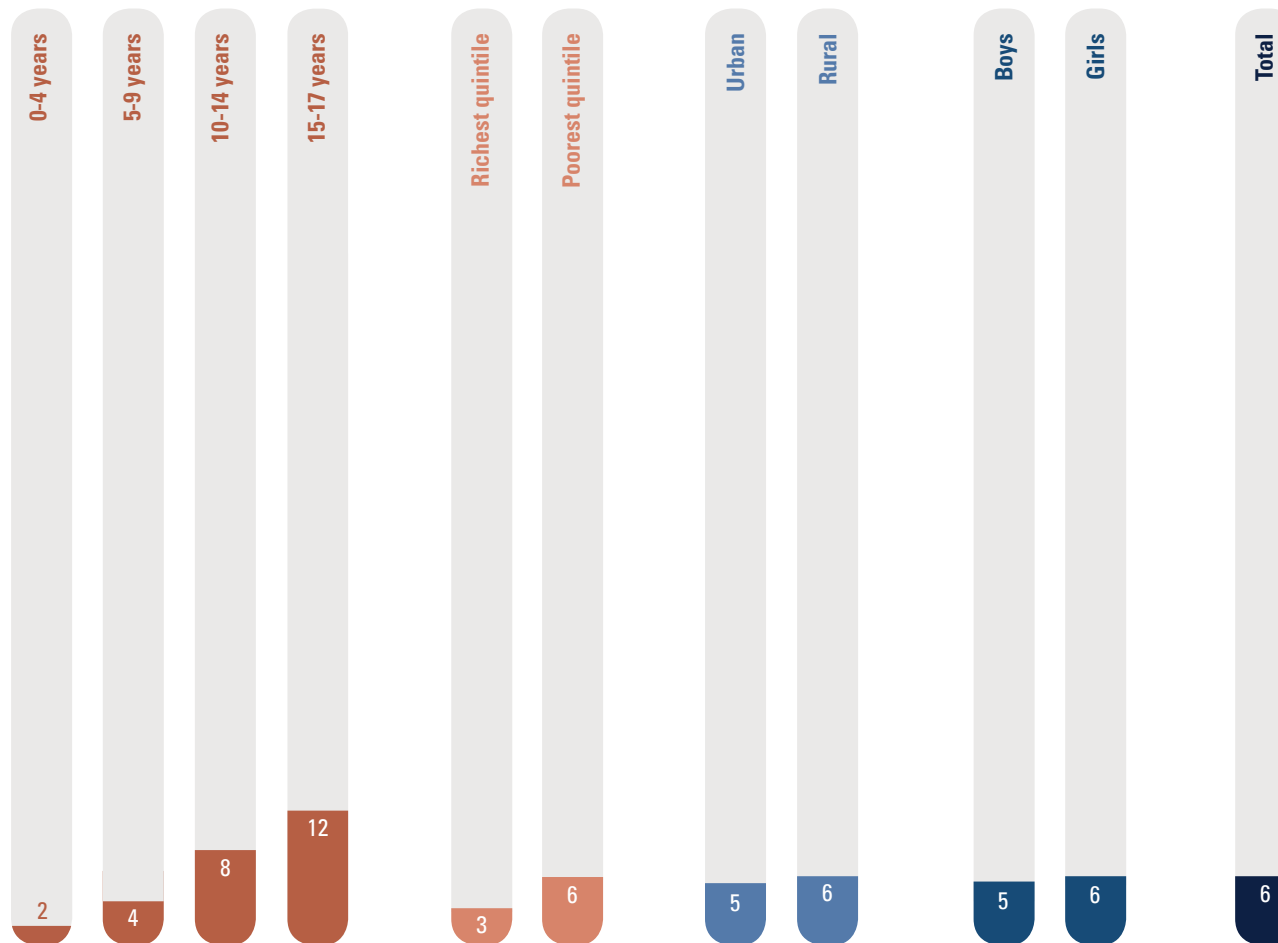
Figure 2.5. Percentage distribution of children aged 0 to 17 years, by parental survival status



Notes: These data refer to the population of children living in households. Values do not add up to 100 due to rounding.  
Source: MICS 2019.

## Around 6 per cent of children have lost one or both parents

Figure 2.6. Percentage of children aged 0 to 17 years who have lost one or both parents, by background characteristics

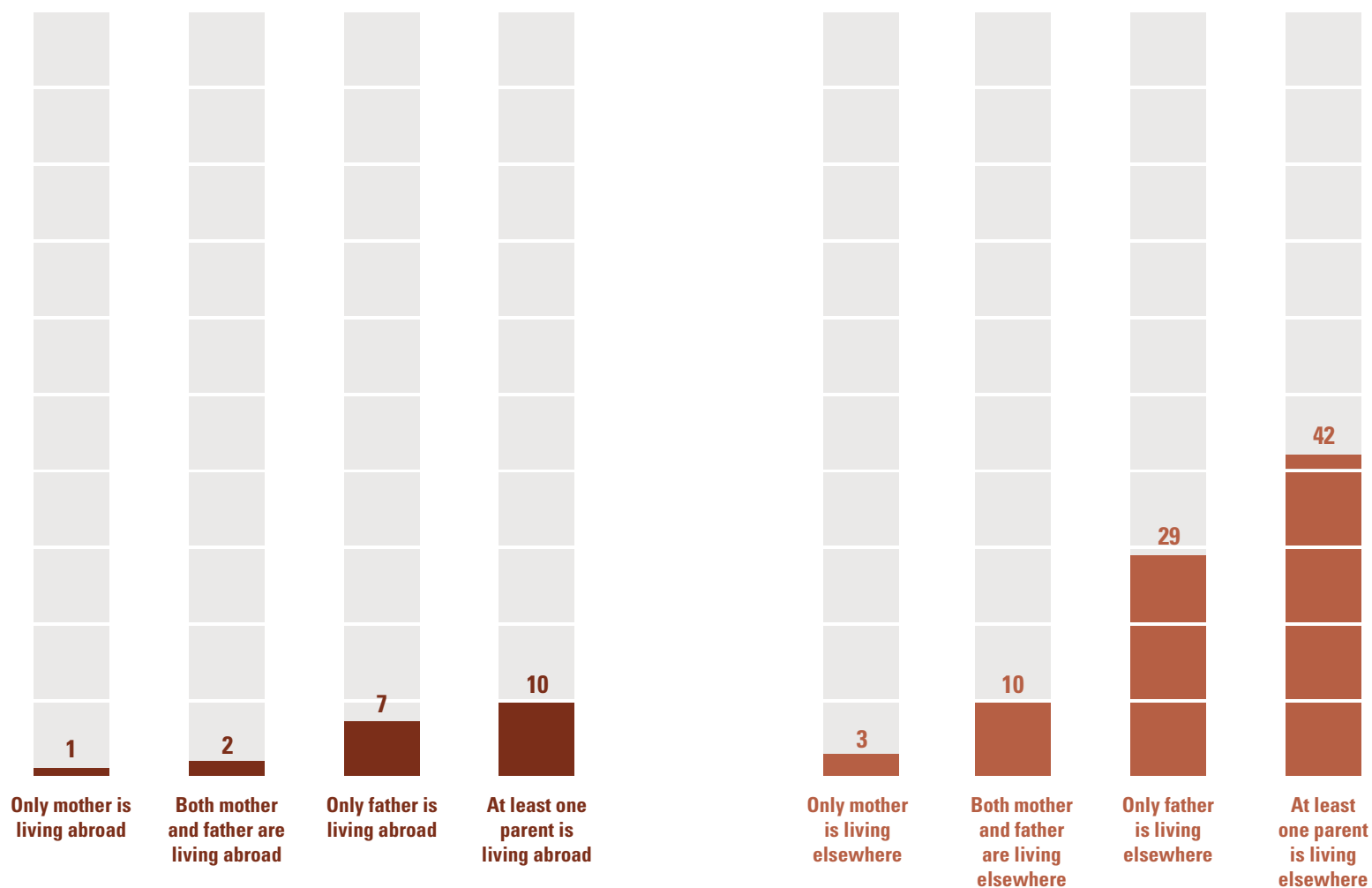


Note: These data refer to the population of children living in households.

Source: MICS 2019.

## Around 4 in 10 children have at least one parent who is living abroad or in another part of the country

Figure 2.7. Percentage of children aged 0 to 17 years with at least one parent living elsewhere, by residence of parents

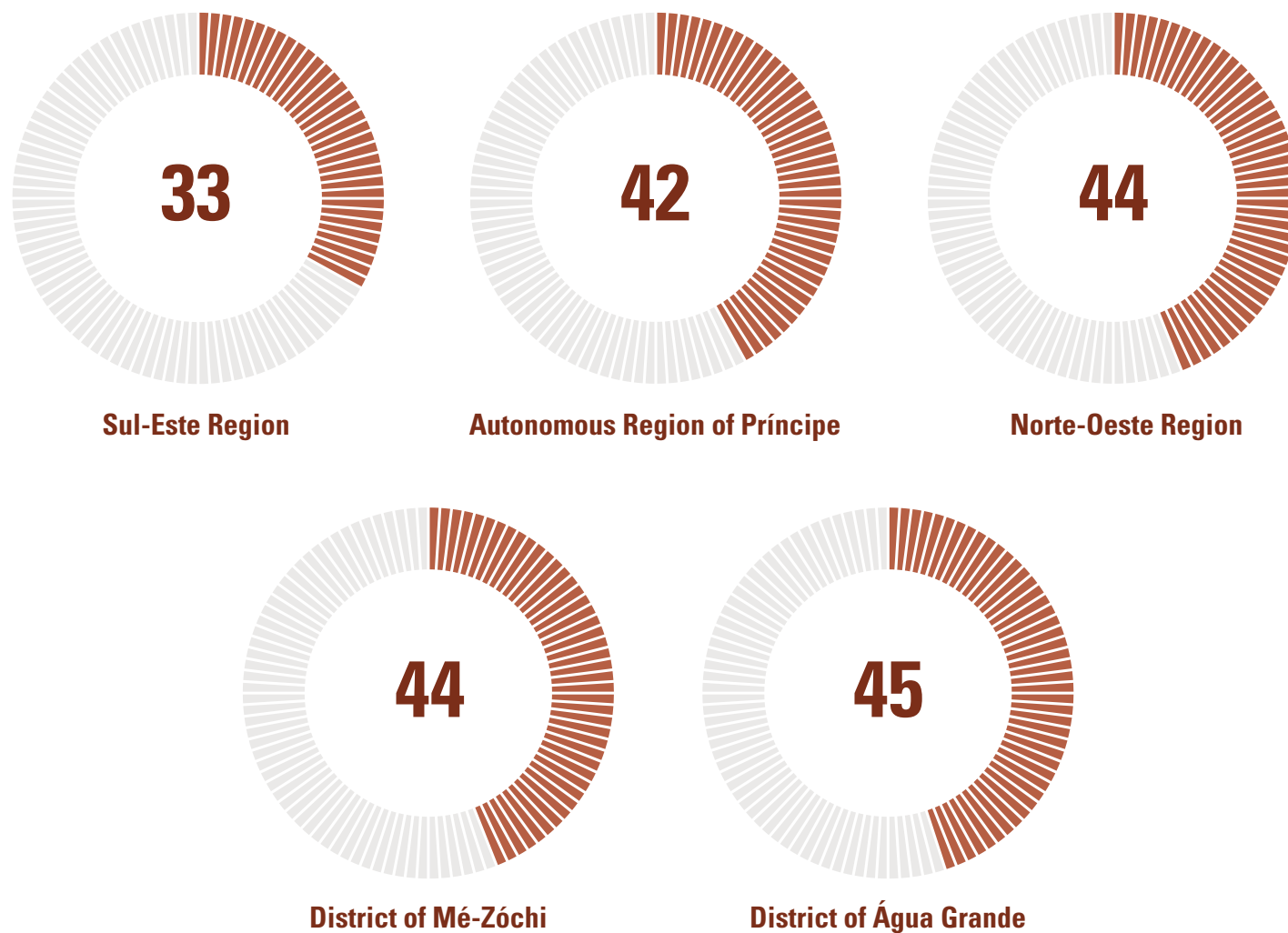


Notes: 'Living elsewhere' includes parents living abroad as well as those living elsewhere in Sao Tome and Principe. These data refer to the population of children living in households.  
Source: MICS 2019.



## Almost half of children from the District of Água Grande, District of Mé-Zóchi and Norte-Oeste Region have at least one parent living elsewhere

Figure 2.8. Percentage of children aged 0 to 17 years with at least one parent living elsewhere, by region



Notes: 'Living elsewhere' includes parents living abroad as well as those living elsewhere in Sao Tome and Principe. These data refer to the population of children living in households.  
Source: MICS 2019.

# 3. VIOLENCE

**Children have the right to be protected from violence in all its forms – physical, emotional, psychological and sexual – as well as neglect. Violence against children can occur in many settings, including homes, schools, neighbourhoods or online. It can be perpetrated by strangers or by those closest to children, such as parents and caregivers, other family members, teachers, friends or peers.**

Violence against children remains all too common and has many serious short- and long-term consequences. It can compromise children's health, development and well-being and create negative coping behaviours and impaired mental health.

Violence against children continues to be a serious problem in Sao Tome and Principe, despite efforts by UNICEF and partners to raise awareness of its negative impact on child development. In addition to social tolerance for physical and psychological violence and caregivers' lack of knowledge of and willingness to implement alternative, non-violent methods of discipline, public servants responsible for prevention and care (judges, prosecutors, police, medical staff, teachers and social workers) are hindered by inadequate specialized knowledge and by resource constraints. Further challenges, aggravated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, include a lack of trust and belief in the effectiveness of services to secure justice or provide the necessary psychosocial support to victims of violence.

The Government and UNICEF have worked together over the last 15 years to bring about change and create a child protection system that addresses violence, abuse and exploitation. In 2006, the Counselling Centre against Domestic Violence was established, and training on the issue of violence against children and women was delivered in the years that followed to strengthen human resources and ensure adequate care and follow-up on cases of domestic violence among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), health centres, social work services and

law enforcement entities. In each district police station, dedicated units for domestic violence have been established.

The National Child Protection Policy (PNPC) and its first Action Plan were adopted in 2016 as a result of participatory work among all stakeholders. Since then, efforts have been focused on the holistic capacity-building of the Directorate of Social Protection, Solidarity and Family. Despite this achievement, the multi-sectoral body set up by the PNPC to ensure coordination of interventions related to the implementation of the national policy was not functional. To remedy this situation, a technical meeting of the National Commission for the Protection of Children was held in November 2021 to evaluate the Action Plan and draft a proposal for the biennium 2022-2023.

New legislation – the Code of Jurisdictional Organization of Minors – to protect children at risk and in danger of violence, abuse and exploitation, including provisions on alternative care and justice for children, entered into force in 2018. This has been accompanied by training on the new legislation for the various sectors responsible for its implementation. In May 2021, the first conference on sexual violence and sexual abuse of minors was held in the country. The meeting was organized by a civil society platform composed of several NGOs and included participation from the Minister of Justice. The objective was to mobilize decision-makers and civil society around the issue to seek urgent solutions to put an end to sexual abuse, especially of minors, and to establish a National Day for Prevention of Sexual Abuse.





## DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THIS SECTION

### **Non-violent discipline**

Explaining why a behaviour is wrong, taking away privileges, not allowing the child to leave the house or giving the child something else to do.

### **Violent discipline**

Any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression.

### **Physical punishment**

Shaking, hitting or slapping a child on the hand/arm/leg, hitting on the bottom or elsewhere on the body with a hard object, spanking or hitting on the bottom with a bare hand, hitting or slapping on the face, head or ears and hitting or beating hard and repeatedly.

### **Severe physical punishment**

Hitting or slapping a child on the face, head or ears and hitting or beating a child hard and repeatedly.

### **Psychological aggression**

Shouting, yelling or screaming at a child as well as calling a child offensive names such as 'dumb' or 'lazy'.



## Most children in Sao Tome and Principe experience both violent and non-violent discipline

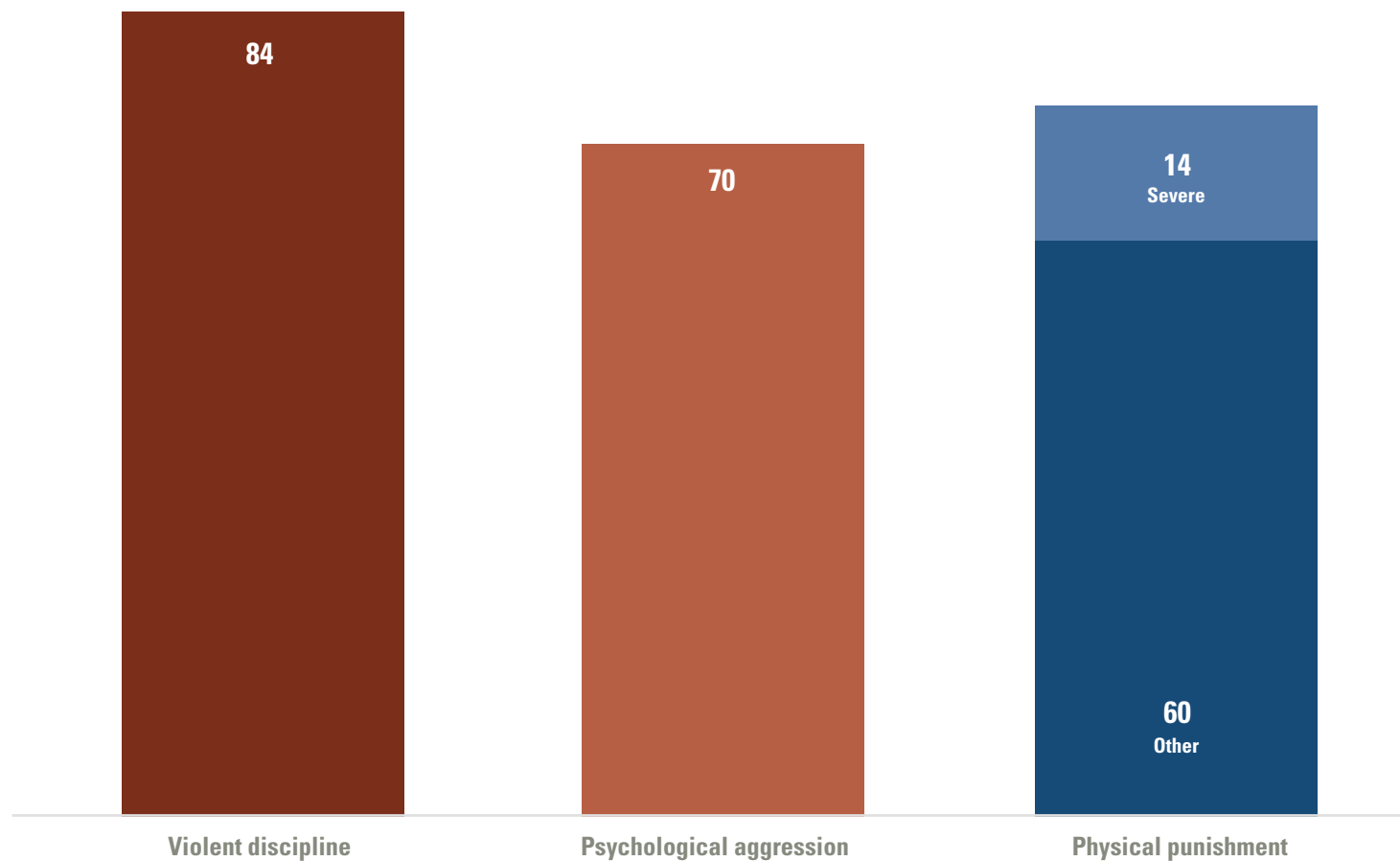
Figure 3.1. Percentage distribution of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced discipline by caregivers in the past month, by type



Source: MICS 2019.

## Seventy per cent of children are exposed to psychological aggression, while 1 in 7 experience severe physical punishment

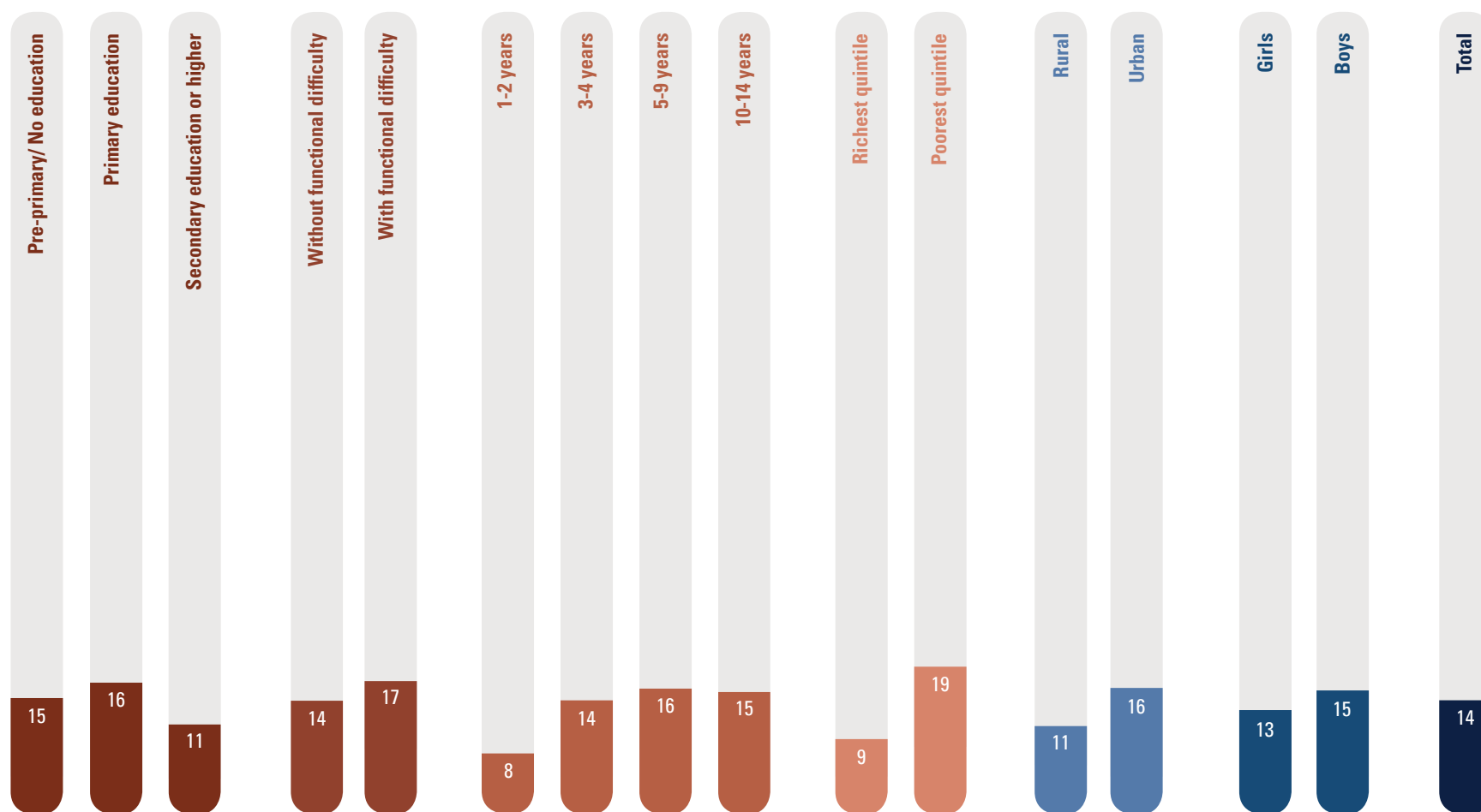
Figure 3.2. Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced violent discipline by caregivers in the past month, by type



Source: MICS 2019.

## Children experience severe physical punishment regardless of their age, sex, residence, functional difficulty, household wealth or mother's education

Figure 3.3. Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced severe physical punishment by caregivers in the past month, by background characteristics

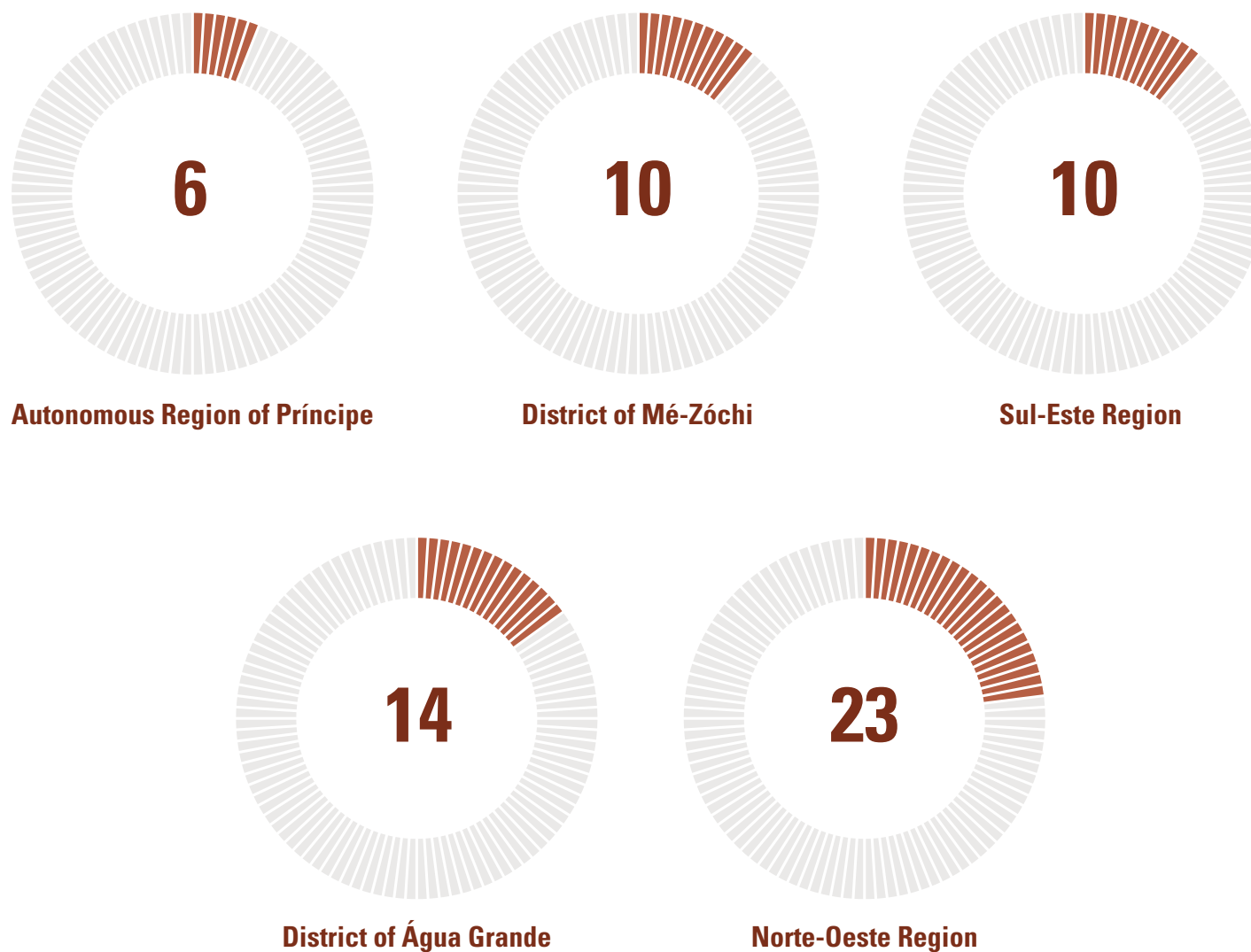


Notes: Data on education refer to the education level of the mother. Data disaggregated by functional difficulty refer to children aged 2 to 14 years.

Source: MICS 2019.

## Children's exposure to severe physical punishment varies by region, with the highest levels found in Norte-Oeste

Figure 3.4. Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced severe physical punishment by caregivers in the past month, by region

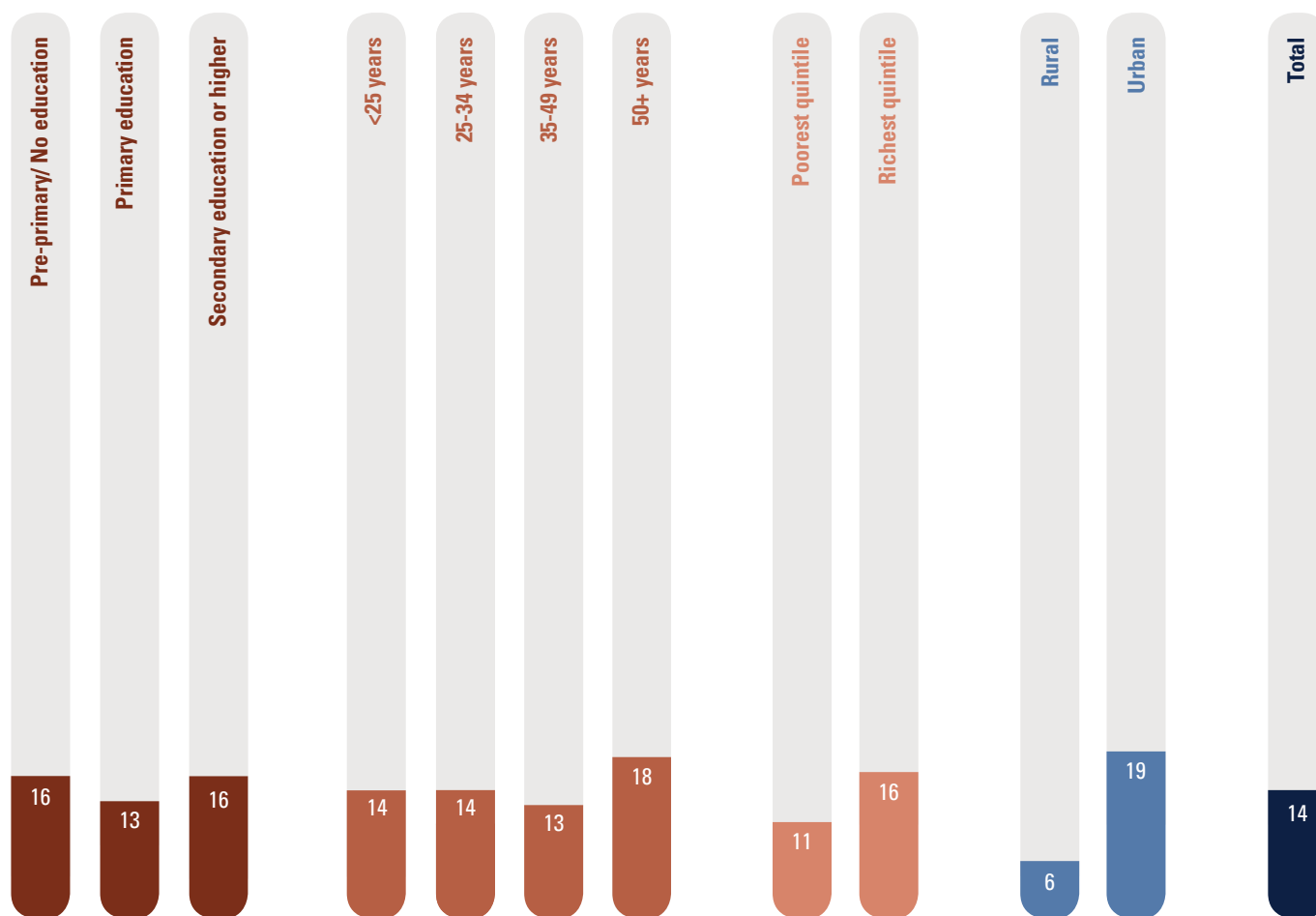


Source: MICS 2019.



## Fourteen per cent of mothers believe that physical punishment is a necessary form of discipline, with those living in urban areas more likely to hold this opinion than those in rural areas

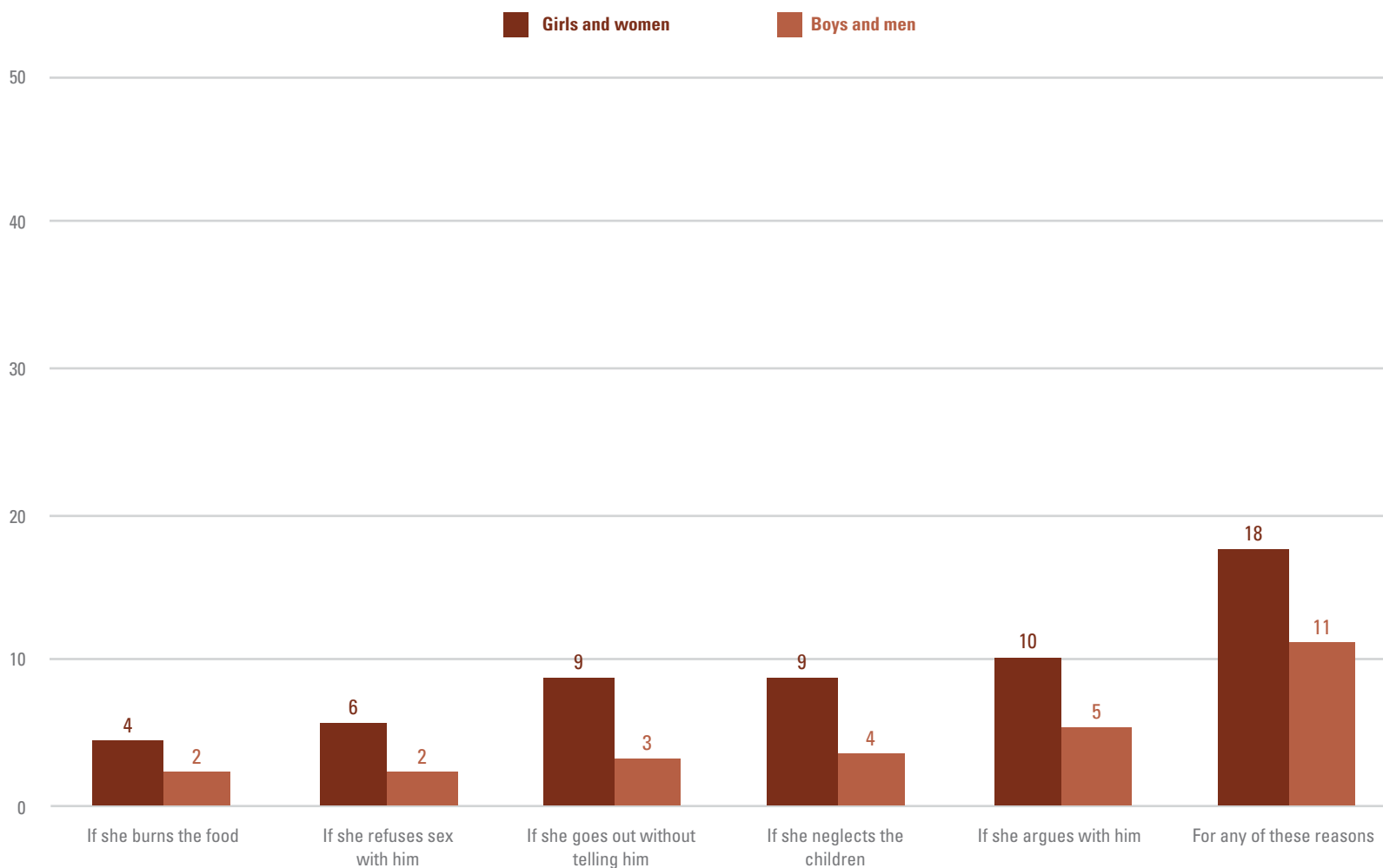
Figure 3.5. Percentage of mothers who believe that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children, by background characteristics



Source: MICS 2019.

## Girls and women are more likely than boys and men to think a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances

Figure 3.6. Percentage of girls and women and boys and men aged 15 to 49 years who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances, by reason

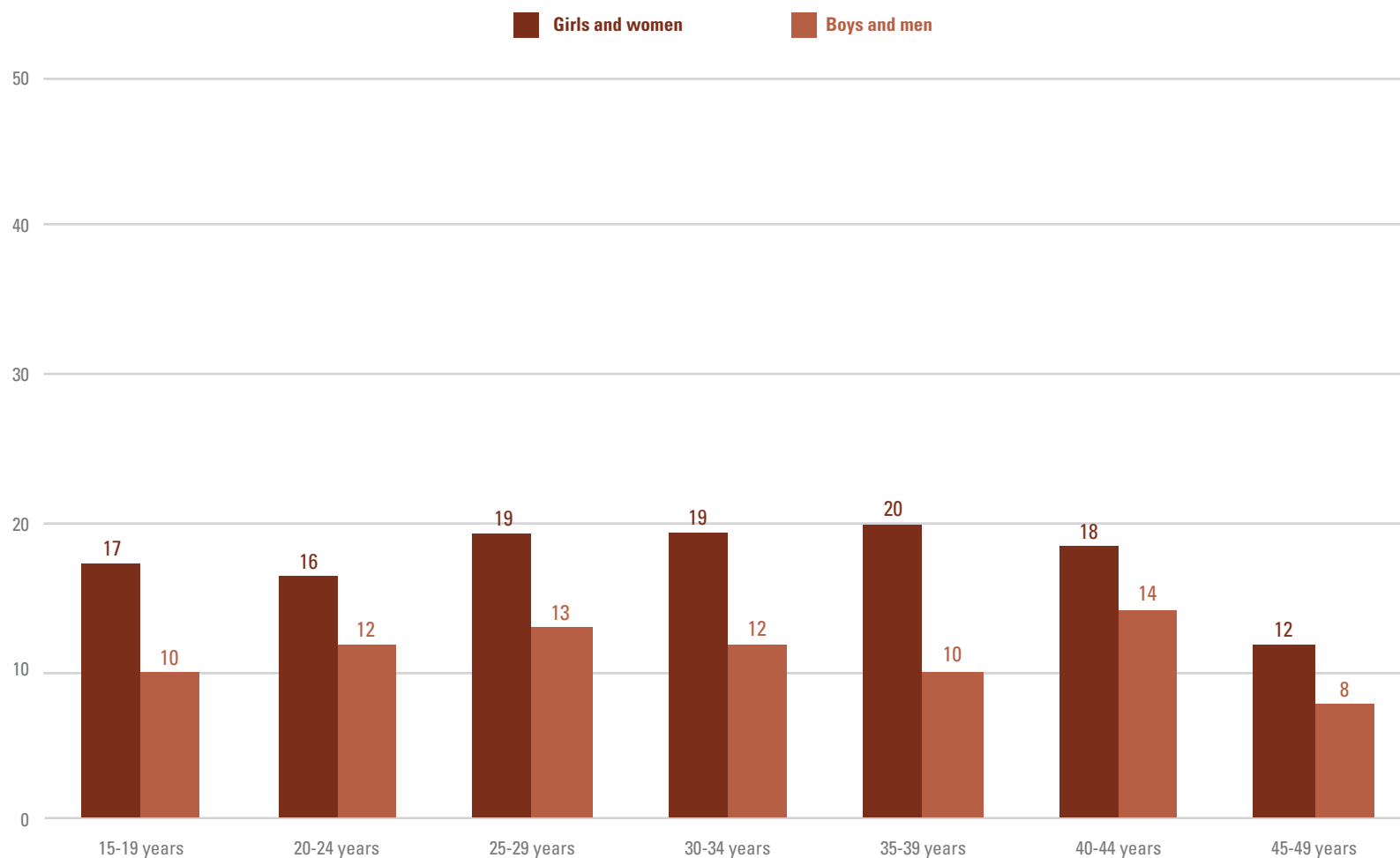


Note: Data in this chart reflect social norms around gender and agreement with wife-beating under certain conditions; they do not reflect the actual prevalence of domestic violence or wife-beating.

Source: MICS 2019.

## Girls and women are more likely to justify wife-beating than boys and men at any age

Figure 3.7. Percentage of girls and women and boys and men aged 15 to 49 years who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances, by age

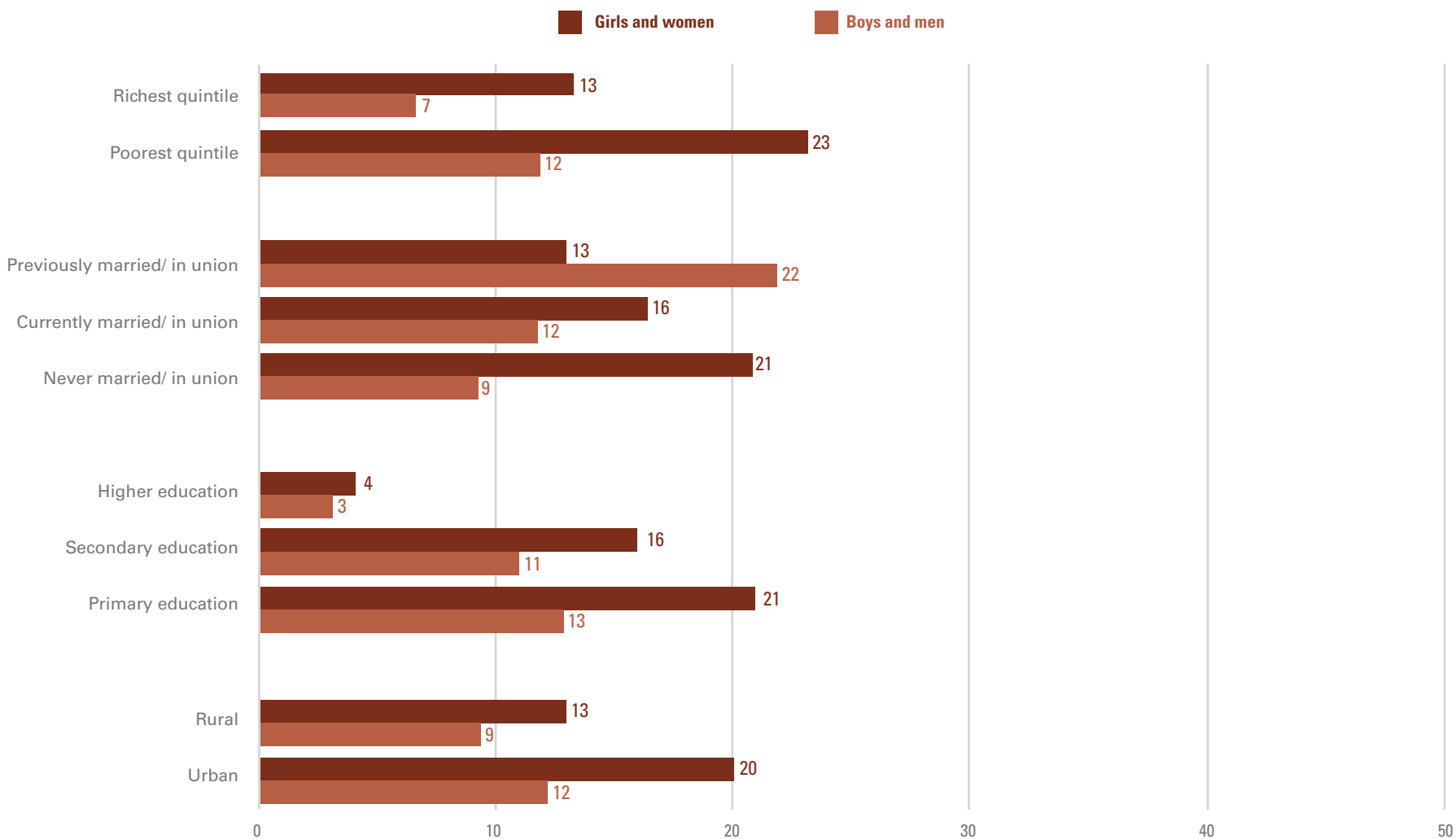


Note: Data in this chart reflect social norms around gender and agreement with wife-beating under certain conditions; they do not reflect the actual prevalence of domestic violence or wife-beating.

Source: MICS 2019.

## Justification of wife-beating is more common among girls and women in the poorest households

Figure 3.8. Percentage of girls and women and boys and men aged 15 to 49 years who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances, by background characteristics



Note: Data in this chart reflect social norms around gender and agreement with wife-beating under certain conditions; they do not reflect the actual prevalence of domestic violence or wife-beating.

Source: MICS 2019.





# 4. CHILD LABOUR

**Child labour is any work that harms children’s health, development and well-being. Not all work done by children falls into this category. For instance, light work done by adolescents for a few hours a week, such as helping a family-run business, can teach children skills and connect them to their communities.**

However, when work is dangerous, exploitative and/or interferes with children’s schooling, play and health, then it is considered child labour and is a violation of children’s rights. Child labour is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and is often worsened by economic shocks, family disintegration and public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Sao Tome and Principe, the Legal Regime of Individual Employment Conditions of 1992 defined the minimum age of employment as 14 years and limited the number of hours that minors can legally work to 35 hours per week. Additionally, the law prohibited employment of children under age 18 in heavy work performed under unhealthy or dangerous conditions such as underground (article 129), and employers have to provide minors in their employ with work conditions adequate to their age and ensure their physical and psychological development under the best possible conditions. Under the law, night work of minors under the age of 16 was prohibited. The law also required that employers provide minors working for them with adequate training and allow them to attend professional/vocational training courses. Informal work by children was not covered under the law.

ILO Convention 182 on the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour and ILO Convention 138 on the minimum age of employment were both ratified by Sao Tome and Principe in 2005. In spite of these legal provisions, child labour persists in the country, in particular in the agriculture, plantation and artisanal fishing industries and among street sellers. One of the main drivers for

child labour in the country is poverty as most children have to work to help their families. Other causes are a deficient school system that does not ensure the attendance of all children in school and limited capacities of the General Labour Inspectorate to monitor and implement the labour laws of the country.

Sao Tome and Principe began its systematic intervention to combat child labour in 2012 through the implementation of ILO’s International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), which has supported actions in Portuguese-speaking African countries through knowledge, awareness, South-South cooperation and the production of new labour legislation and national action plans. A new labour law enacted in 2019 raised the minimum age for employment to 15 years and also requires that minors who work complete compulsory schooling or attend equivalent training.

In the absence of a national policy to combat child labour, the National Plan for Action Against Child Labour, drafted in 2012, aimed to coordinate interventions being carried out by the various stakeholders and introduce new actions aimed at prevention and elimination. Participants in the elaboration of the Plan proposed the targets of 2018 for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and 2020 for the eradication of all child labour in the country. Despite these aspirations, the Plan has not been formally approved or executed by the Government, and there is a need for further engagement and ownership among political decision-makers to translate the Plan into concrete actions to address the issue.





## DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THIS SECTION

### Child labour

Children engaged in economic activities and/or household chores in the past week at or above age-specific hourly thresholds (general production boundary basis), defined as follows:

- Aged 5 to 11 years: children working at least 1 hour per week in economic activity and/or involved in unpaid household services for more than 21 hours per week
- Aged 12 to 14 years: children working for at least 14 hours per week in economic activity and/or involved in unpaid household services for more than 21 hours per week
- Aged 15 to 17 years: children working for more than 43 hours per week in economic activity.

### Economic activities

Paid or unpaid work for someone who is not a member of the household; work for a family farm or business.

### Hazardous work

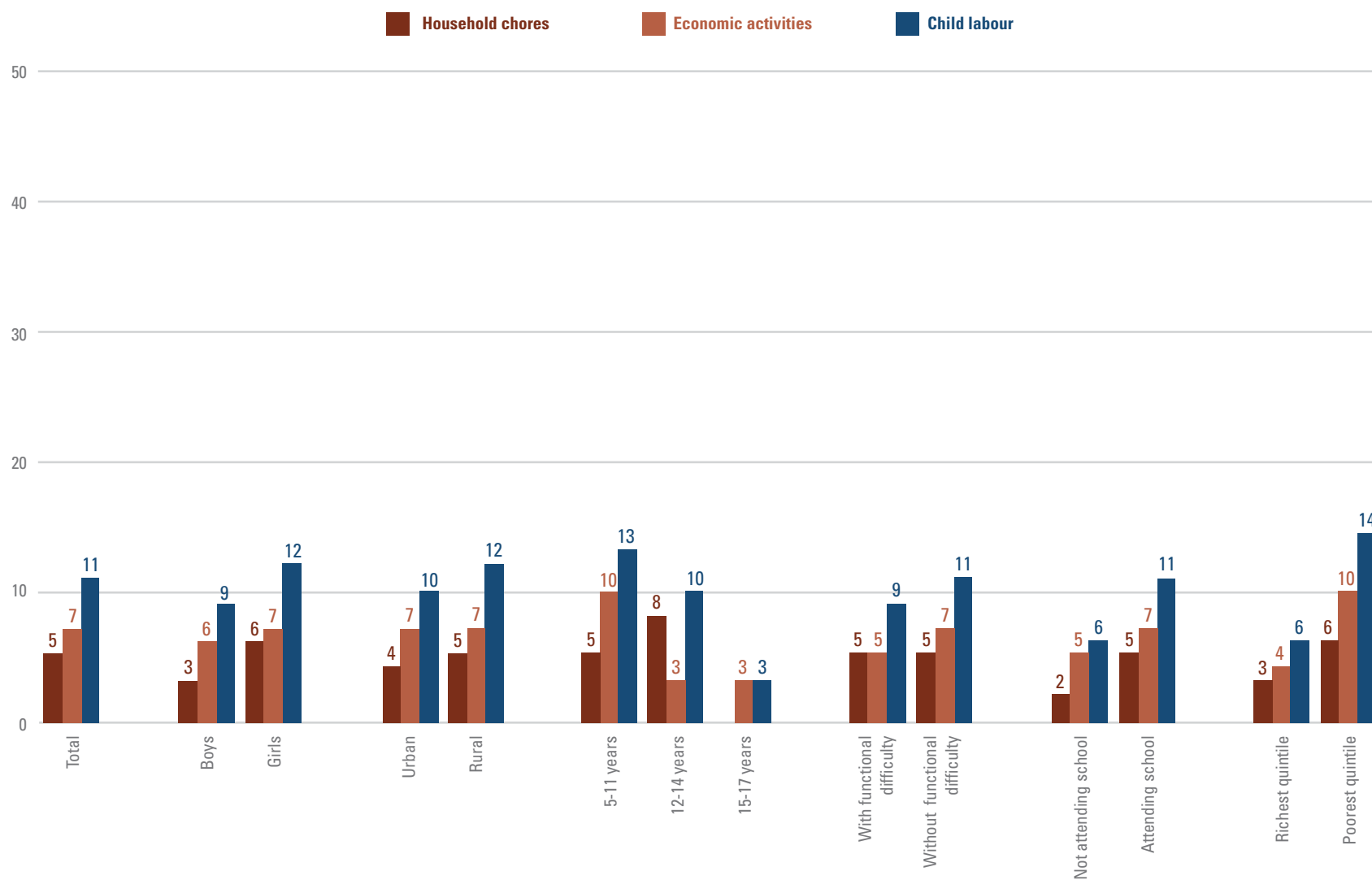
Involvement in any activities that require working with dangerous tools such as knives; operating heavy machinery; exposure to dust, fumes or gas; exposure to extreme cold, heat or humidity; exposure to loud noises or vibrations; working at heights; working with chemicals such as pesticides, glues or explosives; and exposure to other things, processes or conditions harmful to a child's health or safety.

### Household chores

Domestic work for the household including shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing dishes or clothes and caring for children or someone who is old or sick. It also includes collecting firewood or fetching water.

## One in ten children in Sao Tome and Principe are involved in child labour

Figure 4.1. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in household chores, economic activities and child labour at or above age-specific thresholds in the past week, by background characteristics



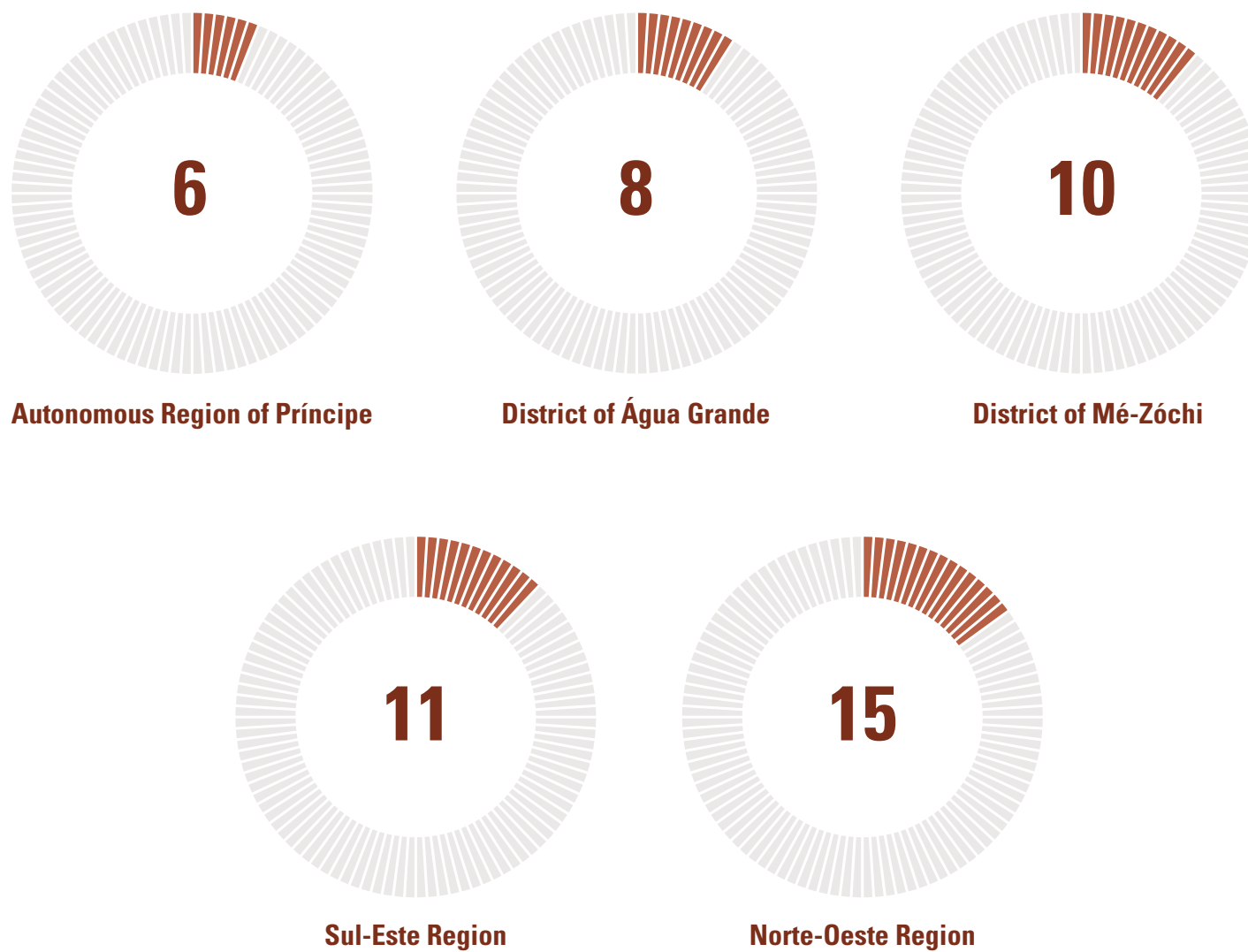
Note: Data on engagement in household chores among children aged 15 to 17 years are not presented since no hourly threshold is applied.

Source: MICS 2019.



## The Norte-Oeste region has the highest level of child labour

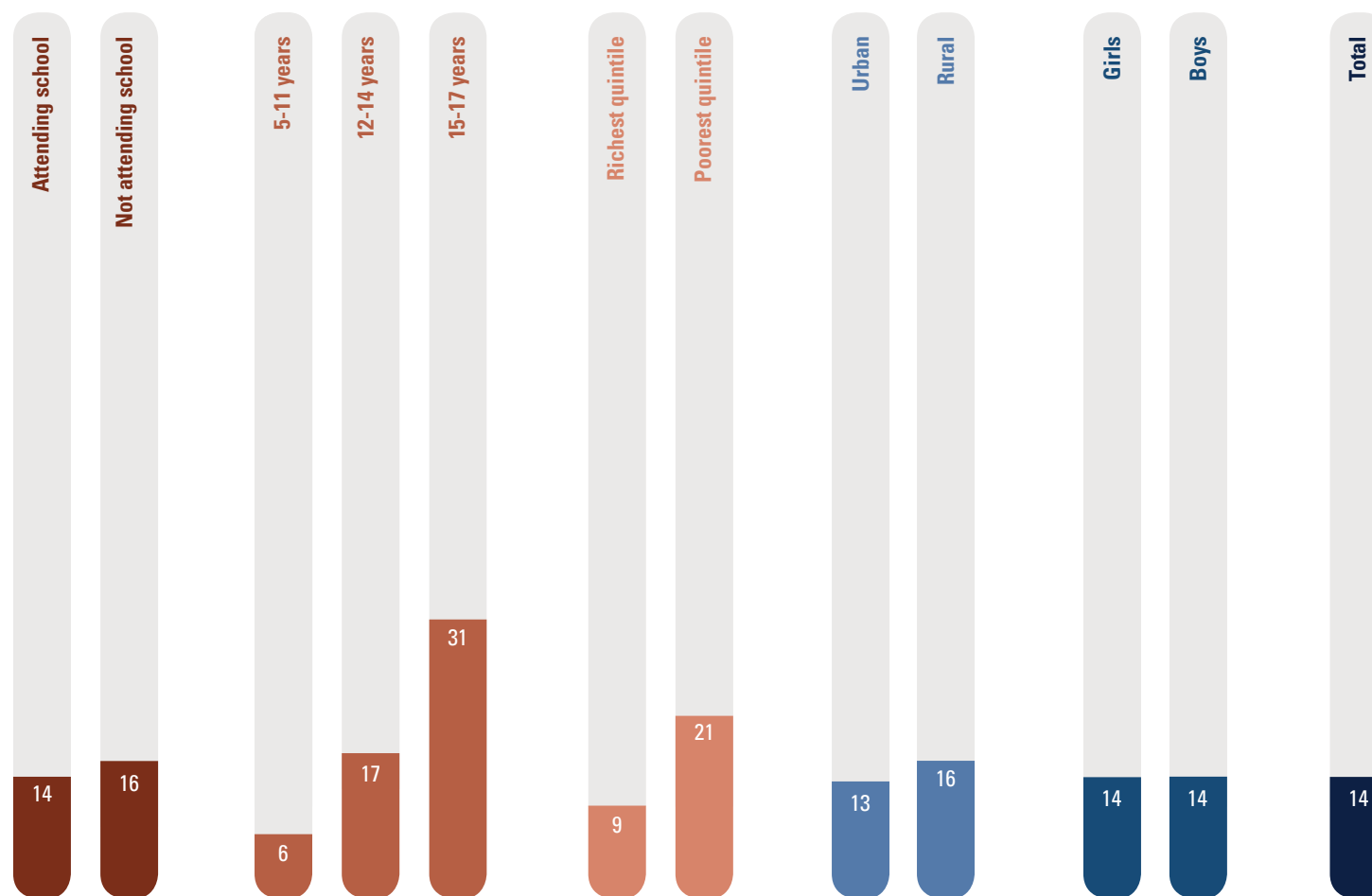
Figure 4.2. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in child labour in the past week, by region



Source: MICS 2019.

## In the past week, one in seven children were involved in hazardous work; this is more likely to occur among children in poor households, in rural areas and those aged 12 and older

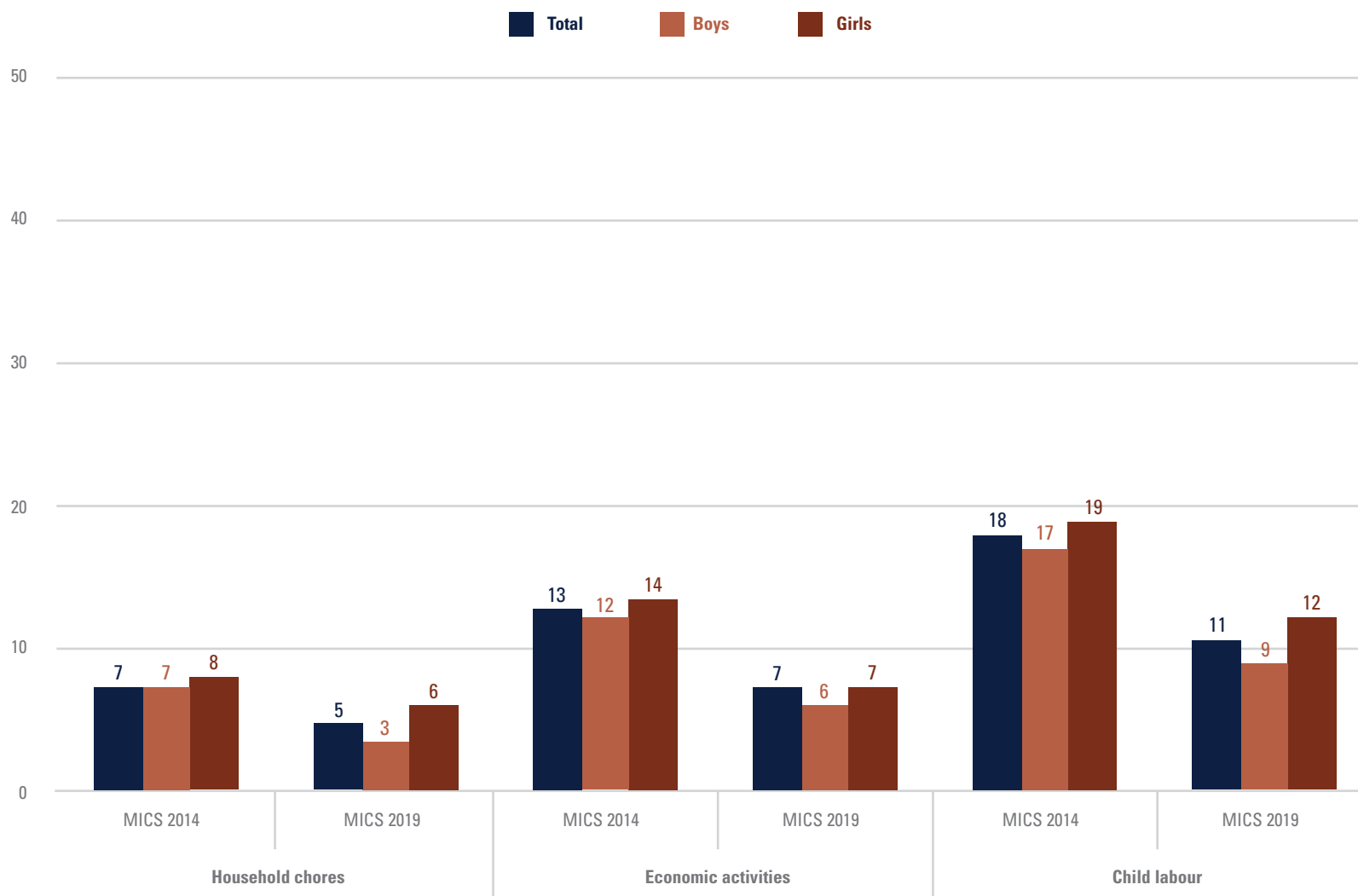
Figure 4.3. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years working under hazardous conditions in the past week, by background characteristics



Source: MICS 2019.

## There was a decline in child labour between 2014 and 2019

Figure 4.4. Percentage of children aged 5 to 17 years engaged in household chores, economic activities and child labour at or above age-specific thresholds in the past week, by sex



Sources: MICS 2014 and 2019.







# 5. CHILD MARRIAGE



## **Child marriage has occurred throughout history and around the world, but it is nonetheless a serious violation of children's rights.**

It often pushes children – especially girls – out of school. And it is also tied to early childbearing, which can in turn have negative impacts on the health, development and well-being of both the young mother and her child.

Sao Tome and Principe is signatory to several international treaties that call for an end to child marriage, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The country recently approved the Third National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity in Sao Tome and Principe (2019-2026). The general objective of the Strategy is to ensure that interventions for the promotion of gender equality and respect for human rights are carried out in an integrated manner. Among other things, it includes specific strategies to help eliminate harmful practices that violate the rights of women, men, girls and boys.

In addition, the Government has made a concerted effort to ensure that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls are reflected in the legal code by amending laws and adopting penal frameworks that strengthen these protections. This includes the adoption of the Family Code Law no. 19 in 2018, which stipulates that marriage is only legal after the age of 18 for both sexes. However, the law does not prohibit other forms of informal unions that are practised in the country.

A number of actions have been taken more broadly to support gender mainstreaming and to protect and promote the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls in the country. For instance,

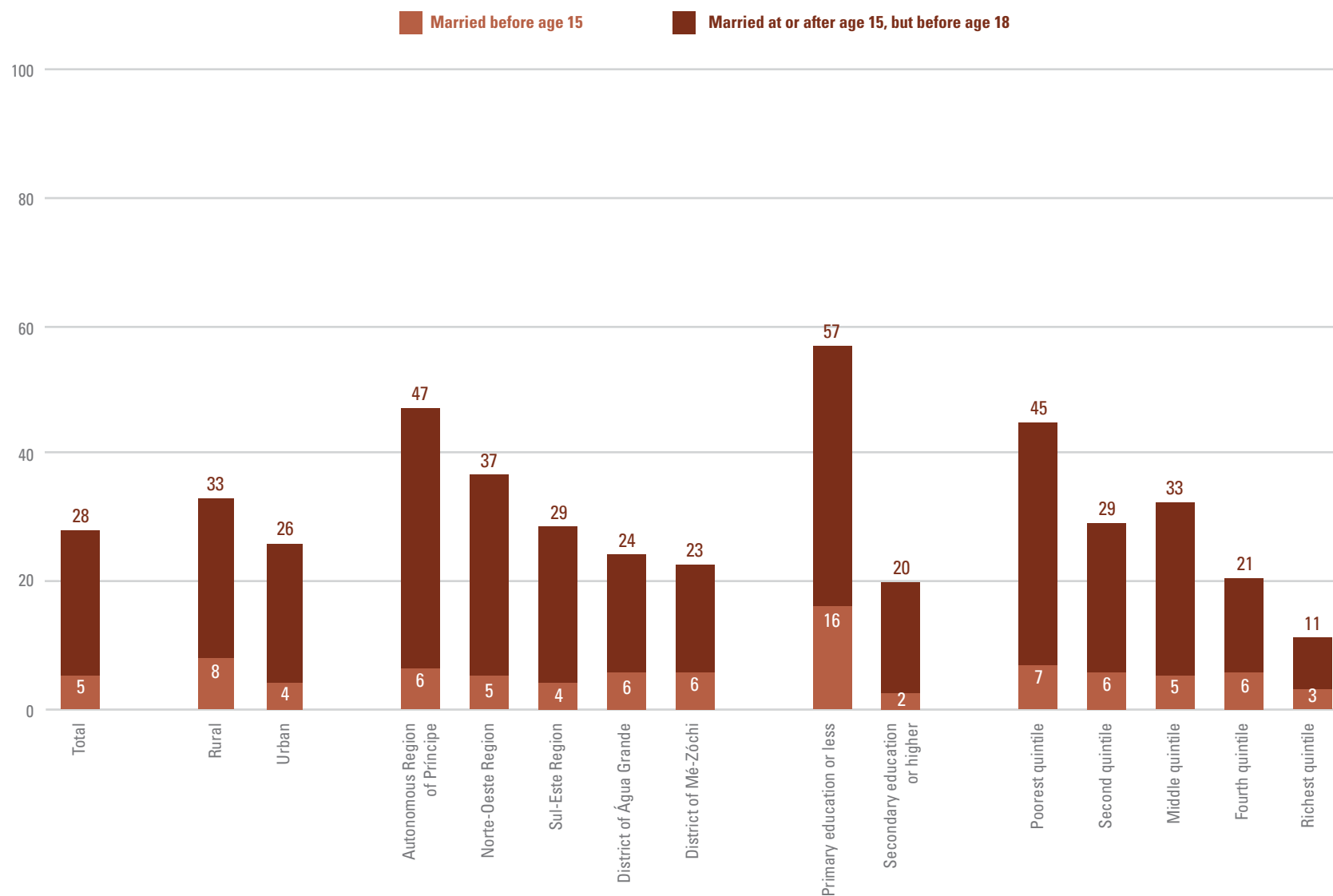
the National Health Policy of 2017 is a guiding document for health policy at the national level and provides an ambitious vision of health for all, with particular attention to women's and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, aligned with the global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Advocacy has also intensified for the implementation of steering documents that integrate gender issues in education, such as the Education Policy Charter (2012-2022).

UNICEF, in partnership with the Government through the Youth Institute, National Youth Council and Children and Youth Parliament, has also implemented a set of initiatives aimed at reducing early marriage/union and early pregnancy by engaging girls in efforts such as:

- Production and dissemination of plays, miniseries and lectures on the subject
- Plenary sessions in Parliament organized by adolescents and young national and international Members of Parliament to debate issues related to marriage
- Organization of marches and social mobilization to advocate for the enforcement of laws with the engagement of ministers and headmasters
- Creation of digital platforms such as U-Report for data collection and information sharing on issues affecting adolescents such as early marriage and pregnancy
- Training peer educators and adolescents in life skills.

## More than one in four young women were married before turning 18; child marriage is more common among those from poor households and those with primary education or less

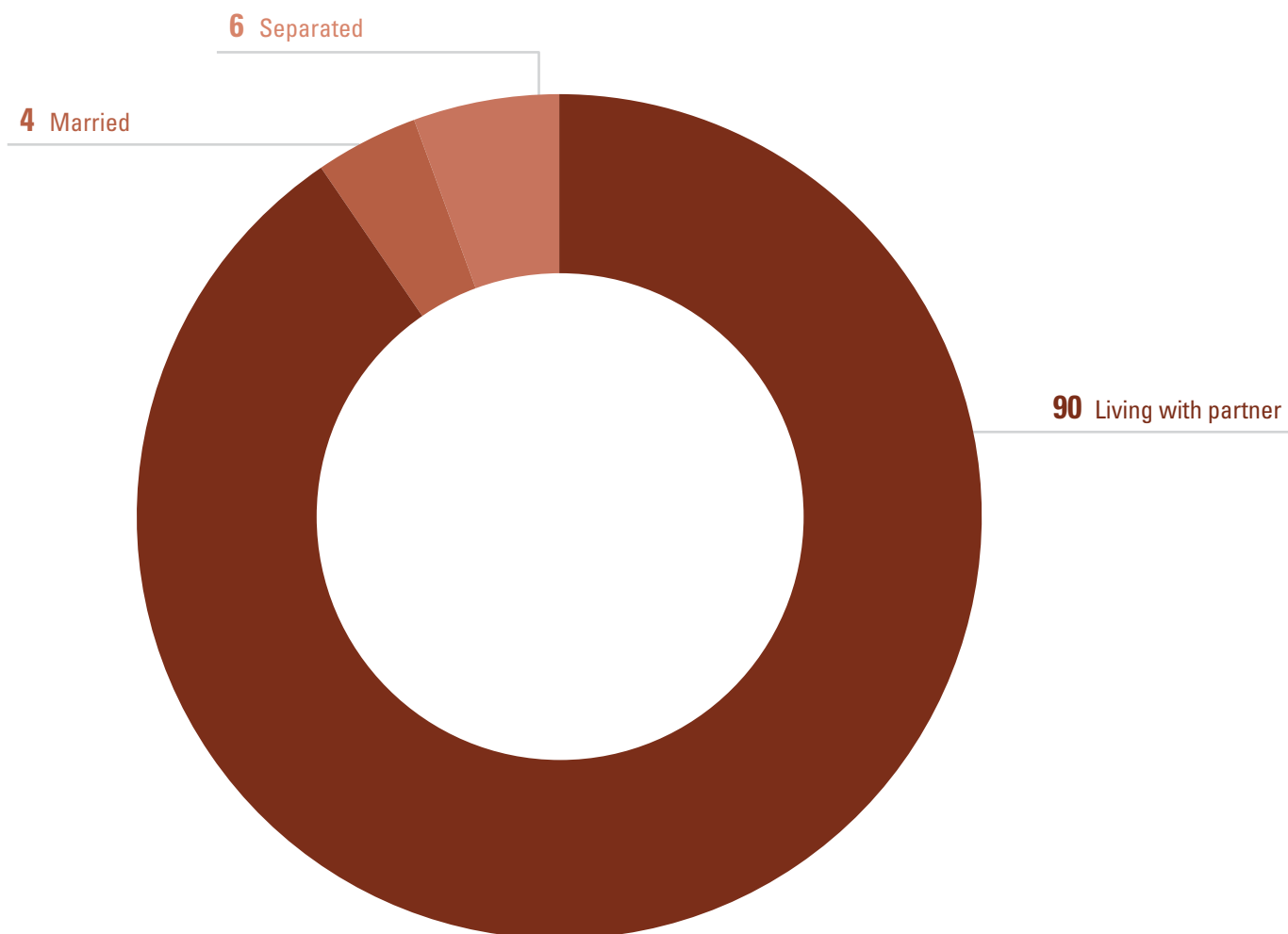
Figure 5.1. Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18, by background characteristics



Source: MICS 2019.

## Child marriage primarily takes the form of informal unions rather than legal marriages

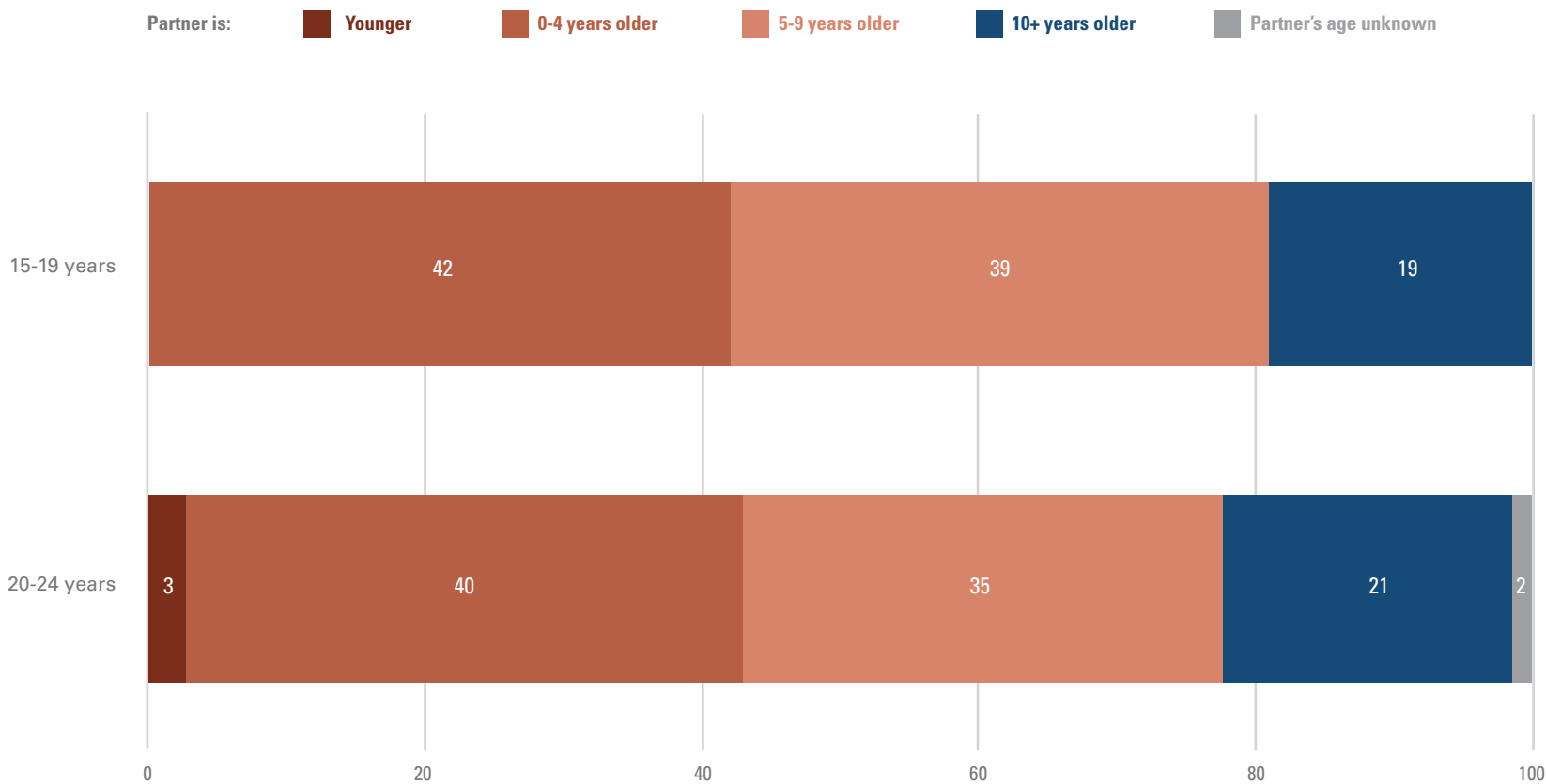
Figure 5.2. Percentage distribution of ever-married girls aged 15 to 17 years, by marital status



Source: MICS 2019.

## Nearly 1 in 5 married adolescent girls have partners who are at least 10 years older

Figure 5.3. Percentage distribution of currently married adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years and women aged 20 to 24 years, by age gap between the girls/women and their partners

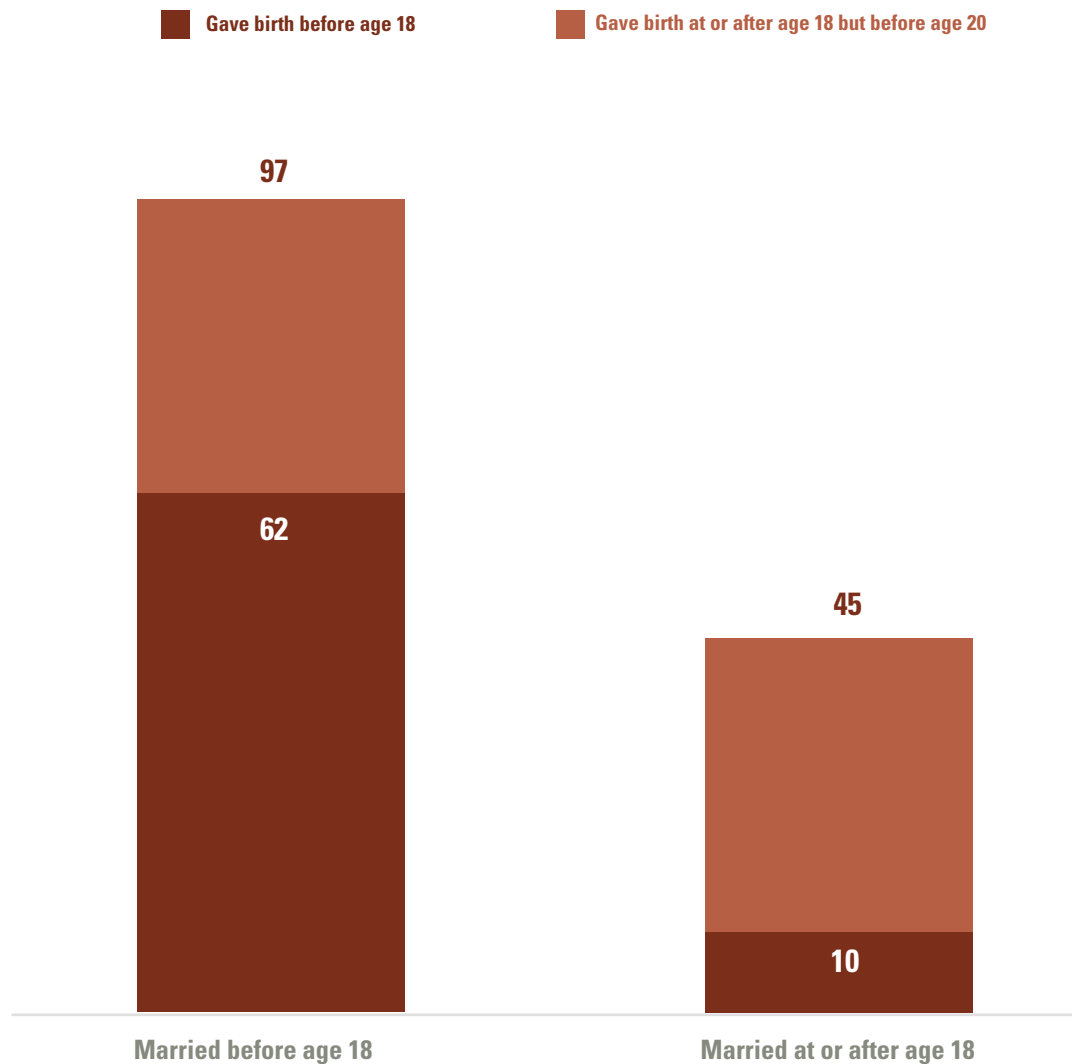


Note: Values do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: MICS 2019.

## Six in ten child brides gave birth before age 18 compared to just one in ten women who married as adults

Figure 5.4. Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years who gave birth before ages 18 and 20, by age at marriage

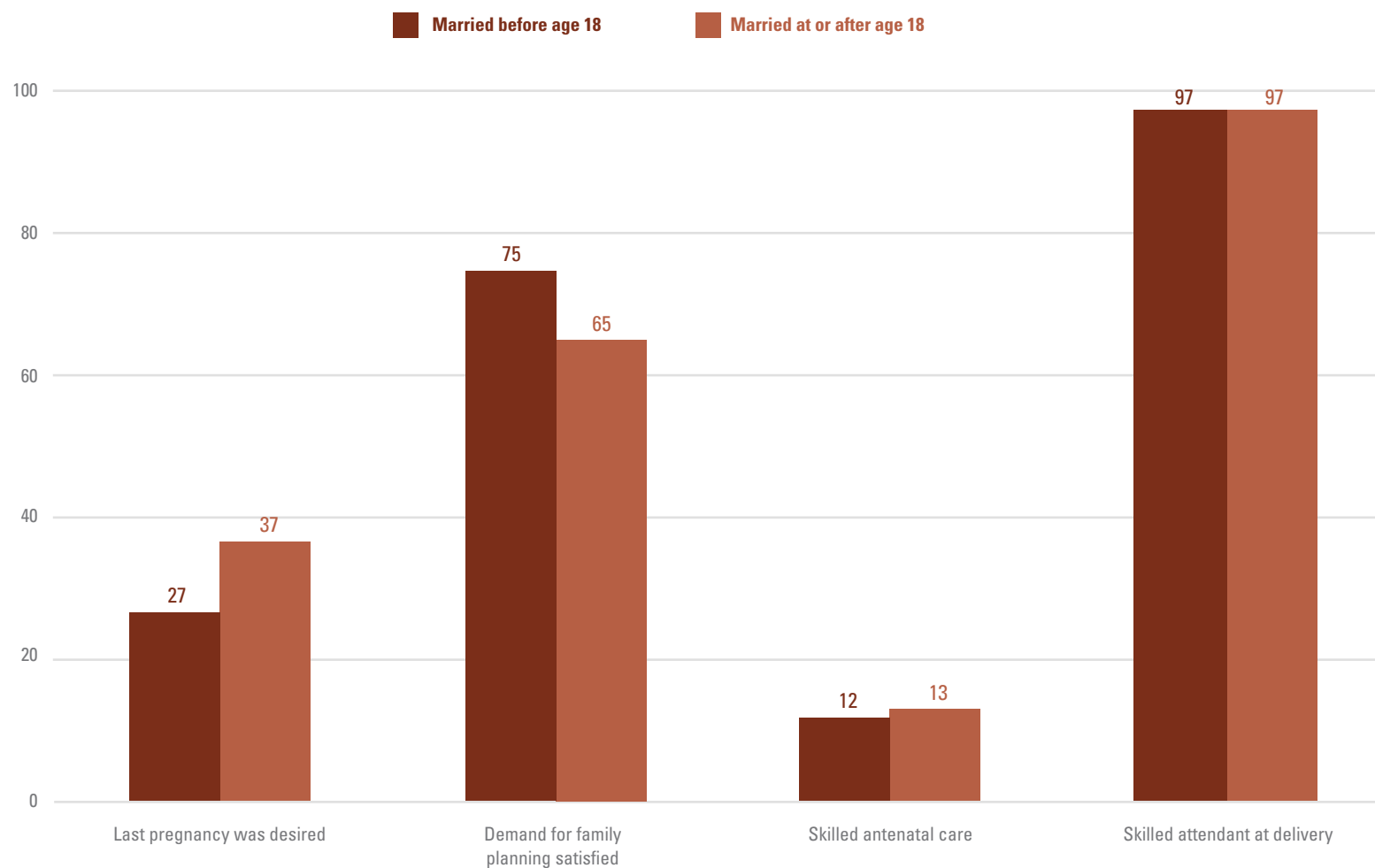


Source: MICS 2019.



## Access to antenatal and delivery care is similar among child brides and those who married in adulthood

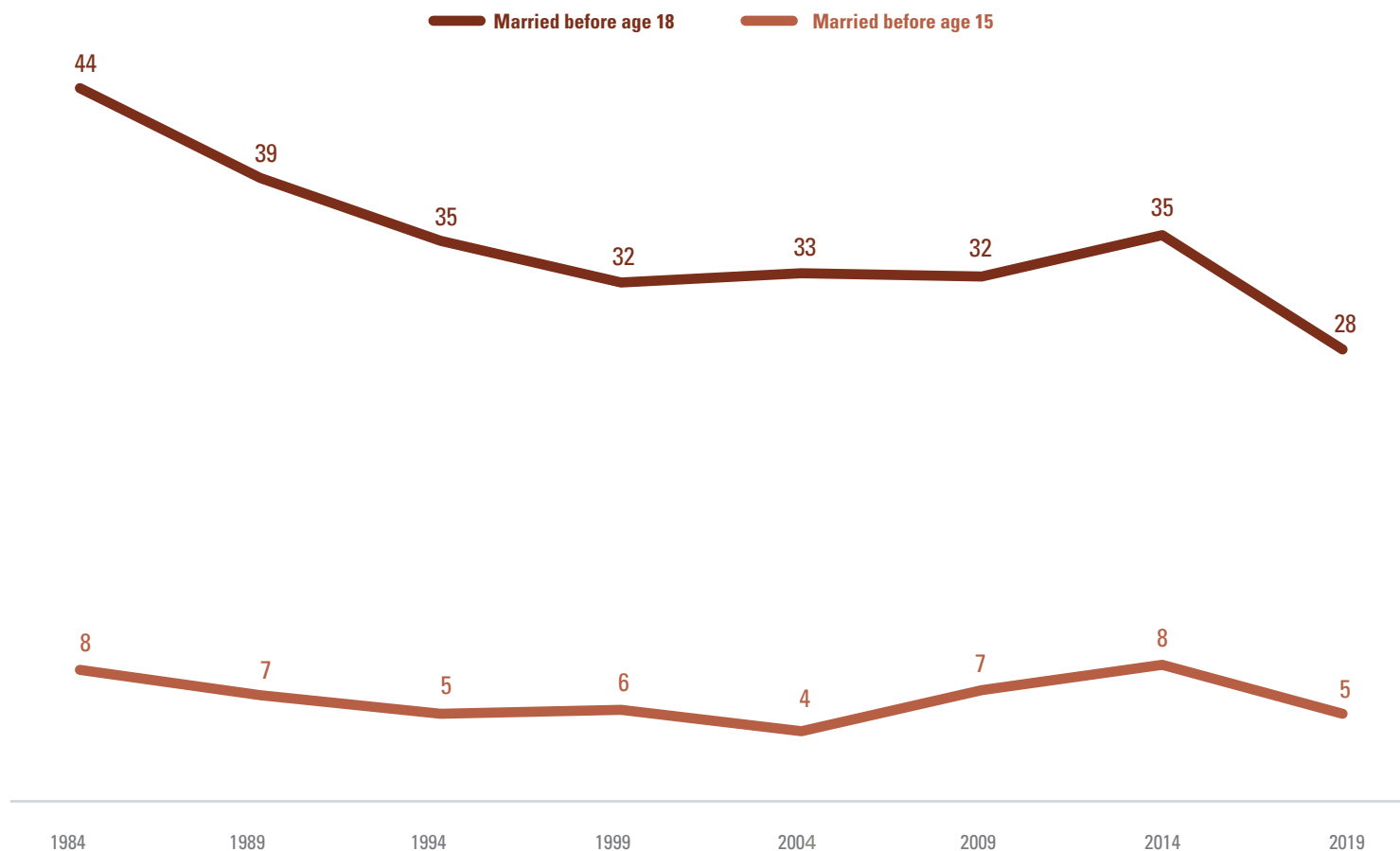
Figure 5.5. Percentage of ever-married women aged 20 to 24 years whose last pregnancy was desired, whose demand for family planning is satisfied by any method, who had four or more antenatal care visits during their last pregnancy and who had a skilled attendant during their last live birth, by age at marriage



Source: MICS 2019.

## Child marriage has been declining slowly since the 1980s; marriage before age 15 has remained uncommon over this period

Figure 5.6. Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18

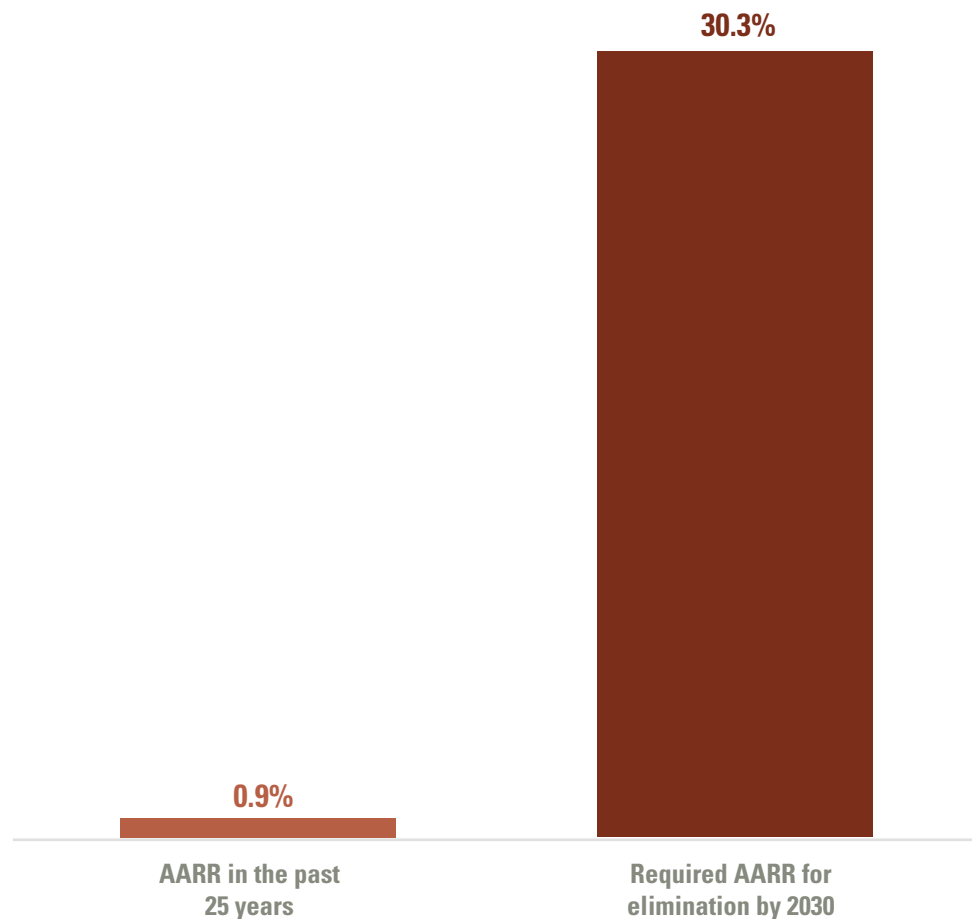


Notes: Trends in the prevalence of child marriage presented here relied on an age-cohort analysis taking into account data from MICS 2014 and 2019 and DHS 2008-2009. Data on age at marriage were used not only for the cohort aged 20 to 24 years but for all respondents through age 49 years, which allowed for a calculation of the prevalence of child marriage up to 25 years prior to the time of data collection. Results were validated across surveys for each cohort of women, and inconsistent results were excluded from the calculation of the final trend lines.

Sources: DHS 2008-2009 and MICS 2014 and 2019.

## The rate of decline is not sufficient to meet the SDG target; eliminating child marriage by 2030 would require substantial acceleration

Figure 5.7. Average annual rate of reduction (AARR) in the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, observed and required for elimination



Note: For statistical purposes, 'elimination' is defined here as a child marriage prevalence of 1 per cent or less.



**CONCLUSION**



## In the 46 years since independence, there has been a rise in the awareness of the importance of protecting and upholding children's rights in Sao Tome and Principe.

At the international level, the country has ratified the main conventions for the protection and promotion of children's rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ILO Conventions 138 and 182 on child labour, the CEDAW and the Protocol against trafficking in persons, especially women and children. In addition, at the regional level, it is party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Significant progress has been made to amend outdated laws and draft new ones to harmonize legislation and cover gaps in the areas of education, health, criminal law, domestic violence, child labour and child protection. In the area of policy, this engagement led to the development, through a participatory and intersectoral process, of the National Child Protection Policy based on four pillars – prevention, victim services, legal protection and functionality of the child protection system – and its Action Plan for the biennium 2016/2017.

The picture in Sao Tome and Principe with regards to child protection is a mix of successes and continued challenges:

- One of the great national successes relates to the right to legal recognition from birth. The strategies implemented since 2010 have been effective, with almost all children under 5 years of age having their births registered.
- Child marriage has been on the decline over the past few decades, but the pace of change has been relatively slow and accelerated effort is needed to eliminate this harmful practice.
- While data indicate a reduction in the prevalence of child labour in recent years, the issue persists due to a lack of

effective implementation of policies aimed at combating this violation of the right to childhood. In the coming years, strong interventions will be needed, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the declining socio-economic situation in the country.

- The prevalence of violence against children remains at worryingly high levels despite numerous interventions and significant resources invested.

### THE ROAD TO CHANGE

The National Child Protection Policy adopted in 2016 represented a shift from a fragmented focus on individual cases to a systems approach to ensuring that all levels and actors are in place to offer coordinated, holistic support to children. But the mechanism set up to ensure the coordination and follow-up of the Action Plan derived from the Policy is not working. So far, the Action Plan has never been implemented, much less updated or evaluated, mostly due to a lack of resources. Costing of the Action Plan should be a priority in the coming years of cooperation between UNICEF and the Government.

UNICEF will also advocate with the Government and other development partners to provide direct support to interventions to strengthen the social protection system, with a focus on an integrated approach between social protection of the most vulnerable families and the protection of children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Another priority area will be the deepening of knowledge about the causes of violence and abuse against children, especially sexual violence, to be able to define informed – and more effective – measures to combat these phenomena.







## TECHNICAL NOTES AND DATA SOURCES

This publication is based primarily on data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019. Demographic data are from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019*, online edition, revision 1.

Confidence intervals are not shown in this publication. Caution is therefore warranted in interpreting the results since apparent differences among groups may not be significant. Key messages were developed taking confidence intervals into account; in cases where the title indicates a difference among various population groups or countries, it has been confirmed as statistically significant.

## ENDNOTES

1. Instituto Nacional de Estatística and United Nations Children's Fund, *Inquérito de indicadores múltiplos 2019: Relatório final*, INE and UNICEF, São Tomé, 2020.
2. United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, A/RES/44/25, 1989.



For information on the data in this publication:

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