

TOWARDS ENDING HARMFUL PRACTICES IN AFRICA

A statistical overview of child marriage and female genital mutilation

CHILD MARRIAGE and FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

are serious **violations of a child's rights**. But across Africa, girls and women continue to experience these harmful practices with alarming regularity. The continent is home to **130 million child brides** and nearly **140 million girls and women who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM)**. Over **40 million girls and women** in Africa have experienced **both harmful practices**.

Globally, **Africa has the highest levels of both practices**. Their prevalence varies widely across the continent by region, country or even the community a girl is a member of. Progress towards ending these harmful practices is likewise mixed: Some countries in Africa have already made impressive advances in upholding girls' and women's rights, while in others, there is still much that needs to be done.

Governments and regional institutions across Africa have joined the global community in its **pledge to end child marriage and female genital mutilation**, guided by the goal of eliminating harmful practices set forth in Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 and of gender equality captured in Goal 17 of the African Union Agenda 2063. But as the data in this report show, **Africa must take urgent action** if it is to uphold these promises to girls and women.

Only through accelerated programmatic efforts and increased domestic resources can we ensure the **rights of every African child** are protected and the harmful practices of child marriage and female genital mutilation **ARE ELIMINATED ONCE AND FOR ALL**.



2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development Goal 5:

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

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

AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063

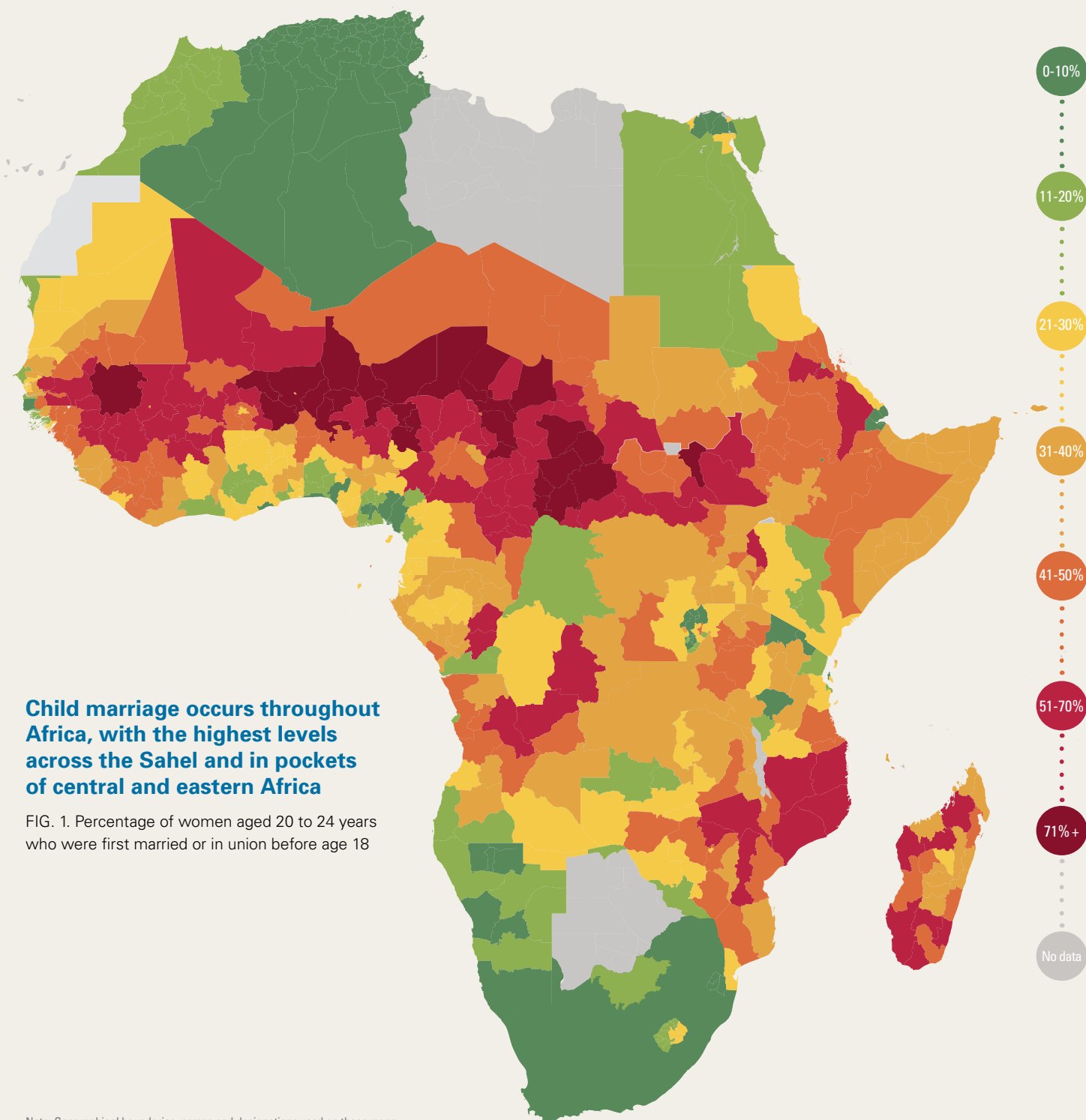
Aspiration 6: An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

Goal 17: Full gender equality in all spheres of life.

Target: All forms of gender-based violence and discrimination (social, economic, political) against women and girls will be eliminated and the latter will fully enjoy all their human rights. All harmful social practices (especially female genital mutilation and child marriages) will be ended and barriers to quality health and education for women and girls eliminated.

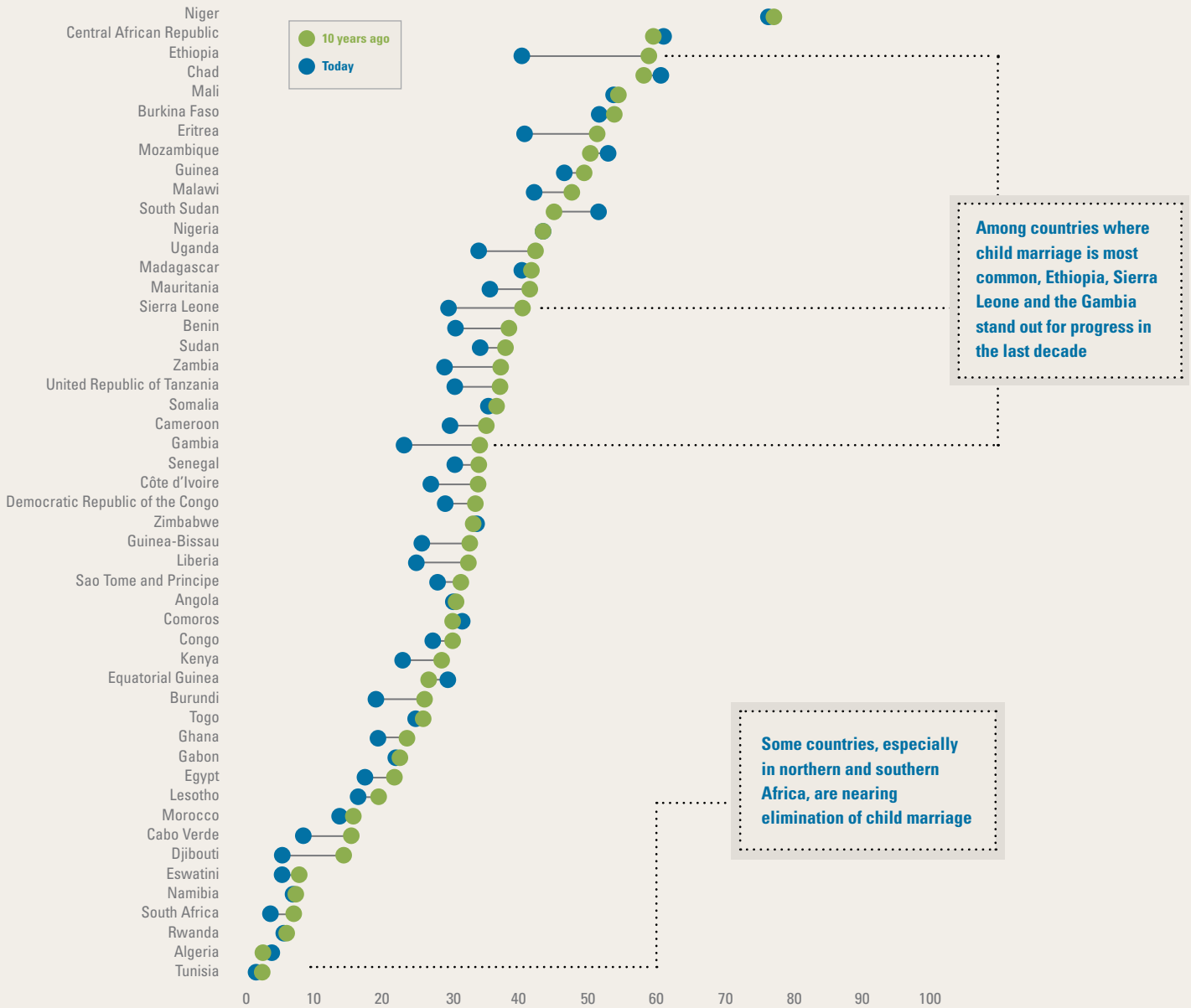
CHILD MARRIAGE

Africa is home to
130 million child brides



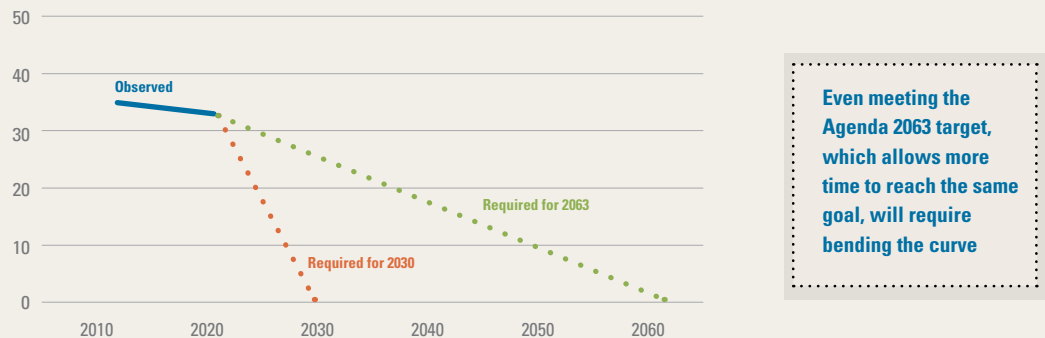
Africa encompasses countries with a diverse range of experiences in child marriage: Levels range from the highest in the world to nearly zero, and some countries have made great progress while others have seen stagnation

FIG. 2. Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



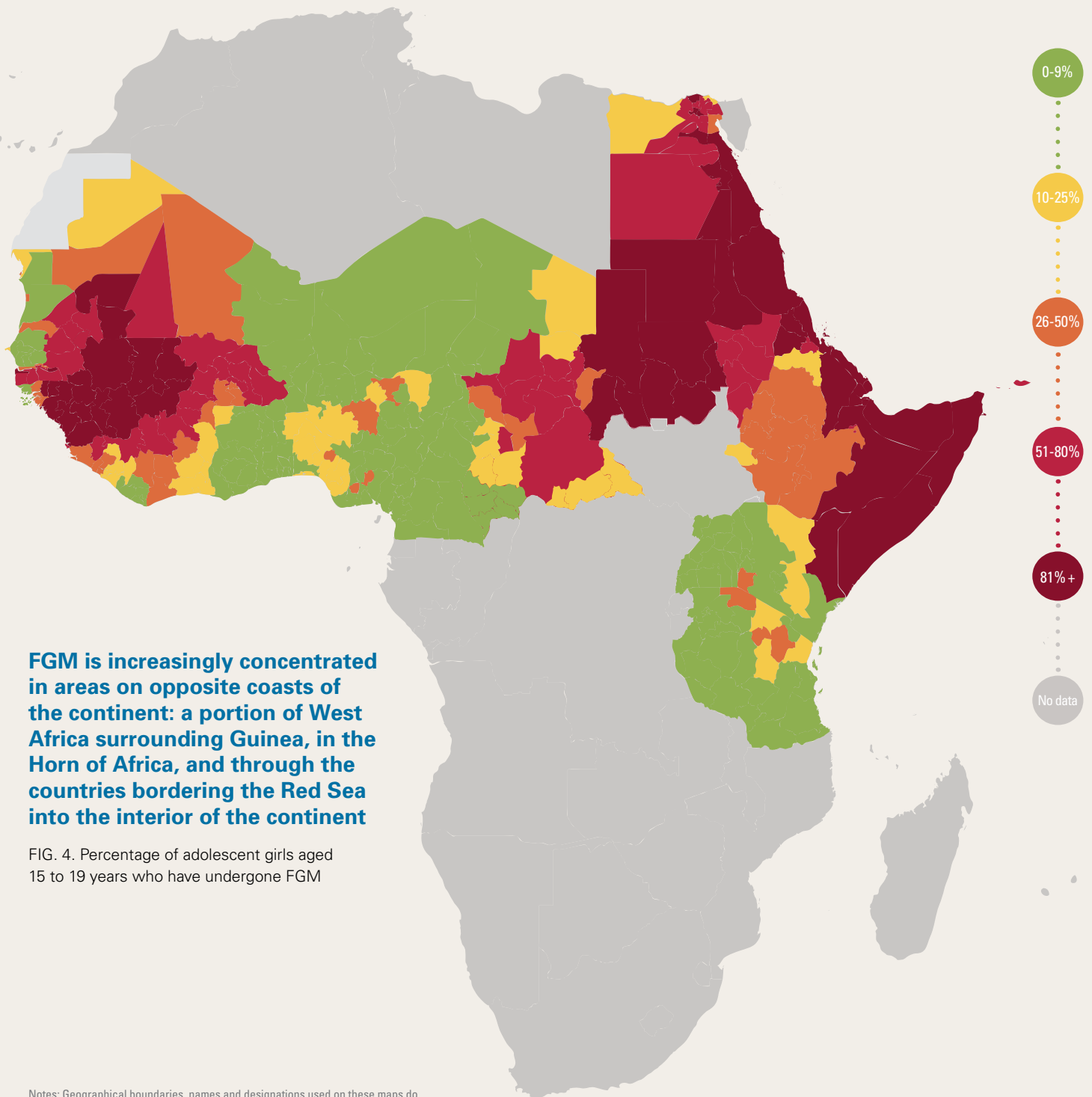
With only slight progress in the last decade, the continent remains off track for meeting the SDG target of eliminating child marriage by 2030

FIG. 3. Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, observed and required for elimination



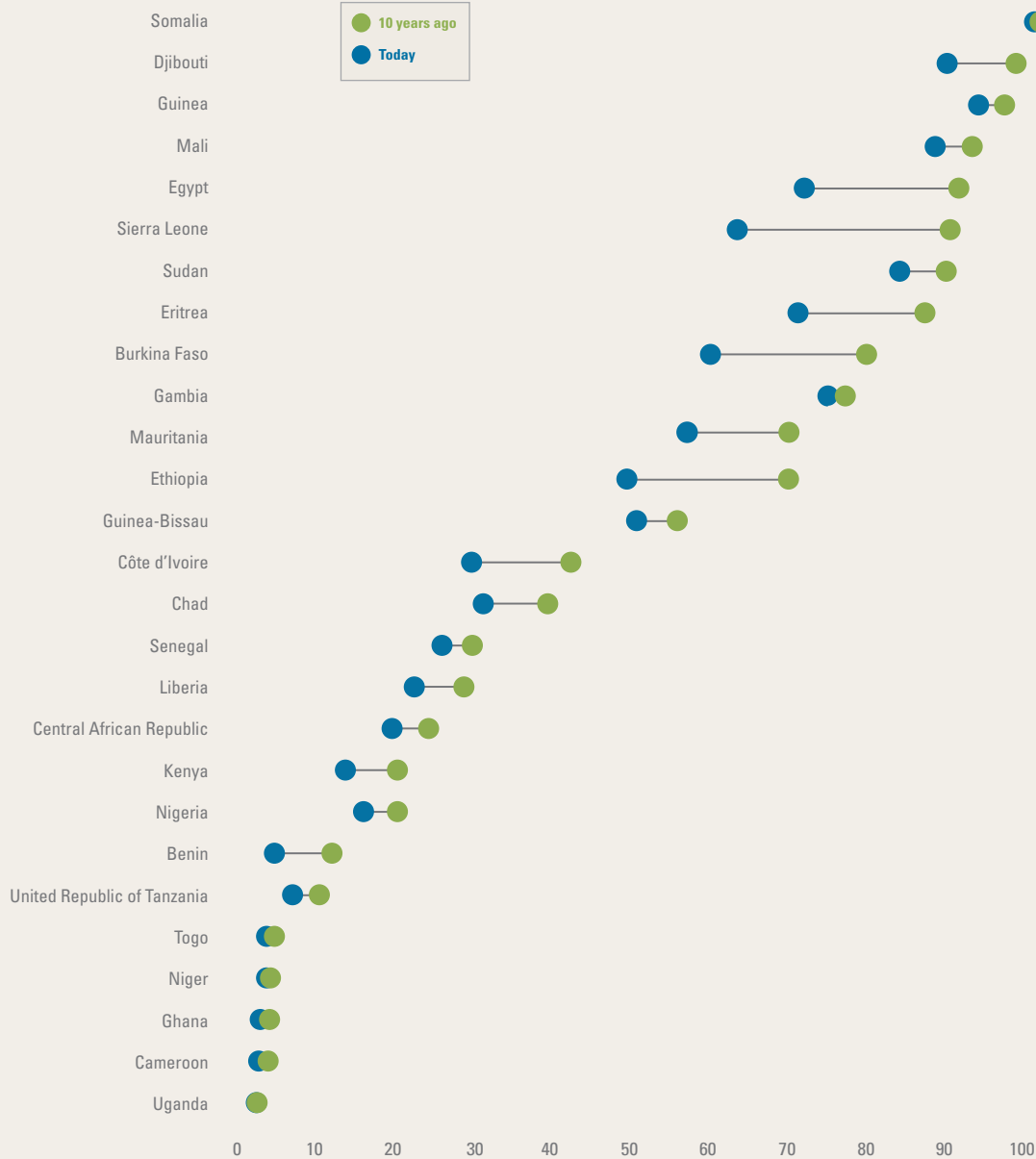
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Nearly 140 million girls and women
in Africa have undergone FGM



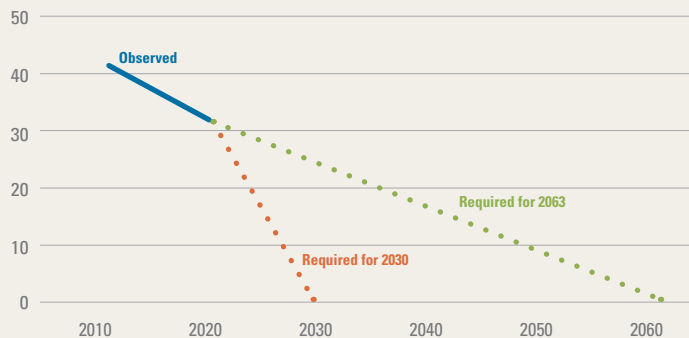
While many countries have struggled to reduce levels of FGM in the last decade, there are promising examples of progress in countries including Egypt, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia

FIG. 5. Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have undergone FGM



Africa is off track for meeting the SDG target of eliminating FGM by 2030, though meeting the same target by 2063 is feasible based on current trends

FIG. 6. Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have undergone FGM



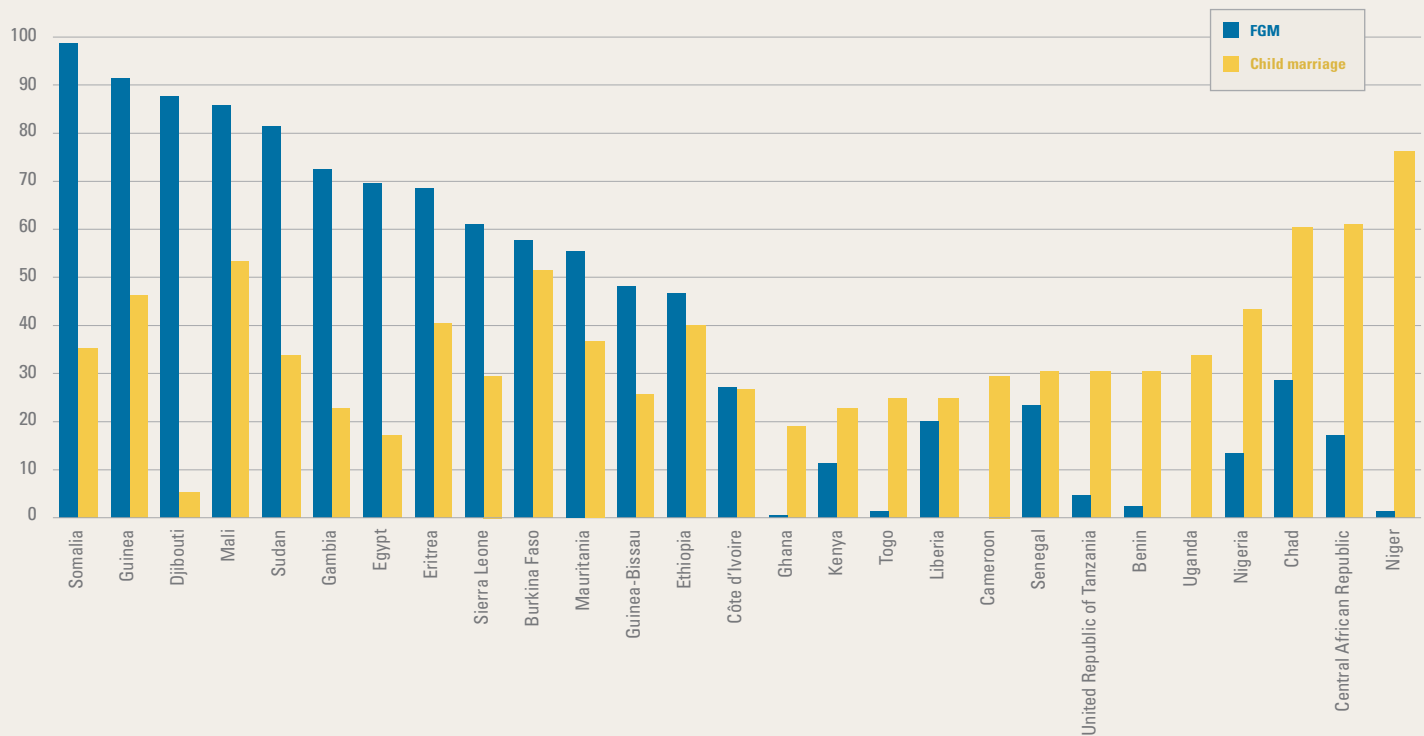
INTERSECTION OF HARMFUL PRACTICES



Child marriage and FGM follow different patterns; yet in some communities, girls are at risk of both practices

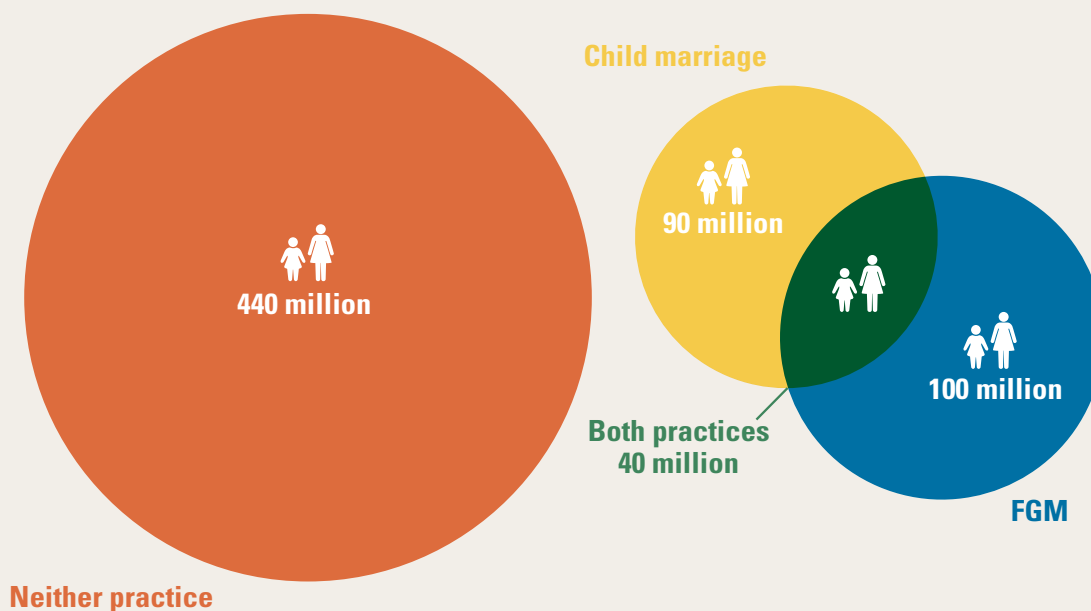
Child marriage and FGM are concentrated in different parts of the continent

FIG. 7. Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have undergone FGM, and percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Among the 130 million married in childhood and nearly 140 million who underwent FGM, over 40 million girls and women experienced both practices

FIG. 8. Distribution of girls and women of all ages according to their experience of child marriage and of FGM



Technical notes

To assess the prevalence of child marriage, this analysis used SDG indicator 5.3.1: Proportion of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before age 18. All references to 'marriage' or 'child brides' include both formal marriages and informal unions in which women started living with a partner before age 18 as if married.

To assess the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM), this analysis used an age disaggregate of SDG indicator 5.3.2: Proportion of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years who have undergone FGM. While the SDG indicator captures this measure among girls and women aged 15 to 49 years, disaggregating for the youngest age group limits the analysis to the population exposed to the risk most recently, thus representing a more current assessment of the prevalence.

The number of child brides is defined as the number of girls under 18 who have already married plus the number of adult women who were married before age 18. The number of girls and women who have undergone FGM is defined as the number of girls and women of all ages who have undergone the practice. These are calculated using the estimated prevalence of each harmful practice among each age cohort, applied to the female population in the respective cohort. This method relies on both household survey data for prevalence and demographic data

for the size of the population. These total numbers refer to the population in 2020.

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

Estimates for child marriage are based on 50 African countries with comparable data from 2010–2021, covering 99 per cent of the continent's female population. Estimates for FGM are based on 27 African countries with comparable data from 2004–2021. Analysis of FGM is limited to the subset of countries with nationally representative data and excludes countries without data and/or in which the practice is not concentrated.

This analysis draws on data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other nationally representative household surveys that use comparable methodology. For detailed source information by country, see <data.unicef.org>. Demographic data are from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019*, online edition, 2019.

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All reasonable precautions have been taken by UNICEF to verify the information contained in this publication. For any data updates subsequent to release, please visit <data.unicef.org>.

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