



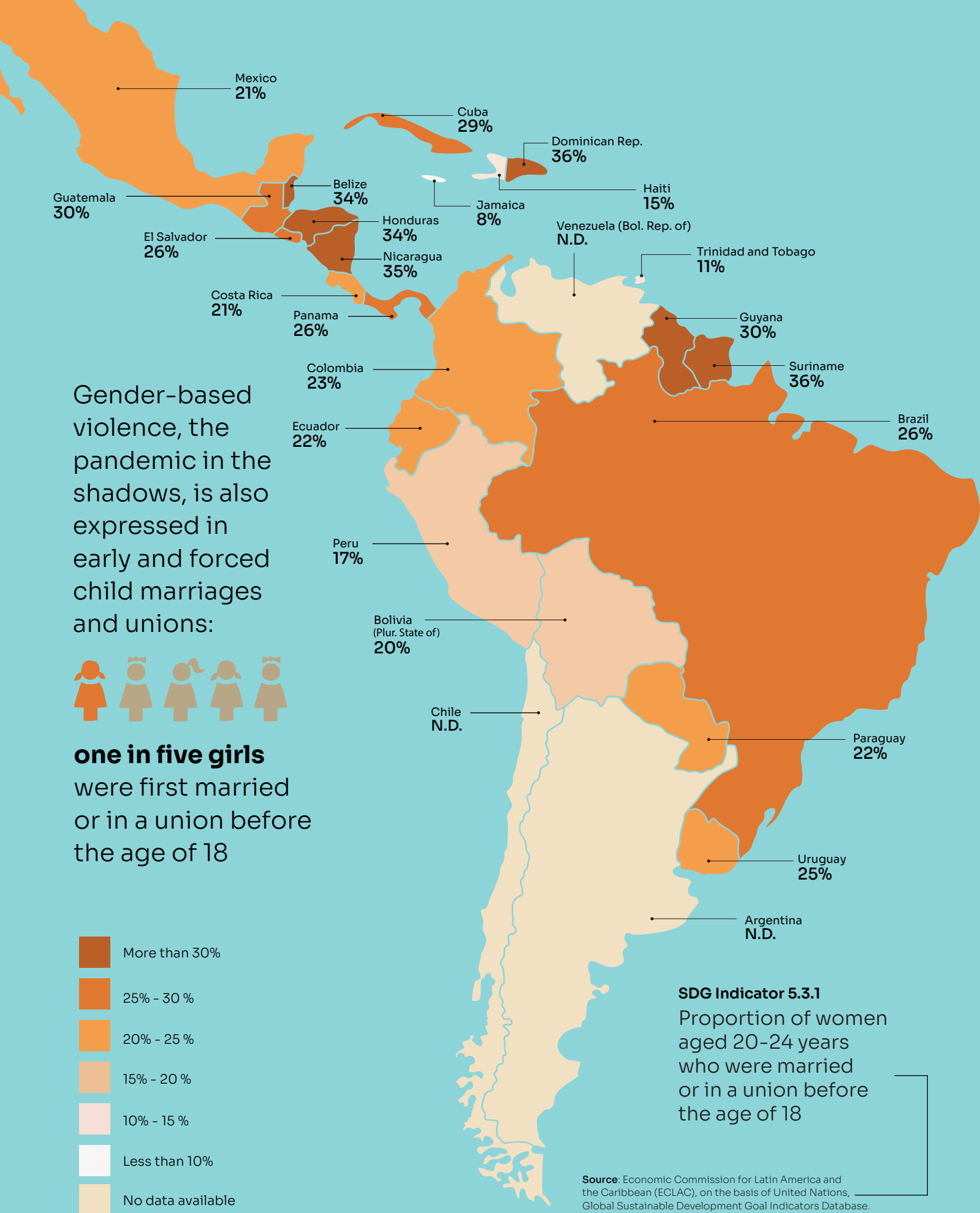
# **Child, early and forced marriages and unions deepen gender inequalities**

Child, early and forced marriages and unions constitute a violation of the human rights of children and adolescents and a harmful practice that disproportionately and persistently affects girls. In a self-reinforcing cycle, they both cause and result from women's limited physical, economic and decision-making autonomy. They deepen gender inequality for girls, adolescents and women and are linked to violence, poverty, school drop-out and teenage pregnancy. Not only do they affect girls, they also perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty and affect families and the development of communities and countries.



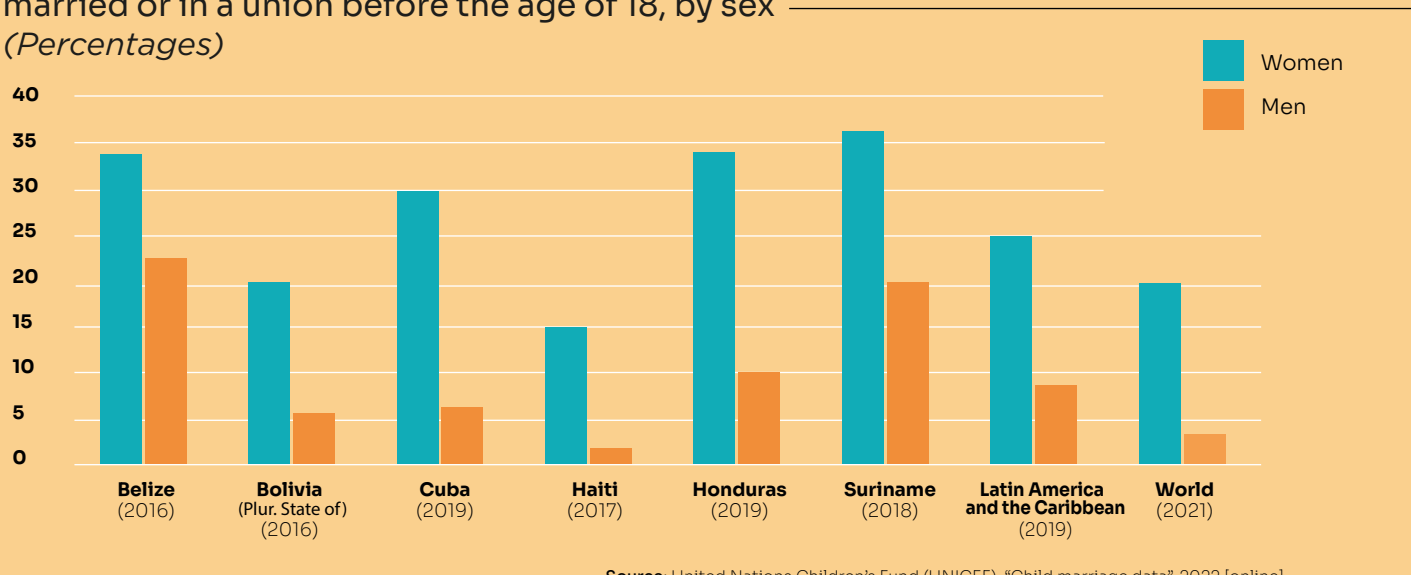
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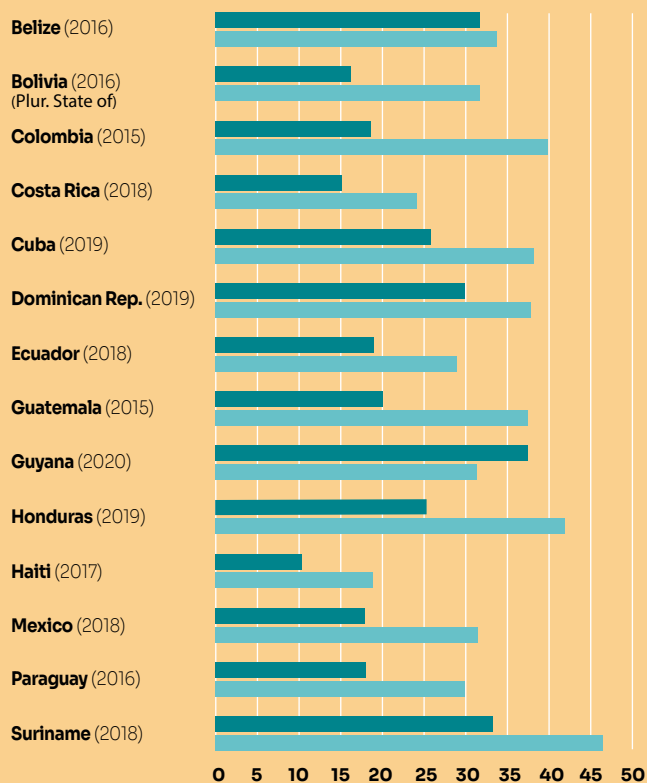


The proportion of girls and adolescents married or in a union in Latin America and the Caribbean is much higher than that of boys and adolescents.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (6 countries),** last year available: men and women aged 20–24 married or in a union before the age of 18, by sex (Percentages)



Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Child marriage data", 2022 [online] <https://data.unicef.org/resources/dataset/child-marriage/>.



Girls and adolescents who **live in rural areas or belong to indigenous and Afrodescendent communities** are at greater risk of early and forced marriage or union.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (14 countries):** women aged 20–24 who were married or in a union before the age of 18, by place of residence

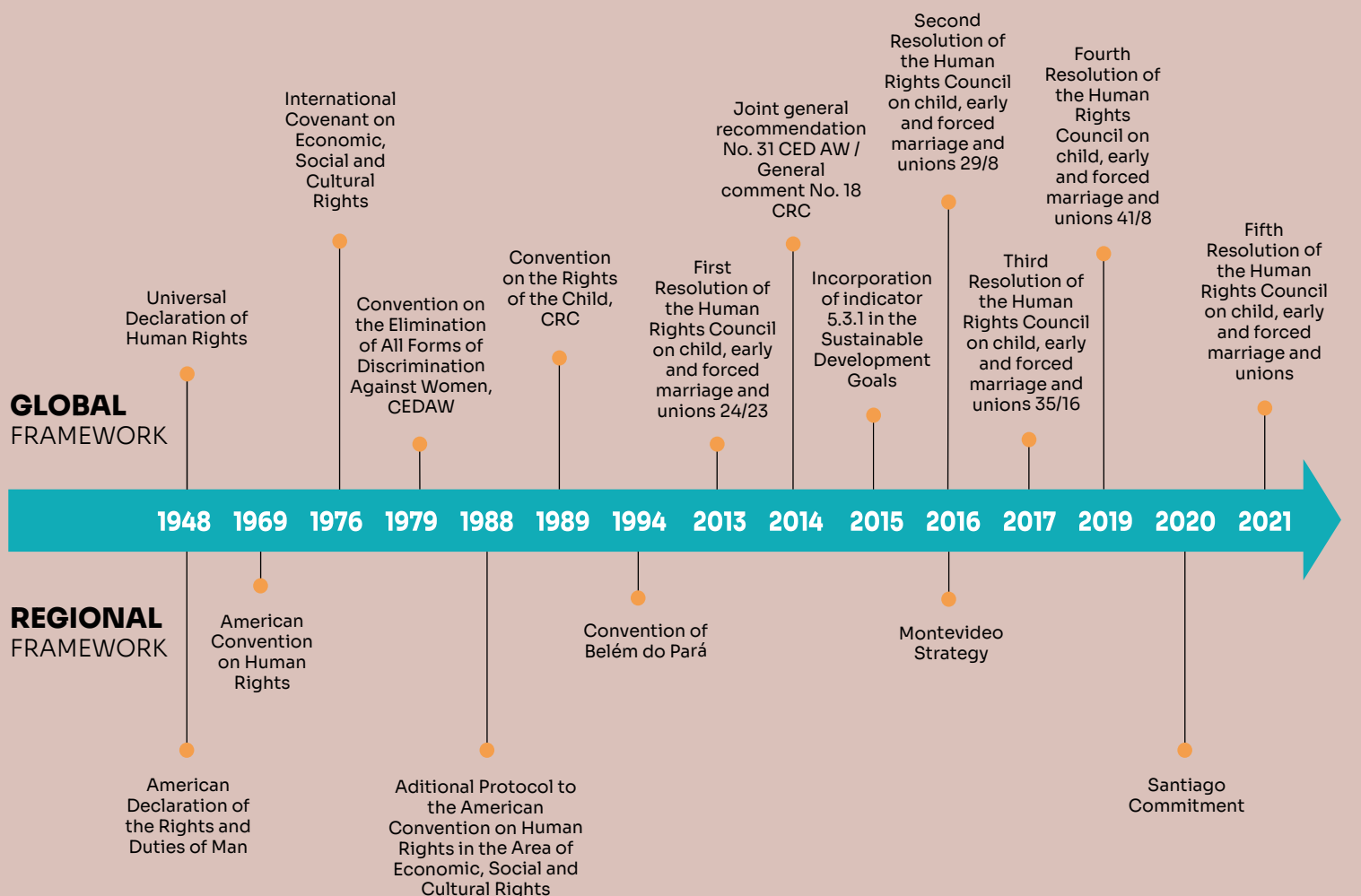
Urban  
Rural

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Child marriage data", 2022 [online] <https://data.unicef.org/resources/dataset/child-marriage/>.



Child and forced marriages and unions are **harmful practices** that affect the full development of girls and adolescents. A **global and regional regulatory framework** has been consolidated to deal with these practices, establishing recommended actions for their elimination. Nevertheless, at the country level, legislation and policies remain inadequate or insufficient, placing girls and adolescents at risk.

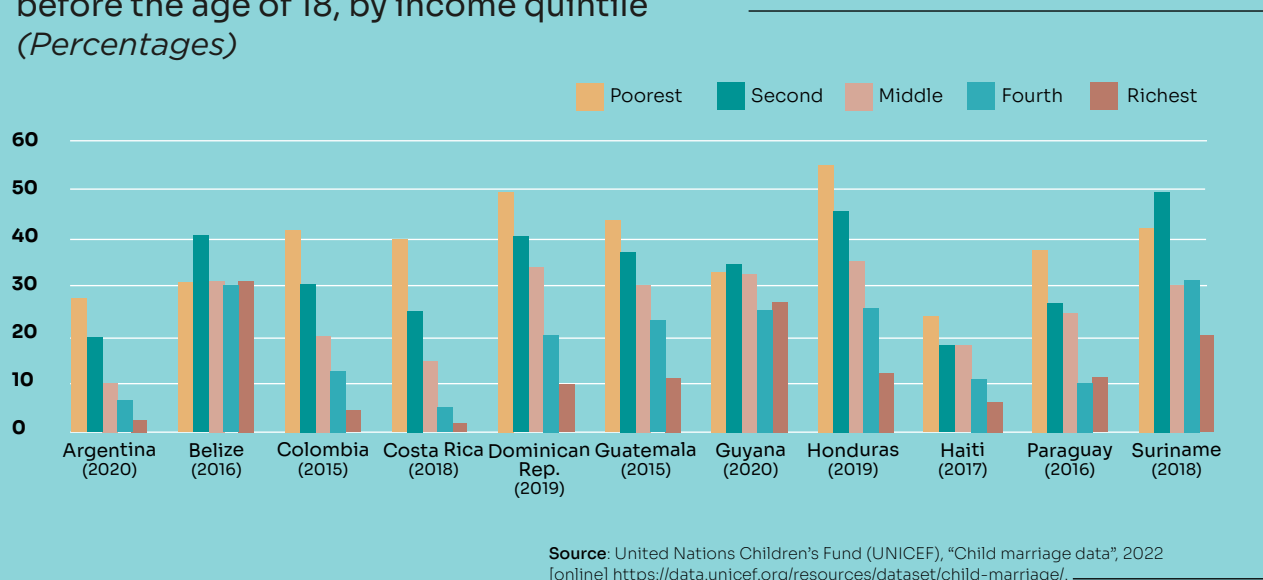
### Global and regional human rights instruments related to child, early and forced marriages and unions



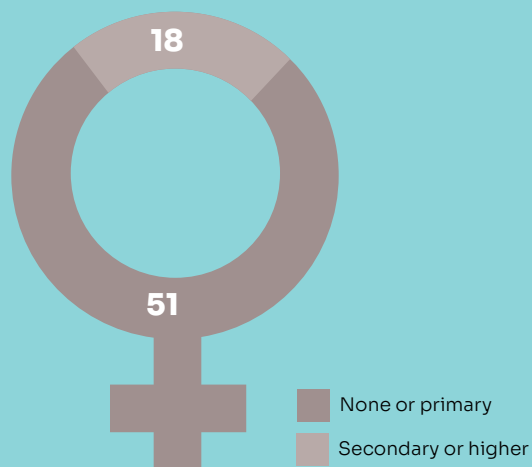
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

Child, early and forced marriages and unions are strongly associated with **adolescent pregnancy**. They perpetuate gender inequalities, and they both result from and cause poverty and discrimination. Young women between the ages of 20 and 24 who were married or in a union before the age of 18 **belong to the first two income quintiles** in most countries with available information.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (11 countries):**  
women aged 20–24 who were married or in a union  
before the age of 18, by income quintile  
(Percentages)



**Latin America and the Caribbean:**  
women aged 20–24 who were married  
or in a union before the age of 18,  
by educational level  
(Percentages)



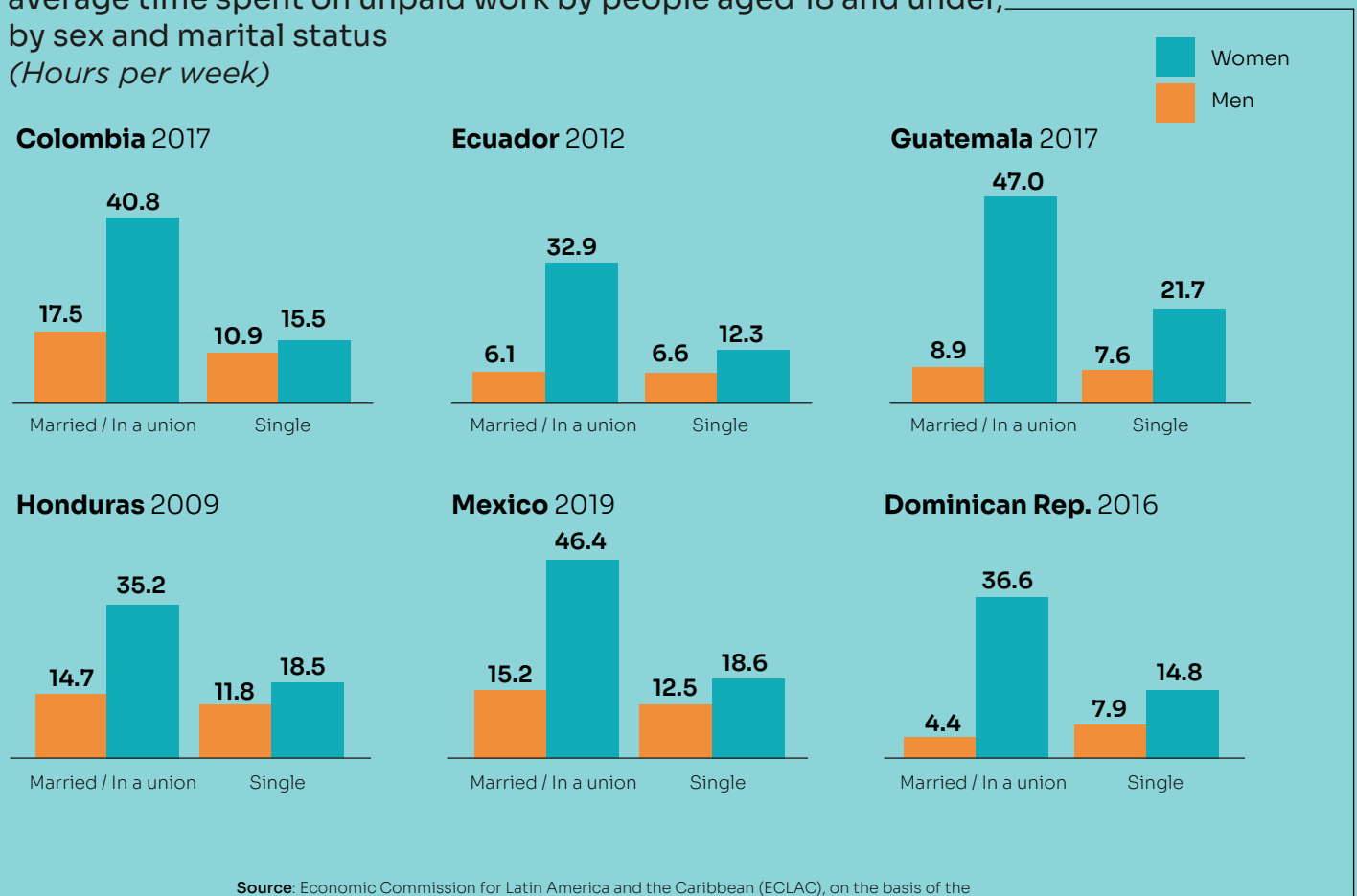
The evidence collected from different countries consistently shows the positive correlation between the **educational level of girls** and the prevention of child marriages, early unions and adolescent pregnancy, indicating that almost universally, when the option of schooling is available and girls are encouraged to study, their marriage, union or pregnancy is delayed.



**The sexual division of labour** begins from an early age and is worse for girls who are in a union or married. Available data for the region show that, each week, girls who are married or in a union dedicate more than double the time to unpaid work than girls who are not, the equivalent of a full working day. In addition, gender gaps in time use are wider for girls in early child marriages and unions, who dedicate around 20 more hours per week to unpaid work than men.

**Latin America (6 countries):**

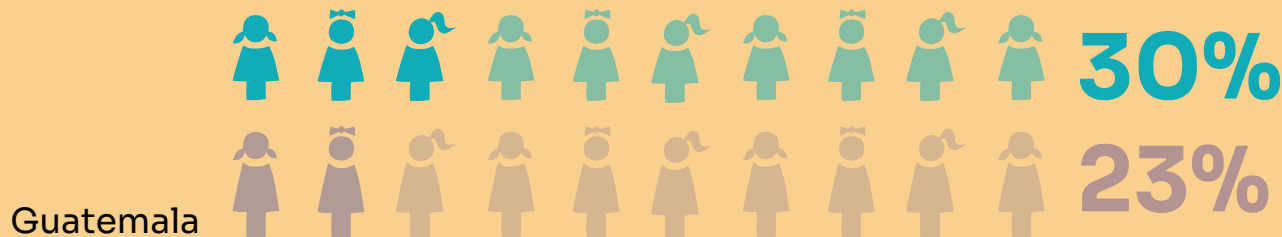
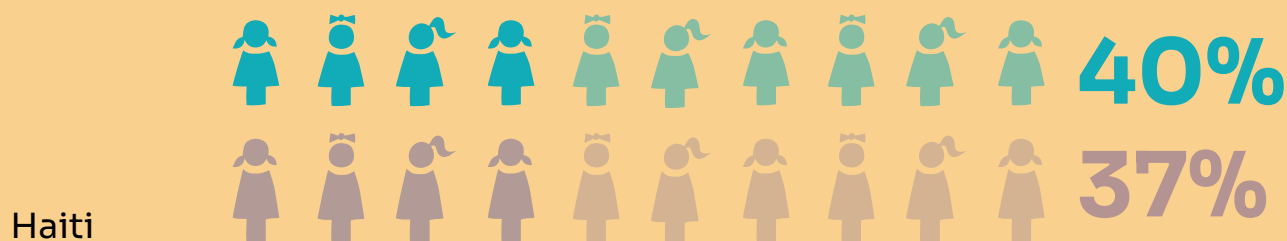
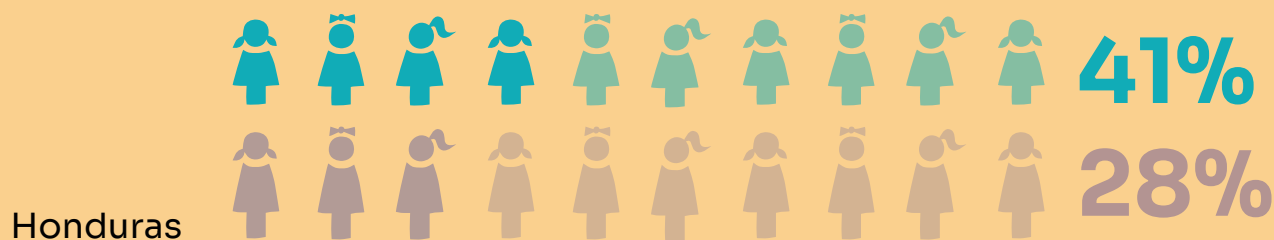
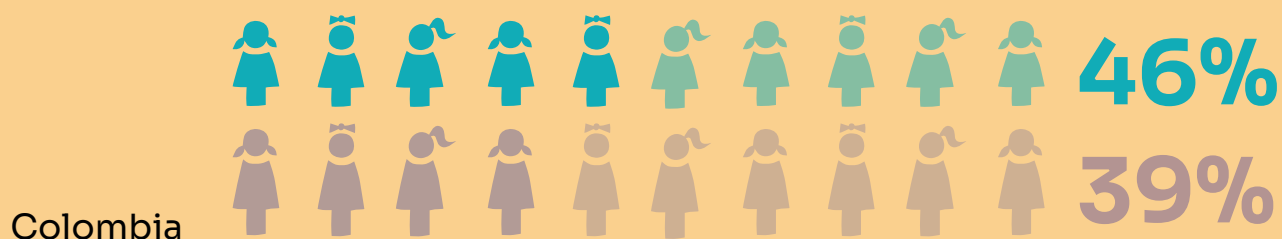
average time spent on unpaid work by people aged 18 and under, by sex and marital status  
(Hours per week)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the "Repository of information on time use in Latin America and the Caribbean" [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/infographics/repository-information-time-use-latin-america-and-caribbean>.

Girls and adolescents who marry or enter a union before the age of 18 are more affected by **gender-based violence**. Young women aged 20 to 24 who were married or in a union before the age of 18 are more likely to have experienced violence at the hands of their intimate partner or ex-partner than those who married later.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (4 countries):**  
 women aged 20–24 who have ever been married and who have been subjected to violence by an intimate partner, by age at marriage  
 (Percentages)



Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *A Profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean*, New York, 2019.

Without action and investment, Latin America and the Caribbean will not be able to achieve target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals—Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage—a commitment to which all countries in the region have adhered.

**For this reason, decisive progress is needed in the following:**



**Raise awareness** of child marriages and early unions in Latin America and the Caribbean, in global, regional and national forums, emphasizing that it violates the rights of girls and adolescents and its prevalence and characteristics.

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Through specific public policies that include legal changes, **progress** towards guaranteeing the prevention and elimination of child marriages and early unions and implement specific programmes to close the gaps that affect girls and adolescents who are married or in a union.

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**Break** the statistical silence and engage with national statistical institutes to address data gaps, including those related to girls aged 10 to 14, through an intersectional approach.



**Guarantee** access to free, universal, gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate education for girls and adolescents, free from any discrimination.

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**Promote** the right to self-care for girls and adolescents as part of their physical autonomy, with comprehensive sexual education programmes and guaranteed access to contraception.

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**Develop** strategies for the transformation of patriarchal cultural patterns and the elimination of gender violence in dating relationships and public spaces, with the participation of girls and adolescents.

This document was prepared by the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC in collaboration with the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).