

Gap analysis of Child Marriages and Early and Forced Unions (CMEFU) in Colombia.

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1. Abstract

Historically, in Colombia, monitoring of CMEFU has been carried out based on the DHS. However, this source has limitations to reflect appropriate and updated data that reflects the impact of this harmful practice. This, in turn, hinders the design and implementation of relevant public policies that contribute to the eradication of the practice and that guarantee the rights of girls and adolescents, allowing them to reach their full potential leaving no one behind.

This document provides an analysis of the CMEFU in Colombia, making gender, territorial and educational gaps visible, with emphasis on population characteristics such as sex, age group, disability and ethnicity. It provides relevant information that allows a better understanding of the impact of the practice on girls and adolescents, especially those who live in rural areas, are indigenous or Afro-descendants or have no education at all. Although the analysis focuses on the information available for Colombia, this work can be replicated in other countries of the LAC region that face the similar challenges related to data sources and differential approach to the practice.

Key words: Gender, child marriage, early unions, inequality, census data, ethnicity, indigenous, afrodescendants, disability, human rights, policy, SDGs, statistics for advocacy and policy impact, gaps.

2. Introduction

Globally, 33,000 child marriages occur every day. Of the girls and women alive today, an estimated 650 million were married as children, and by 2030, another 150 million will be married under the age of 18⁵. However, because of the Covid-19 crisis, an additional 13 million CFMEU are estimated between 2020 and 2030⁶, which may negatively affect the process of eradicating the practice in the country. CFMEU are manifestations of inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV). They violate the rights of girls, boys and adolescents, and have a differentiated impact on women, who are at greater risk of suffering consequences on their health, physical integrity, wellbeing and life projects. In this context, CFMEU include registered or unregistered unions, in which at least one of the people living together as a couple is under 18 years of age⁷. Likewise, they have been recognized as forced, since they do

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⁵ UNFPA, 2020. Report: State of the World Population 2020. Retrieved from: <https://colombia.unfpa.org/es/publications/estado-de-la-poblacion-mundial-2020-0>

⁶ UNFPA, 2020. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family planning and the elimination of gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage. Available at: https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/COVID-19%20impact%20brief%20for%20UNFPA_24%20April%202020_ES.pdf

⁷ UNICEF; Child marriage and early unions Study of knowledge, attitudes and practices in six municipalities in the Dominican Republic (2019). Retrieved from: https://www.unicef.org/republicadominicana/CAP_MIUT.pdf

not have the full, free and informed consent of one or neither of the parties⁸. As a result, girls and adolescents are obliged to undertake a series of roles and responsibilities for which they are not prepared, such as housework and motherhood.⁹

Measuring the incidence of the practice is fundamental to design and implement strategies and public policies aimed at its prevention and elimination. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes the indicator 5.3.1: "proportion of women between the ages of 20 and 24 who were married or in a stable union before the age of 15 and before the age of 18". In this regard, Colombia has set two goals: to reduce by a third (to 3.1%) the CFMEU of children under 15 years of age, and by a quarter (to 17.7%) the CFMEU of children under 18 years of age. According to the historical trend, this indicator has shown no tangible progress since 1986, where the percentage of unions in children under 15 was 4.3% and in children under 18, 23.3%. For 2015, the percentage of women who were united before the age of 15 was 4.9% and before the age of 18 was 23.4%. The above indicates the importance of further monitoring of this indicator because in terms of trend, the country is not projected to achieve the target by 2030.

The ENDS¹⁰ is the source recommended by the interagency expert group on SDG¹¹ indicators. However, it has limitations due to the fact that it is conducted every 5 years, and the pandemic caused by Covid-19 delayed the data gathering for 2020. For this reason, this study proposes other sources of information to measure the behavior of the CFMEU, which in turn allowed the analysis of gender, territorial and educational gaps with emphasis on women according to age group, ethnicity, disability, area of residence and at the subnational level. On the other hand, in order to better understand the impact of other phenomena on the CFMEU, we also consider variables such as: Specific Fertility Rate (SFR), types of violence, age of difference with the partner and multidimensional poverty were cross-checked.

3. Methodology

In order to follow up on the CFMEU in the periods in which information from the ENDS is not available, two statistical sources from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) were used, corresponding to the GEIH¹² and the latest Population Censuses¹³. These instruments have information on the marital status of individuals at the time of answering the survey, which makes it possible to identify CFMEU of children and adolescents not retrospectively as indicated in indicator 5.3.1, but as a "snapshot of the moment", which is useful as a proxy taking into account the aforementioned limitations of the ENDS.

First, a review and comparison of the questionnaires of the two sources is conducted to identify changes in the questions and variables related to the marital status of respondents, especially women and men under 15 and 18 years of age. Our preliminary progress has identified important differences in the wording of the 2018 Census question with respect to 2005.

⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women General Recommendation No. 31 and Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 18 on harmful practices, jointly adopted. CEDAW/C/GC/31/CRC/C/GC/18. <http://www.acnur.org/t3/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2014/9925.pdf?view=1>

⁹ CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF COLOMBIA; Sentence C-507 of 2004

¹⁰ National Demographic and Health Survey - ENDS-

¹¹ Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs)

¹² Period of analysis 2007 to 2020.

¹³ General Census 2005 and National Population and Housing Census 2018.

The analysis of the practice will focus on the characteristics of sex, age group, ethnicity, disability, educational level, rural or urban area and subnational level. These characteristics are available in the census, and the ENDS does not allow for disaggregation, which facilitates a comprehensive analysis with a gender, differential, ethnic and territorial approach, ensuring that no one is left behind. Taking into account the Sample Coefficient of Variation (SCV) as a basis for determining the level of disaggregation, the analysis of the GEIH will be at the national and urban-rural levels. We also propose to perform a multivariate principal component analysis to identify associations with new characteristics at the territorial level.

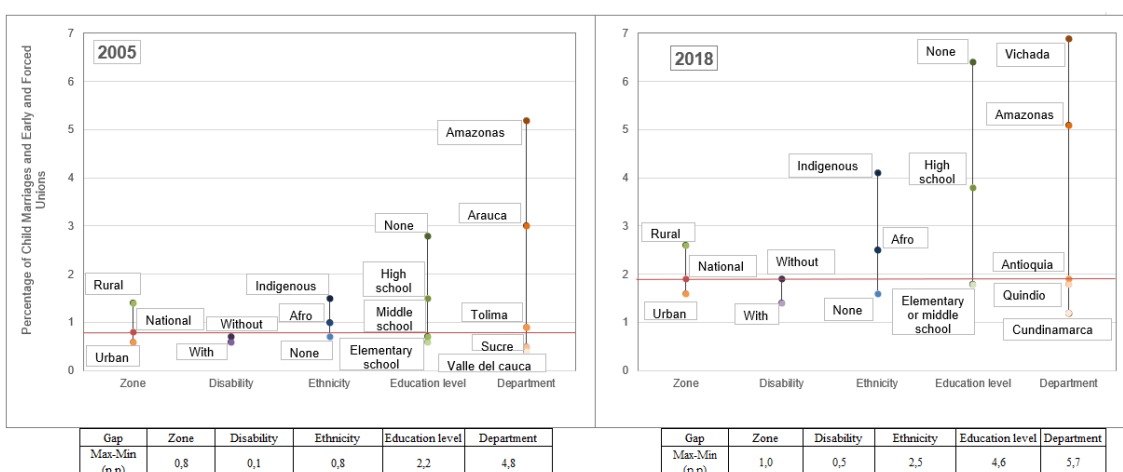
4. Expected findings

Preliminarily, a change has been identified in the wording of the question on the marital status of persons in the 2018 Census, with respect to the 2005 Census and the GEIH, which maintain the same form. The change is evident in the question on marital status and the response categories: non-marital union, married, divorced, separated from non-marital union, separated from marriage, widowed and single. This adjustment has an important change in the measurement of the CFMEU, since there is a greater number of cases identified in relation to the previous census.

Below we share data that we have already processed and identified as essential data to make gaps visible:

It was observed that girls and adolescents, more frequently, are immersed in CFMEU. In 2020 according to the GEIH, 0.3% of females under 15 years of age and 3.6% under 18 years of age reported being or have ever been in union. Compared to males under 15 and 18, this ratio is 0% and 0.3%, respectively. This situation varies depending on the characteristics of adolescents and girls that seems to have an impact in their vulnerability towards this harmful practice.

Graph 1. Gaps in Women under 15 years of age at some time or currently linked to the national total by specific characteristics, 2005 and 2018 Censuses



Source: Census Data 2005 and 2018.

According to the 2018 Census, in Colombia one of the most evident gaps is that of educational level: the gap between women under 15 years who have no educational level versus those who have at least basic primary or secondary education, is 4.6 pp,

more than double compared to 2005 (2.2 pp¹⁴); as shown in Graph 1. In the case of adolescents and girls under 18 years of age, in 2018 the gap was reduced to 4.6 pp with respect to 2005, which was 7.1 pp. This situation denies them the possibility of obtaining tools, skills and knowledge that will allow them to prepare for adult life, to develop their autonomy, including their economic autonomy, build and create their own life project and to escape from situations of violence and poverty.

Likewise, the CFMEU are closely related to poverty and residence in rural areas¹⁵. As shown in Figure 1, the urban-rural gap in women under 15 years of age is 1.0 pp for 2018, an increase of 0.2 pp with respect to 2005 (0.8 pp). The gap in children under 18 is 3.6 pp in 2018, higher than the 2005 gap of 3.3.

Colombia has been recognized as a multiethnic and multicultural country, in which different indigenous and Afro-descendant communities live. In this sense, the situation of ethnic and non-ethnic women has been analyzed, since indigenous or Afro-descendant women are more at risk of being in CFMEU compared to those who do not recognize themselves in any ethnic group. By 2018, the gap by ethnicity widened by 2.5 pp between indigenous and non-ethnic women under 15, this ratio in 2005 was 0.8 pp (see Figure 1). The widening of the gap is also reflected in women under 18, where in 2018 it was 4.6 and in 2005, 2.9 pp. At the subnational level, according to the censuses, there is a concentration of higher unions in regions such as the Orinoquía and the Amazon, in particular the behavior of the department of Vichada stands out, as it presents the highest percentages in both 2005 and 2018. In children under 15 years of age, the territorial gap was 5.7 pp, while in those under 18, it is 16.6 pp. For both cases, there is an increase in the gap with respect to 2005.

Within the framework of the CFMEU, girls and adolescents see their options and decisions limited, especially those related to their sexuality, reproduction, body and life autonomy. This significantly increases the risk of premature and subsequent unplanned pregnancies, other forms of gender violence, including sexual violence perpetrated by their partners, and high rates of poverty, reflecting misinformation, dependence on the decisions and desires of their partner and the impossibility of accessing education, health and welfare services. In order to analyze the consequences and determinants of CFMEU, a contrast will be made with ASFR, GBV, age of the partner and multidimensional poverty.

This work has been socialized at the regional level with the UNFPA Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, being catalogued as a good practice to generate evidence on CFMEU, that can also be replicated in other countries in the region with similar limitations such as Ecuador and Brazil. Likewise, these findings have been identified as a basis for the quantitative analysis of the practice in the country, within the framework of a study being carried out together with UNICEF, UNFPA, and some Colombian national institutions¹⁶, carried by the consulting firm ISEGORIA and Plan International Foundation. Likewise, the final result of the analysis will be used for incidence and advocacy, as well as for technical assistance to national and territorial institutions in order to make this problem visible in the country and support the implementation of measures aimed at its prevention.

¹⁴ Percentage Points

¹⁵ UNFPA, 2020. Report: State of World Population 2020. Retrieved from: <https://colombia.unfpa.org/es/publications/estado-de-la-poblacion-mundial-2020-0>

¹⁶ Such as ICBF, DNP, MSPS and Ministry of Education.