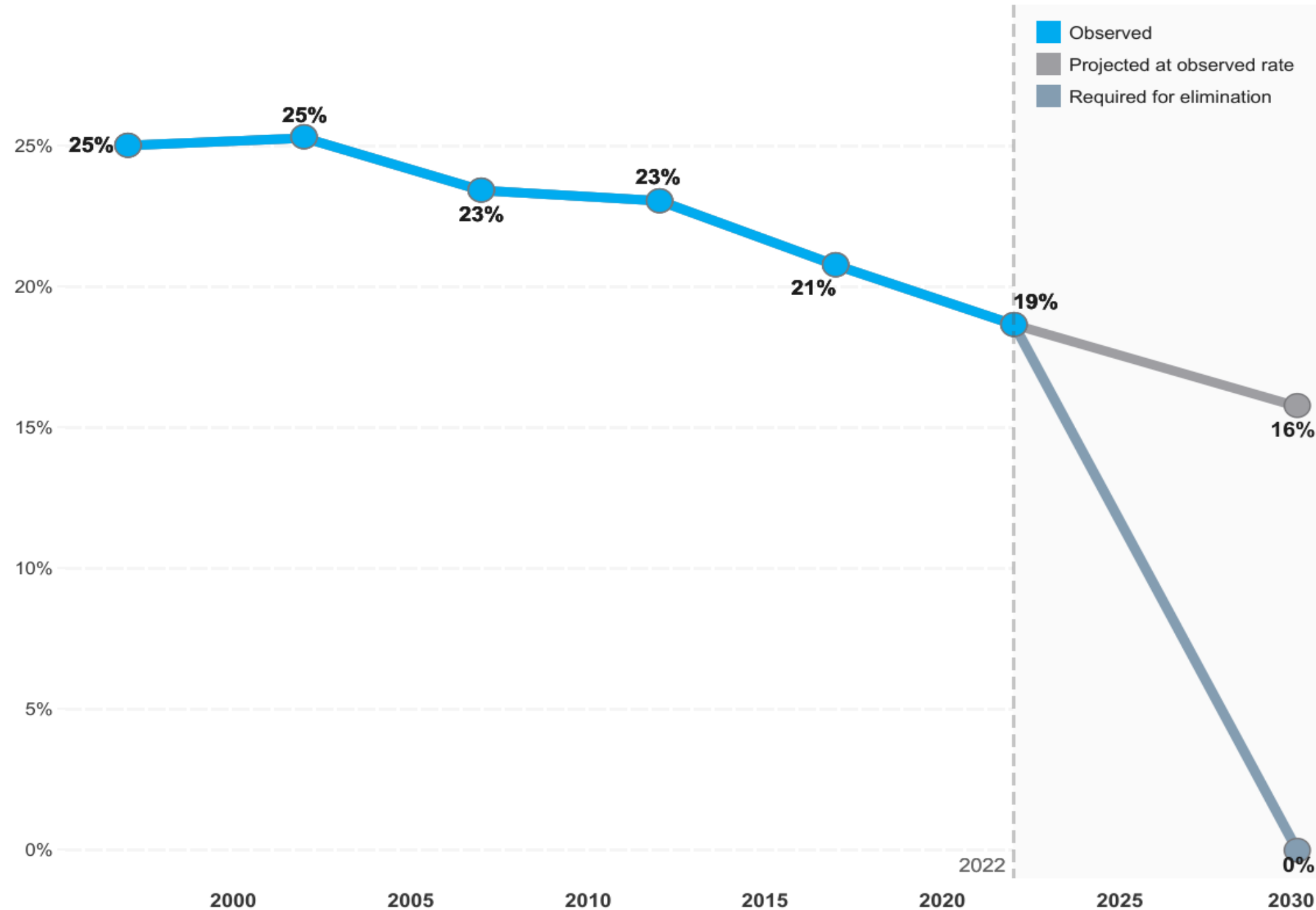


An Economic View on **Investment to End Child Marriage**

Kehinde Ajayi, Gabriela Smarrelli, and Radhika Nagesh

Observed and projected percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18



Source: United Nations Children's Fund, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 edition*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

- ~1 in 5 young women married or in union before age 18
- ~650 million girls and women alive today were child brides
- What is the **cost of inaction** on this?



1. Economic costs of child marriage

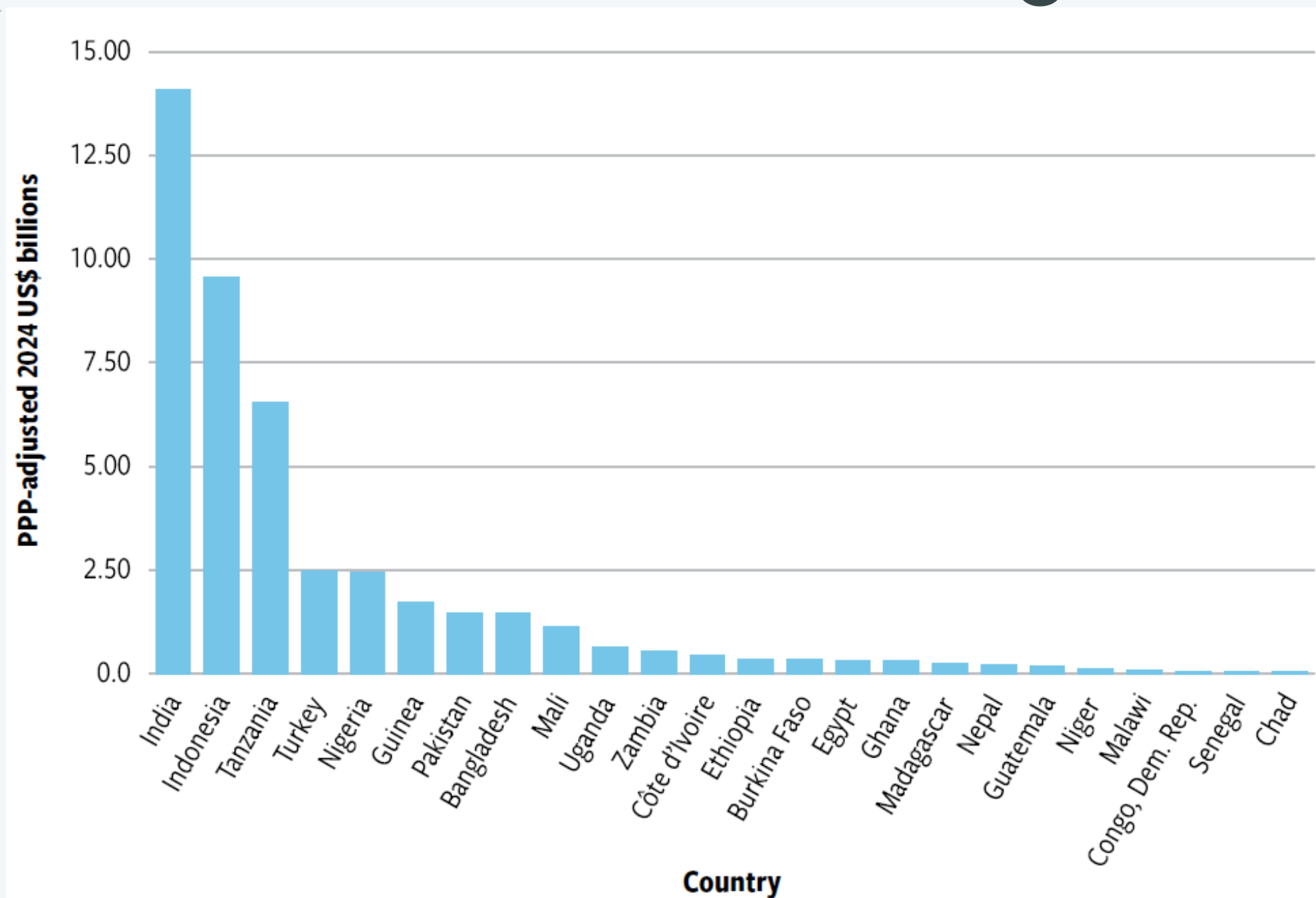
- **Total costs:** up to **US\$ 175 billion** per year for 27 countries (70% of global burden)
- **Health-related costs:** up to **US\$ 130 billion** per year
 - Child mortality
 - Maternal mortality, IPV, miscarriage
- **Education-related costs:** up to **US\$ 45 billion** per year
 - Lower educational attainment
 - Lower labor-force participation and earnings
- **Negative trends** (e.g., climate change, conflict, funding cuts) could raise costs



1. Mortality and morbidity costs

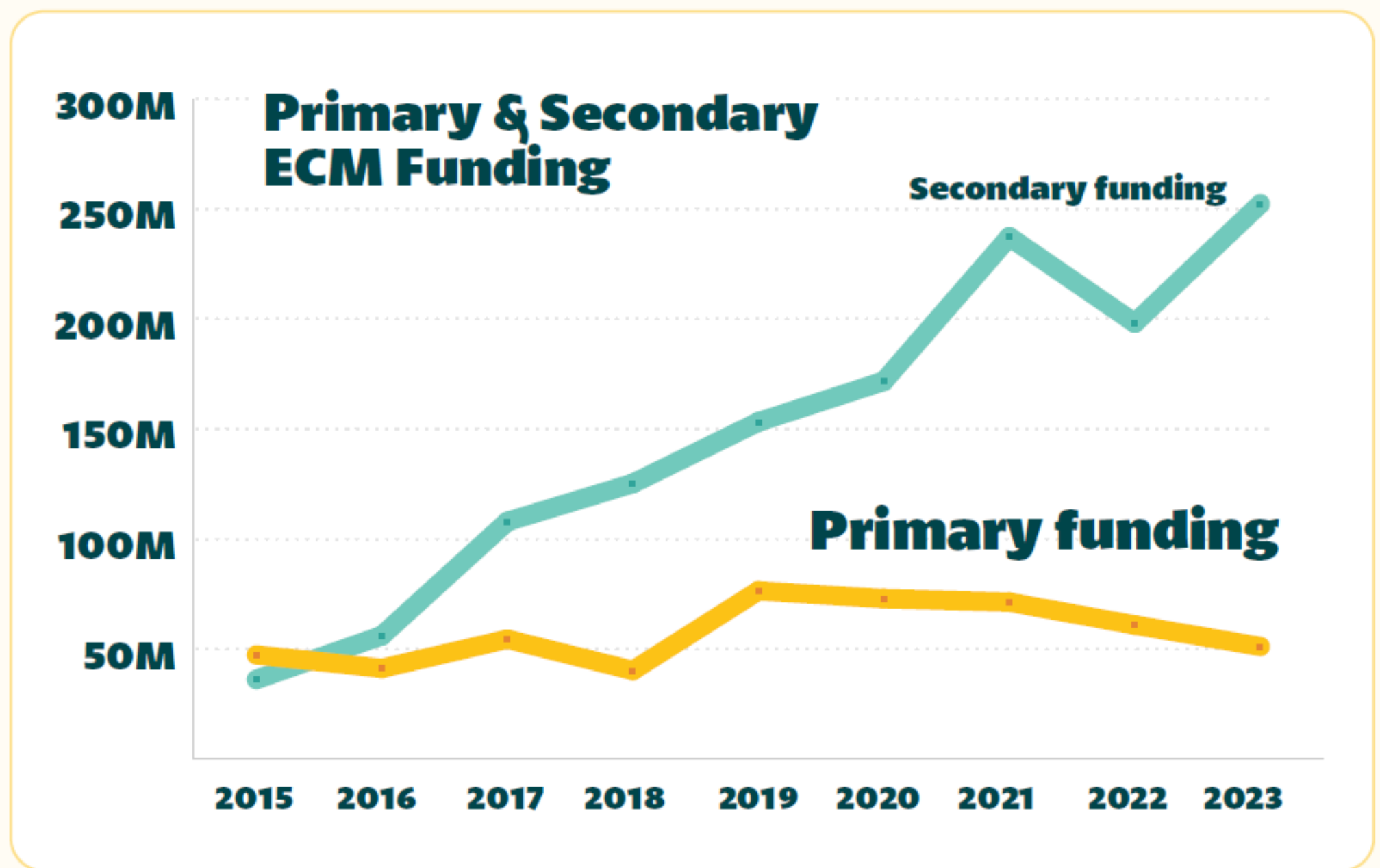
		Under-5 mortality	Maternal mortality	IPV	Miscarriage or abortion	Total
Deaths	up to	190,651	14,655	-	-	205,300
DALYs lost (thousands)	up to	17,925.6	1,104.4	77.8	0.4	191,108.2
Economic costs (US\$ millions)	up to	122,952.1	6,222.5	795.0	6.2	129,948.8

1. Education and earning costs



Note: Estimated costs of child marriage due to lost earnings by country by year, in 2024 PPP-adjusted US\$ billions.

2. Recent international funding levels (Girls Not Brides & Girls First Fund, 2026)



- **Primary funding**
 - 0.025% of total ODA
 - ~US\$61.2 million a year over the last 3 years
 - **Declining:** from peak in 2019 to ~\$50 million in 2023
- **Secondary funding**
 - 0.081% of total ODA
 - ~US\$229.3 million a year over the last 3 years
 - **Increasing:** almost 5 times primary funding in 2023

Source: "International Funding to End Child Marriage: Reviewing a Decade of Investment," Girls Not Brides and Girls First Fund (March 2026)

2. Projected funding declines

US\$ millions, 2023 constant prices, grant equivalents



Risk of further funding decreases.

- Top bilateral funders cutting ODA
- Shifts from gender equality as a foreign policy priority.
- Prominent philanthropic funding also wound down.

Source: Original figure by authors using data on top ECM funders from "International Funding to End Child Marriage: Reviewing a Decade of Investment" Girls Not Brides and Girls First Fund, March 2026 and data on projected funding from Donor Tracker's analysis of bilateral funding announcements, "The Budget Cuts Tracker," Kristin Laub, Nadia Setiabudi et al., Donor Tracker, July 4, 2025.

3. Required funding

- Recent levels of international primary ECM funding amount to **<US\$ 1 per girl at risk**
- Best case scenarios (using minimum intervention costs):
 - **US\$ 1.3 billion per year** over five years to lower rates from **1 in 5** to **1 in 7**
 - **US\$ 4.3 billion per year** over five years to **prevent all child marriages**
- **Localized assessments** identify context-specific, cost-effective interventions.
- **Domestically mobilized resources** could complement international funding.

Key takeaways

- The economic cost of inaction **greatly exceeds** minimum funding levels
- Global funding is at **risk of decline**, while costs of inaction could rise
- Funding increases could come from using ending child marriage as an **entry point** for impact on sectors like poverty, education, SRHR, crisis response.
- Returns on investment would include **broader benefits** beyond direct impacts on girls at risk

Learn more

- **“An Economic View on Investment to End Child Marriage,”** Kehinde Ajayi, Gabriela Smarrelli, and Radhika Nagesh (March 2026), <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/economic-view-investment-end-child-marriage>
- **“Accelerating Efforts to End Child Marriage,”** Rachel Vogelstein and Jennifer Klein (March 2026), <https://igp.sipa.columbia.edu/sites/igp/files/2026-03/Accelerating%20Efforts%20to%20End%20Child%20Marriage.pdf>
- **“International Funding to End Child Marriage: Reviewing a Decade of Investment,”** Girls Not Brides and Girls First Fund (March 2026), <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/resource-centre/international-funding-end-child-marriage-2015-2024-report>