

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

Laura Lozano Ruíz<sup>1</sup>, Yessica Carabali Mendoza<sup>2</sup>, Carlos Ramirez Hernandez<sup>3</sup> y Estefanía Mosquera Gómez<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Gender, Rights and Intercultural Advisor, UNFPA, [llozano@unfpa.org](mailto:llozano@unfpa.org)

<sup>2</sup>Gender, Rights and Interculturality Consultant, UNFPA, [carabali@unfpa.org](mailto:carabali@unfpa.org)

<sup>3</sup>Demographer in population and development, UNFPA, [cramirez@unfpa.org](mailto:cramirez@unfpa.org)

<sup>4</sup>Consultant in population and development, UNFPA, [mosquera@unfpa.org](mailto:mosquera@unfpa.org)

## 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.

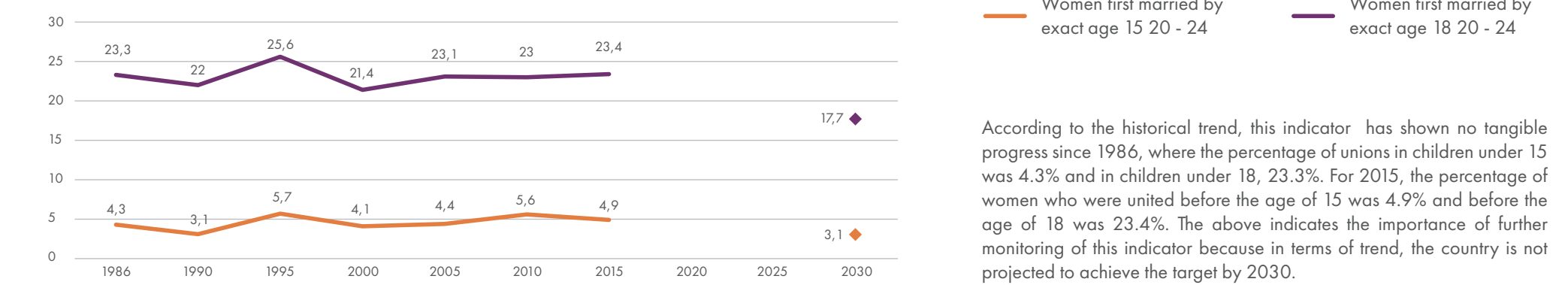
## Introduction

CFMEU are manifestations of inequality, discrimination, gender-based violence (GBV) and they violate the rights of girls, boys and adolescents. In this context, CFMEU include registered or unregistered unions, that have been recognized as forced, since they do not have the full, free and informed consent of one or neither of the parties. 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.

Measuring and have updated information about 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 CMEFU of children under 15 years of age, and by a quarter (to 17.7%) the CMEFU of children under 18 years of age.

## Context

Percentage of women aged 20-24 years old who joined a union for the first time before their 15th and 18th birthday and National 2030 Target DSH



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.

## Methodology

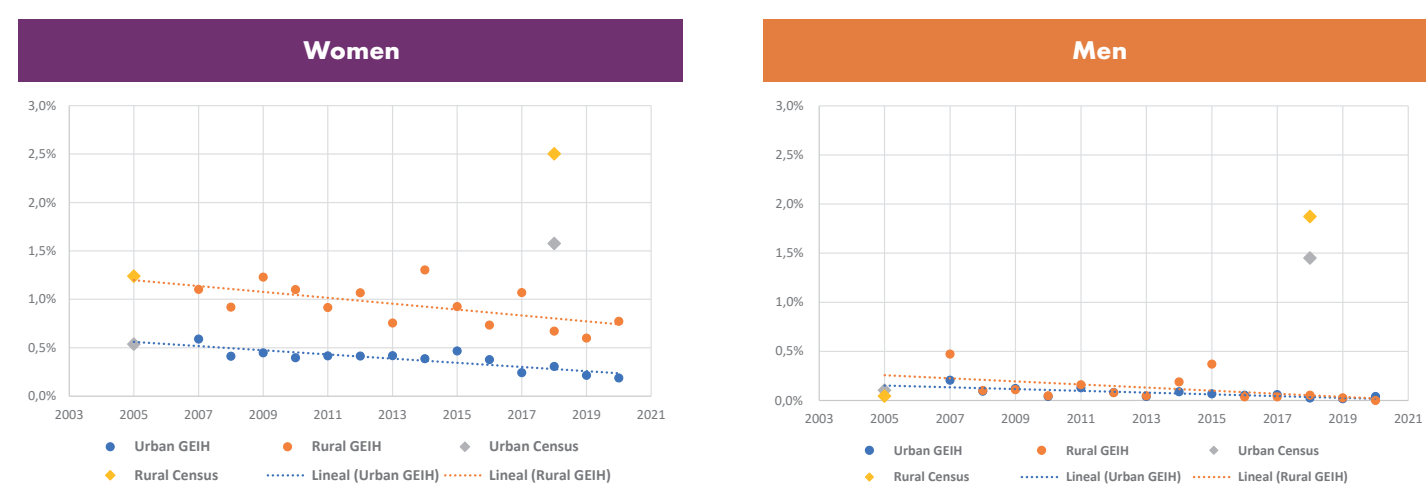
In order to follow up on the CFMEU in the periods in which information from the ENDS is not available, two statistical sources from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) were used, corresponding to the GEIH and the latest Population Censuses. These instruments have information on 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.

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.

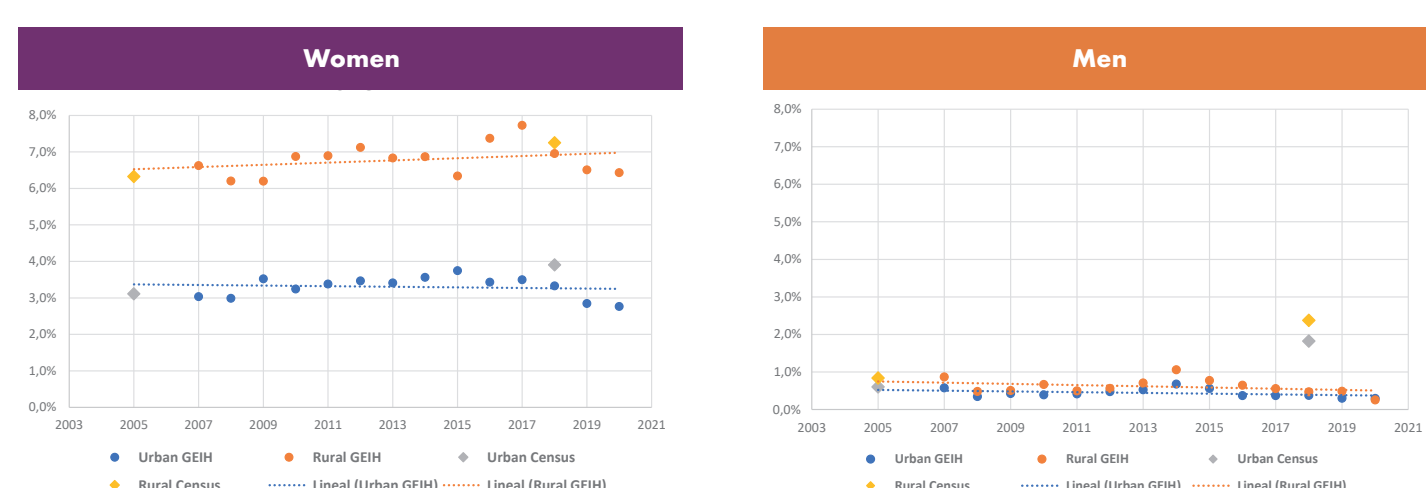
## Results

Percentage of persons under 15 ever or currently in union, national total (urban/rural), 2005 to 2019.



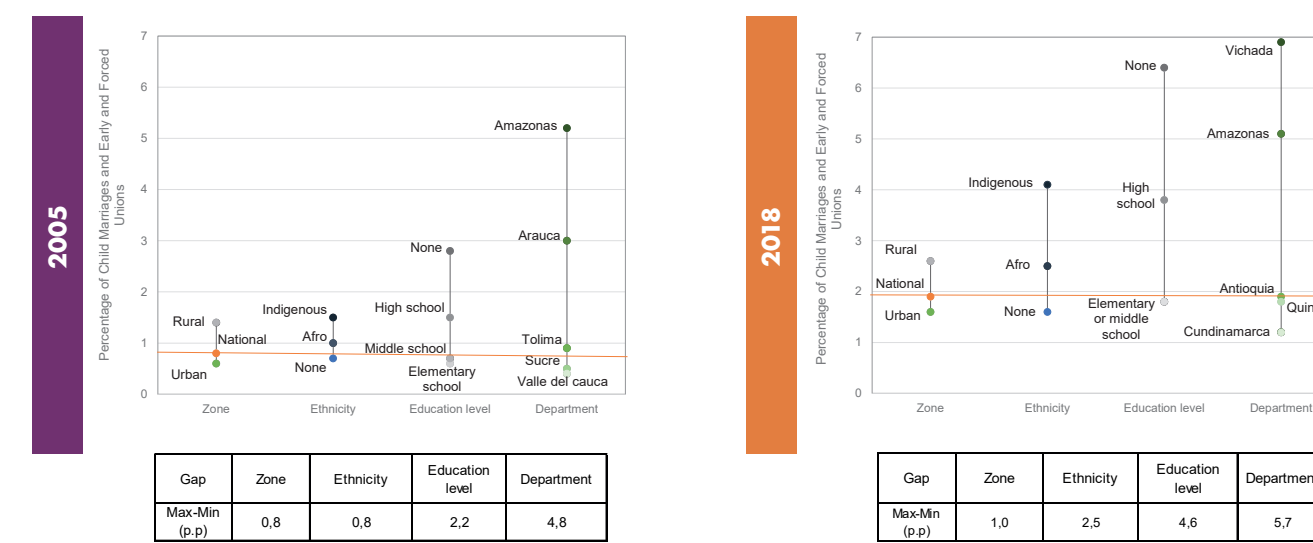
In 2009 according to the GEIH, at the national level 0.7% of girls under 15 years of age were in some type of union, for boys this percentage was 0.1%. For 2019, this ratio was 0.3% for girls and 0% for boys. For the 2018 Census, there is better data collection, indicating that 1.8% of females and 1.6% of males under 15 were in a CMEFU, it is evident that the gender gap remains as a consequence of inequality and deepens for girls living in rural areas.

Percentage of persons under 18 ever or currently in union, national total (urban/rural), 2005 to 2019.

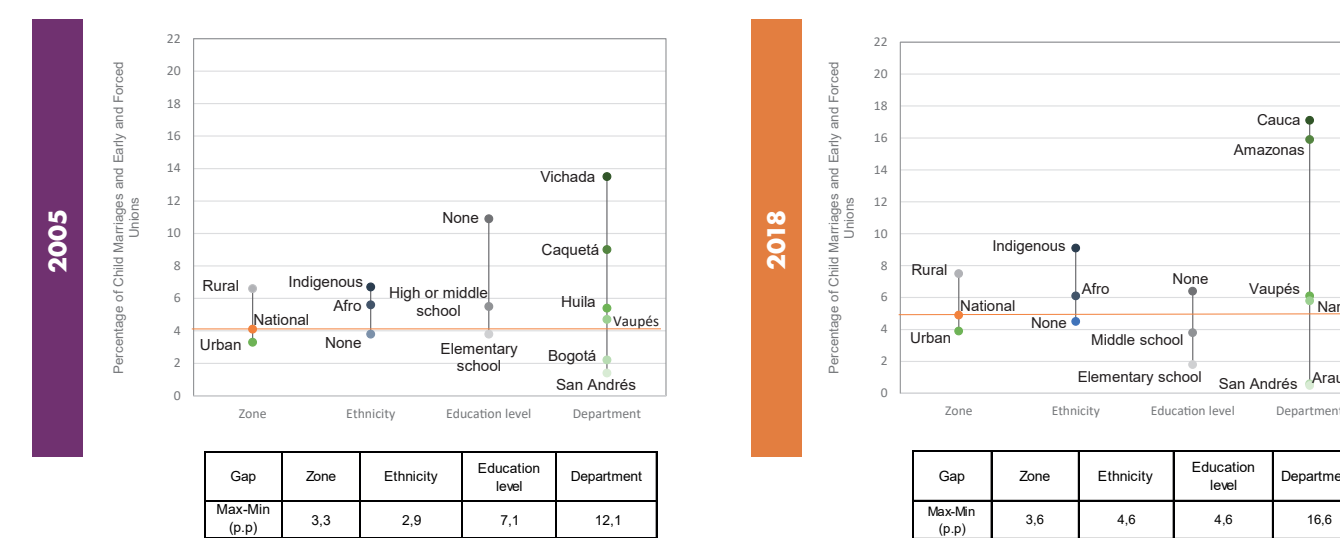


In 2009, according to the GEIH, 4.2% of girls and adolescents (under 18 years of age) were in union, while 0.4% of men were. In 2019, this ratio improves for females but the gender gap remains. In 2018, according to the Census, 4.8% of females under 18 were in CMEFU, compared to 2.0% of males under 18. In this age group, a wider gap is evident in terms of gender, affecting rural women to a greater extent.

Women under 15 ever or currently in union, national total (urban/rural), ethnicity, education level, department, Census 2005 and 2018.



Women under 18 ever or currently in union, national total (urban/rural), ethnicity, education level, department, Census 2005 and 2018.

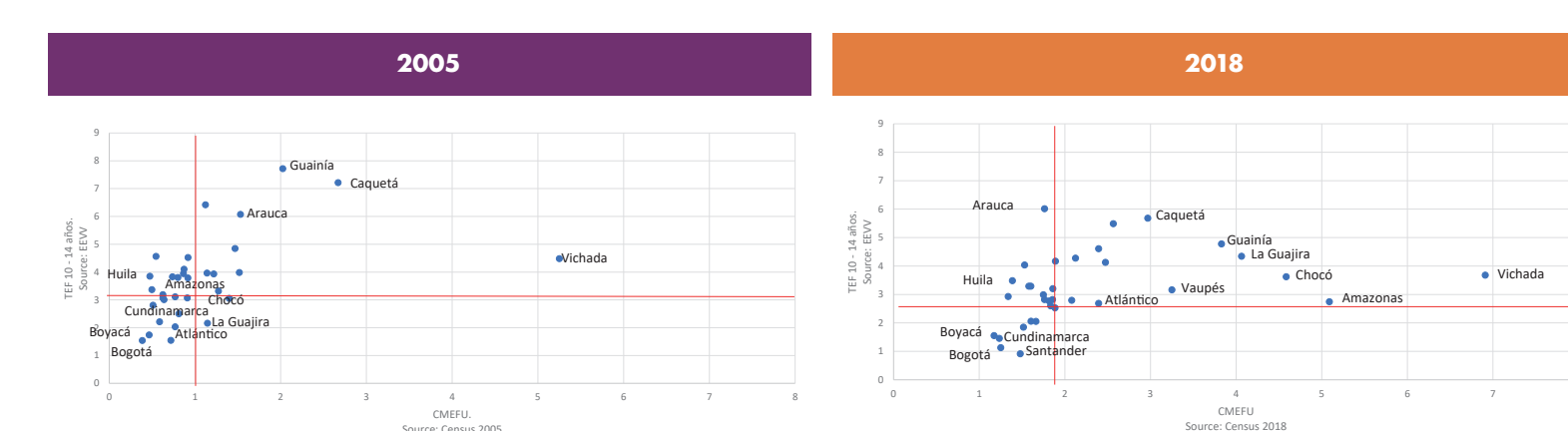


According to the 2018 Census, the gap between women under 15 years who have no educational level versus those who have at least basic primary or secondary education, is 4.6 pp, more than double compared to 2005 (2.2 pp). In the case of adolescents and girls under 18 years of age, in 2018 the gap was reduced to 4.6 pp with respect to 2005, which was 7.1 pp.

In Colombia, 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. 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.

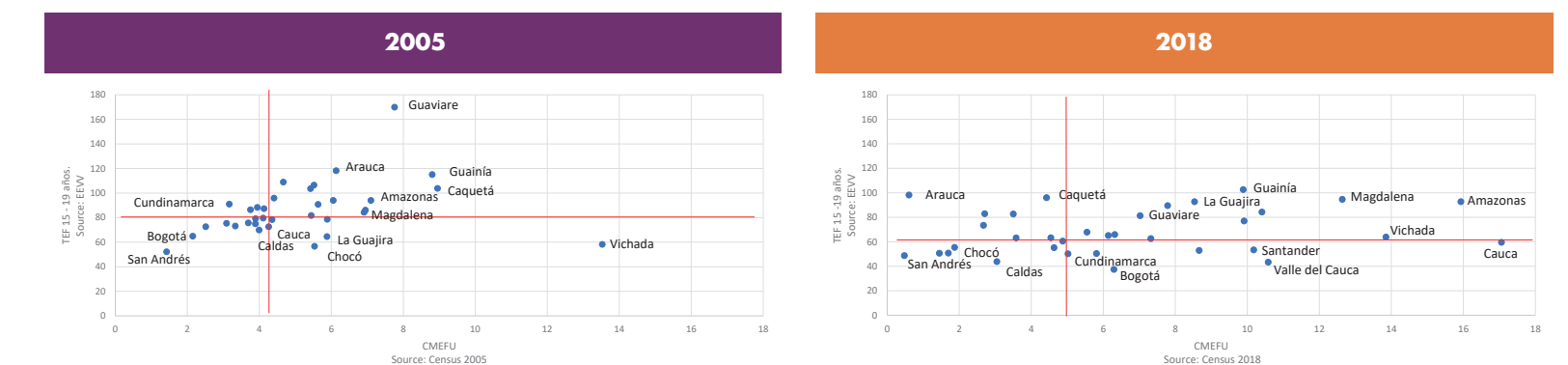
At the subnational level, according to the censuses, there is a concentration of higher unions in regions such as the Orinoquia and the Amazon, in particular the behavior of the department of Vichada stands out, as it presents the highest percentages in both 2005 and 2018. In children under 15 years 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.

Percentage of females under 15 years old currently or ever in union vs. ASFR 15-19 years old.



In 2009, in the first quadrant, the department of Caldas was identified as having a prevalence of EFT compared to UUTM. For the second, high fertility and union rates are present in Caquetá and Magdalena. In the best scenario (quadrant 3), Boyacá and Bogotá have low fertility and CMEFU. Graphically, where the red lines intersect, the national total is located, with Risaralda and Valle del Cauca being the departments that have close behaviors. In 2019, it can be observed that there is a general decrease in TEF and CMEFU, moving the points closer to quadrant three (best scenario).

Percentage of females under 18 years old currently or ever in union vs. EFT 10-14 years old.



For 2009, in the group of women between 15 and 19 years of age, Bogotá and Boyacá are in the best scenario, with low fertility and union rates. On the other hand, the quadrant that reflects the worst situation due to high FSRs and CMEFUs includes the departments of Caquetá, Magdalena and Cesar. In quadrant 4, Chocó reflects a prevalence of early unions compared to fertility. Finally, Valle del Cauca, Risaralda and Caldas are close to the national total. In 2019, there is evidence of a slight decrease in the rates compared to 2009.

## Conclusion

- Within the framework of the CMEFU, girls and adolescents see their options and decisions limited, especially those related to their sexuality, reproduction, body and autonomy. This significantly increases the risk of premature and subsequent unplanned pregnancies, other forms of gender violence 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.
- The largest gap is at the territorial level. Evidencing those Departments with greater challenges for access to services such as education and state abandonment.
- Indigenous girls and adolescents face greater risks of being immersed in a CMEFU as a result of social and cultural constructs that have legitimized their roles as caregivers, mothers and wives.
- Lack of education is a determining factor in the prevalence of CMEFU, which denies girls and adolescents the possibility of obtaining tools, skills and knowledge that will enable them to prepare for adult life, to generate their own income and to escape from situations of violence and poverty.
- The conditions of rural areas become a scenario of vulnerability for girls and adolescents to enter a CMEFU, motivated by their families to get out of poverty.

## Recommendations

- Deconstruction of gender roles and social norms that impose on women activities related to care, home, family and motherhood as the sole purpose. Especially, in the territories where there is evidence of higher percentages of CMEFU, gender violence and teenage pregnancies. With an intercultural approach that allows working in indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.
- To advance in intervention actions for the empowerment of girls, adolescents and women, which contribute to the transformation of attitudes that approve of early unions, as a fundamental step in the prevention of gender violence and so that the decisions that affect their life projects, their bodies and the exercise of their rights, are made in a free and informed manner.