



**WORLD Policy  
Analysis Center**

# **Protection from Child Marriage, Africa, 1995 - 2023**

## **Public Use Data Dictionary**



# PROTECTION FROM CHILD MARRIAGE, AFRICA, 1995 - 2023 PUBLIC USE DATA DICTIONARY

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## ABOUT THE DATA

### ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

The mission of the WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD) is to strengthen equal rights and opportunities globally by providing civil society, policymakers, citizens, and other researchers with tools to advance feasible and effective policy approaches for improving the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and societies. WORLD captures quantitatively comparative data for 193 United Nations (UN) countries on adult labor and working conditions, discrimination at work, child marriage, aging, education, constitutional rights, health, disability, family, migration, child labor, environment, and income policies. WORLD works with partners to promote evidence-based decision-making across these areas.

In creating this dataset, our goal was to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the data we present. We look forward to receiving feedback from data users if they believe that any individual countries have been placed in the wrong category. If you are aware of an error in our data, please contact us at [world@ph.ucla.edu](mailto:world@ph.ucla.edu) to report the error. Please provide a link to the relevant law from which the information can be verified.

### BUILDING THE DATA CENTER

We examine constitutional and legal provisions as they set a foundation for citizens' rights and are a first step toward improving outcomes. Across countries, having laws on paper does make a difference in practice. Laws and constitutional rights lead to change by shaping public attitudes, encouraging government follow-through with inspections and implementation, and enabling court action for enforcement. Even when local enforcement is inadequate, laws may still have an impact by shaping the terms of political debate and providing levers for civil society advocates. Laws are a mechanism by which power can be democratically redistributed, changes in institutions can be created to ensure greater fairness, and a social floor guaranteeing minimum humane conditions can be established.

When determining which laws, rights, and policies to include in the data center, we prioritize policies that meet one or more of the following criteria: 1) there is widespread global consensus on their value; 2) research evidence supports their importance to human development, health or well-being in a variety of geographic, social, and economic circumstances; or 3) input from civil society, policymakers, and other stakeholders indicates there are urgent questions about policy design that comparative data could help address.

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### DATA SOURCES

In selecting data sources to analyze, our first priority is to identify sources containing full-text original legislation. To ensure the greatest level of accuracy and comparability across countries, we always aim to read the original laws (primary sources) rather than secondary summaries or policy descriptions. Primary sources allow for more accurate coding across countries,

particularly in complex legal areas. Working with primary sources also allows us to provide excerpts or links to actual legislation and constitutions for those interested in passing new laws or creating reform in their countries. We review documents in their original language or in a translation into one of the UN's official languages.

Secondary sources are used when information is unclear or insufficient for particular countries. In choosing these secondary sources, we prioritize those that are comparable across multiple countries, such as global or regional sources. When using information sources that cover a limited number of countries, we aim to ensure that the information they contain can be made consistent with other sources.

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## **CODING FRAMEWORKS**

In this work, coding refers to the process of translating legislative, policy, or constitutional text into a set of features which can be quantitatively analyzed to provide readily understandable summaries of policy approaches across countries and transformed into data visualizations, such as maps or charts. For example, a researcher reviews many pieces of labor and social security legislation and uses them to answer questions such as: Does a country guarantee paid parental leave? Is it available to all parents, only mothers, or only fathers? How long is paid leave? What is the wage replacement rate? How long do workers need to have been employed to access paid leave?

To answer these questions consistently across countries, we first identify the essential policy features that we want to capture, including intrinsic characteristics, such as coverage; important elements identified in policy research; and minimum standards recognized in global agreements, where they exist. Researchers then read legislative text from 20 to 30 countries to develop an understanding of the approaches countries take in each of these areas. A coding framework consisting of questions and close-ended responses is developed to capture the essential policy features systematically across countries based on the range of approaches identified. Research team members then test whether this coding framework accurately captures approaches on an additional ten to twenty nations.

Once we have a viable framework, we seek feedback from civil society and researchers working in these areas to ensure the questions we are asking will provide the critical answers needed to inform policy debates. Their feedback can lead to more scoping and test coding to determine which questions are feasible to answer with available legislation, recognizing that some important areas aren't always covered by national laws and policies. For example, access to sanitation facilities and safe transportation matters deeply to girls' ability to complete their education but is rarely addressed in a meaningful way in national-level education laws and policies. In other cases, new areas of research might involve going beyond the initial legislation we planned to code, expanding the scale of the project.

Capturing the richness and variety of approaches taken by different countries is our priority throughout the coding process.

At times, research teams would have already analyzed 60 to 80 countries before coming across a single country whose approach to a particular problem was different enough in important ways that it could not be adequately captured within the coding scheme. In these cases, the coding scheme was revised to add the elements necessary to capture new features of legislation and policymaking that had presented themselves. All previously coded nations were reviewed to determine whether the revised coding system would alter how they were analyzed. In other words, the new coding system, better adapted to the full variety of approaches nations around the world take, was applied to all countries in the end.

The data sources available contained systematic information on legislation and policies but not on implementation. To ensure consistent approaches across countries, reports that contained comprehensive information on policies but only limited incidental information on implementation were coded only for policies. Obtaining systematic sources of information on implementation should be a pressing priority for global organizations.

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## **CODING PROCESS**

Core to ensuring transparency and consistency is developing a codebook that details the rules and examples for coding each question. Researchers rely on this codebook to make decisions on coding policy features. The codebook is designed to be as straightforward as possible, but some questions require judgment calls. To minimize human error, we use a double coding system where two researchers independently code legal text for each country and then meet to compare their results. When two researchers cannot reach consensus based on the existing codebook, they bring these questions to the full coding team and senior analysts. This team meets regularly to discuss any questions or concerns that arise through the coding process. We record detailed minutes of these meetings and update the codebook to reflect any determinations that impact the coding rules.

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## **ACCURACY, ANALYSIS, AND UPDATING**

Upon completion of coding, we conduct systematic quality checks. We also carry out targeted checks of countries that appear as outliers globally or for their region or income level.

For each of our databases, we use the most up-to-date sources available. While this approach is designed to achieve accuracy, it is important to note that when publicly available sources have not been fully updated, the most recent amendments may not be captured in our databases. Further, our process of coding legislation inevitably involves important matters of interpretation. For all databases, we welcome receiving feedback and copies of laws from anyone who believes the databases may not be fully up-to-date.

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## NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL LEVELS

Our goal is to understand the scope of policy provisions and whether they extend protections to all, including, for example, workers in the informal economy, racial and ethnic minorities, urban and rural residents, and those in the poorest households. Accordingly, we code for policies in place at a national level with wide coverage. When policies are legislated subnationally, that is, when states or cities provide protections without a national guarantee, we code for the minimum guaranteed level of protection covering all states so as to not overstate safeguards available only in limited localities. In the future, we hope that a team will be able to analyze information about state/provincial policies and laws in all federal systems for each area.

## THE PROTECTION FROM CHILD MARRIAGE, AFRICA, 1995 – 2023 DATASET

The Protection from Child Marriage, Africa, 1995 - 2023 dataset was created through a systematic review of legislation governing minimum age of marriage from 1995 to 2023 in 54 African countries. The foundation for the longitudinal data from 1995 to 2013 was built in collaboration with McGill University's Maternal and Child Health Equity (MACHEquity) team. WORLD's team expanded the data to May 31, 2023.

Legislation to construct the data was located primarily through official country websites, the Lexadin World Law Guide, the Foreign Law Guide, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s NATLEX database, the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute, the Asian Legal Information Institute, and JaFBase. In some cases, hard copies and electronic copies of legislation were obtained from libraries such as the Swiss Institute for Comparative Law, the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Law Library, the Harvard Law School Library, and the Northwestern University Library. The database captures national-level legislation. In countries where minimum age of marriage laws are set at the state or provincial level we coded based on the lowest minimum age among all of their states or provinces. Given that the scope of the full project includes 193 UN member states, and that the role and strength of case law varies substantially across countries, we were unable to include an analysis of case law relevant to legal provisions for the minimum age of marriage. Including case law in future analyses will be helpful to better understand the minimum age of marriage permitted by law.

When legislation was not available from these sources, analysts reviewed the most recent reports submitted by countries to the monitoring committees of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as the reports detailing the committees' concluding observations.

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## CHILD MARRIAGE DATASET

To see Africa in the global context, WORLD's Child Marriage provides data on child marriage laws in 193 countries with longitudinal data available for more than 100 low- and middle-income

countries. This data can be accessed here: <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/maps-data/data-download/world-areas>

## DATA

### COUNTRY IDENTIFER VARIABLES

| <b>Variable Name</b>                         | <b>Variable Values</b>                              | <b>Variable Description</b>                               |
|--|---|---|
| country                                      |   | Name of country   |
| iso2   |   | 2-digit ISO country code                                  |
| iso3   |   | 3-digit ISO country code                                  |
| region                                       |   | Country geographical region (World Bank classification)   |
| World Bank Country Income Group<br>(wb_econ) | 1: Low-income<br>2: Middle-income<br>4: High-income | Country income group classification<br>(World Bank: 2022) |

## THE PROTECTION FROM CHILD MARRIAGE, AFRICA, 1995 – 2023 DATASET

While exhaustive methods were used to collect data, comparable information was not always available for all countries for every indicator, particularly when legislation pre-dates the widespread usage of the internet. In these cases, the relevant variable will be blank in the datasets.

| Variable Name  | Variable Values   | Variable Notes   |
|--|---|--|
| Year of policy<br>(year)   | Numeric from 1995 to 2023   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For each year, the legislation in force is coded. If a new law was passed, but it did not enter into force until a subsequent year, the new law is not captured. (e.g. A 2002 law raises the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18, but does not enter into force until January 1, 2003. For 2002, the minimum age of marriage would be coded as 16. For 2003, the minimum age of marriage would be coded as 18.)</li> </ul>  |
| What is the minimum age of marriage for girls?<br>(minage_female_leg)                      | Age in years with special codes as noted below.<br><br>0: No minimum age<br>98: Puberty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 6 countries, the approval of a guardian is required for females to be married at any age for at least part of the data series. The minimum age of marriage with guardian approval is reflected in the data for this variable.</li> <li><i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage.</li> <li><i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated girls could be married once they reached puberty.</li> </ul> |
| What is the minimum age of marriage for girls with parental consent?<br>(minage_female_pc) | Age in years with special codes as noted below.<br><br>0: No minimum age<br>98: puberty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Parental consent</i> creates legal loopholes to minimum age of marriage laws because most early marriages happen with parental consent and involvement.</li> <li>We do not consider countries with legislation that requires marriage with parental consent to be in the best interest of the child and/or to be to a spouse that is above the age of majority to be more protective than countries that require parental consent alone.</li> </ul>  |

| Variable Name  | Variable Values   | Variable Notes   |
|--|---|--|
|  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage broadly or allows for earlier marriage with parental consent without specifying a minimum age.</li> <li>• <i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated girls could be married once they reached puberty.</li> </ul>   |
| <p>What is the minimum age of marriage for girls under religious and customary law?</p> <p>(minage_female_crlaw)</p> | <p>Age in years with special codes as noted below.</p> <p>0: No minimum age<br/>98: puberty<br/>99: Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some countries civil law exists alongside parallel customary and religious legal systems. These parallel laws often do not establish an adequate minimum age for marriage, or any at all, weakening civil law prohibitions and exposing girls in specific religious and ethnic communities to early marriage.</li> <li>• <i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage broadly or allows for earlier marriage under religious and customary law and these laws do not specify a minimum age.</li> <li>• <i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated girls could be married once they reached puberty.</li> <li>• <i>Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law</i> means that legislation recognizes marriages under religious and/or customary law, but there is no written legislation regarding the minimum age of marriage under these systems, or the minimum age is only explicit for some but not all systems.</li> </ul> |
| <p>When loophole exceptions are taken into account, what is the minimum age of marriage for girls?</p>               | <p>Age in years with special codes as noted below.</p> <p>0: No minimum age<br/>98: puberty</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We consider two forms of loophole exceptions: parental consent (because most early marriages happen with parental consent and involvement), and religious or customary law.</li> <li>• We do not consider countries with legislation that requires marriage with parental consent to be in the best interest of the child and/or to</li> </ul>  |

| Variable Name  | Variable Values   | Variable Notes   |
|--|---|--|
| (minage_female_loop)   | 99: Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law                                       | <p>be to a spouse that is above the age of majority to be more protective than countries that require parental consent alone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some countries civil law exists alongside parallel customary and religious legal systems. These parallel laws often do not establish an adequate minimum age for marriage, or any at all, weakening civil law prohibitions and exposing girls in particular religious and ethnic communities to early marriage.</li> <li>• <i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage broadly or allows for earlier marriage with parental consent or under religious and customary law without specifying a minimum age.</li> <li>• <i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated girls could be married once they reached puberty.</li> <li>• <i>Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law</i> means that legislation recognizes marriages under religious and/or customary law, but there is no written legislation regarding the minimum age of marriage under these systems, or the minimum age is only explicit for some but not all systems.</li> </ul> |
| <p>What is the minimum age of marriage for boys?</p> <p>(minage_male_leg)</p>                      | <p>Age in years with special codes as noted below.</p> <p>0: No minimum age<br/>98: Puberty</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage.</li> <li>• <i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated boys could be married once they reached puberty.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>What is the minimum age of marriage for boys with parental consent?</p> <p>(minage_male_pc)</p> | <p>Age in years with special codes as noted below.</p> <p>0: No minimum age<br/>98: puberty</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Parental consent</i> creates legal loopholes to minimum age of marriage laws because most early marriages happen with parental consent and involvement.</li> <li>• We do not consider countries with legislation that requires marriage with parental consent to be in the best interest of the child and/or to</li> </ul>   |

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| <p>What is the minimum age of marriage for boys under religious and customary law?<br/>(minage_male_crlaw)</p> | <p>Age in years with special codes as noted below.</p> <p>0: No minimum age<br/>98: puberty<br/>99: Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some countries civil law exists alongside parallel customary and religious legal systems. These parallel laws often do not establish an adequate minimum age for marriage, or any at all, weakening civil law prohibitions and exposing children in specific religious and ethnic communities to early marriage.</li> <li>• <i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage broadly or allows for earlier marriage under religious and customary law and these laws do not specify a minimum age.</li> <li>• <i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated boys could be married once they reached puberty.</li> <li>• <i>Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law</i> means that legislation recognizes marriages under religious and/or customary law, but there is no written legislation regarding the minimum age of marriage under these systems, or the minimum age is only explicit for some but not all systems.</li> </ul> |
| <p>When loophole exceptions are taken into account, what is the</p>  | <p>Age in years with special codes as noted below.</p> <p>0: No minimum age</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We consider two forms of loophole exceptions: parental consent (because most early marriages happen with parental consent and involvement), and religious or customary law.</li> </ul>  |

| Variable Name   | Variable Values  | Variable Notes  |
|---|--|---|
| minimum age of marriage for boys?<br><br>(minage_male_loop) | 98: puberty<br>99: Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We do not consider countries with legislation that requires marriage with parental consent to be in the best interest of the child and/or to be to a spouse that is above the age of majority to be more protective than countries that require parental consent alone.</li> <li>• In some countries civil law exists alongside parallel customary and religious legal systems. These parallel laws often do not establish an adequate minimum age for marriage, or any at all, weakening civil law prohibitions and exposing children in particular religious and ethnic communities to early marriage.</li> <li>• <i>No minimum age</i> indicates that legislation does not establish a minimum age of marriage broadly or allows for earlier marriage with parental consent or under religious and customary law without specifying a minimum age.</li> <li>• <i>Puberty</i> indicates that legislation did not specify a minimum age of marriage in years, but stated boys could be married once they reached puberty.</li> <li>• <i>Unknown minimum age set by religious or customary law</i> means that legislation recognizes marriages under religious and/or customary law, but there is no written legislation regarding the minimum age of marriage under these systems, or the minimum age is only explicit for some but not all systems.</li> </ul> |