

Africa - WORLD African Child Marriage Laws 2023

WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD)

Report generated on: March 6, 2026

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Identification

SURVEY ID NUMBER
afr-world-wacml-2023-v1.1

TITLE
WORLD African Child Marriage Laws 2023

ABBREVIATION OR ACRONYM
WACML 2023

COUNTRY

Name	Country code
Africa	afr

STUDY TYPE
Other

ABSTRACT

The WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD) is committed to improving the quantity and quality of globally comparative data available to policymakers, citizens, civil society, and researchers on laws and policies that work to support human rights, including economic opportunity, social and civic engagement, human health, development, well-being, and equity. This dataset is part of a series that assesses progress in laws across African countries that lay the foundation for equal opportunities in childhood and gender equality. Early marriage jeopardizes the health, economic security, and autonomy of women and their children. WORLD's Protection from Child Marriage, Africa 1995-2023 dataset provides data on progress on laws protecting girls from early marriage through a systematic review of legislation governing minimum age of marriage from 1995 to 2023 in 54 African countries. A public use legislative repository is available with the legislation used to code each African country. In some cases the laws made available are only the recent laws and not all the laws that relate to the coded data in the longitudinal African datasets.

KIND OF DATA
Legislation

UNIT OF ANALYSIS
Laws

Version

VERSION DESCRIPTION
v1.1: Edited anonymised data for distribution as public access share-alike data

VERSION DATE
2026-03-05

VERSION NOTES
Version 1.1 includes corrections to the customary law and loophole variables in the data file.

Scope

NOTES

The data covers the legislated minimum age of marriage for boys and girls, including legal loopholes that allow for earlier marriage with parental consent or under religious and customary law.

Coverage

GEOGRAPHIC UNIT

The data is at the level of country, and includes the following countries: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Eswatini, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Producers and sponsors

PRIMARY INVESTIGATORS

Name
WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD)

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR

Name	Role
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Funding agency
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation	Funding agency
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	Funding agency

Data Collection

DATES OF DATA COLLECTION

Start	End
1995	2023

DATA COLLECTION MODE

Other

SUPERVISION

Ethics approval was not required because all data is from publicly available legislative texts

DATA COLLECTION NOTES

WORLD examined constitutional and legal provisions as they set a foundation for 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.

DATA SOURCES

In selecting data sources to analyze, WORLD's first priority is to identify sources containing full-text original legislation. To ensure the greatest level of accuracy and comparability across countries, the aim is always 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. Documents are reviewed 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, those that are comparable across multiple countries are prioritized, such as global or regional sources. When using

information sources that cover a limited number of countries, the aim is to ensure that the information they contain can be made consistent with other sources.

For the Protection from Child Marriage Database, 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 data captures national-level legislation. In countries where minimum age of marriage laws are set at the state or provincial level coding is 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, an analysis of case law relevant to legal provisions for the minimum age of marriage could not be included. 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. 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 updated and expanded the data to May 31, 2023.

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, the WORLD team first identify the essential policy features to be captured, 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 a viable framework is created, feedback is sought from civil society and researchers working in these areas to ensure the questions asked 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 are not 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.

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.

ACCURACY, ANALYSIS, AND UPDATING

Upon completion of coding, the WORLD team conducts systematic quality checks. They also carry out targeted checks of countries that appear as outliers globally or for their region or income level.

World uses the most up-to-date sources available for each of their datasets. 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 the data. Further, the process of coding legislation inevitably involves important matters of interpretation. For all datasets, the WORLD team welcome receiving feedback and copies of laws from anyone who believes the datab may not be fully up-to-date.

DATA COLLECTORS

Name	Abbreviation	Affiliation
WORLD Policy Analysis Center	WORLD	University of California, Los Angeles

Access policy

CONTACTS

Name	Affiliation	Email	URL
DataFirst Support	University of Cape Town	support@data1st.org	www.support.data1st.org

ACCESS CONDITIONS

Public access data for use under a Creative Commons CC-BY-SA (Attribution plus Share-Alike) License

CITATION REQUIREMENTS

WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD). African Child Marriage Laws 2023 [dataset]. Version 1.1. Los Angeles: WORLD Policy Analysis Center [producer], 2024. Cape Town: DataFirst [distributor], 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25828/4rda-6e94>

ACCESS AUTHORITY

Name	Affiliation	Email	URL
DataFirst	University of Cape Town	support@data1st.org	support.data1st.org

Metadata production

PRODUCERS

Name	Abbreviation	Role
WORLD Policy Analysis Center	WORLD	Metadata producer
DataFirst		Metadata producer

DATE OF METADATA PRODUCTION

2026-03-06

DDI DOCUMENT VERSION

Version 3

Data Description

Data file	Cases	Variables
minagemarr-v1.1	1550	14

Data file: minagemarr-v1.1

Cases: 1550

Variables: 14

Variables

ID	Name	Label	Question
V37	country	country name	
V38	year		
V39	minage_female_pc	min age of marriage for girls with parental consent	
V40	minage_female_leg	legal min age of marriage for girls	
V41	minage_female_crlaw	min age of marriage for girls under religious and customary law	
V42	minage_female_loop	min age of marriage for girls w/ legal loopholes	
V43	minage_male_pc	min age of marriage for boys with parental consent	
V44	minage_male_leg	legal min age of marriage for boys	
V45	minage_male_crlaw	min age of marriage for boys under religious and customary law	
V46	minage_male_loop	min age of marriage for boys w/ legal loopholes	
V47	iso3	iso 3	
V48	region	world bank region	
V49	wb_econ	world bank income-level	
V50	iso2	iso 2	

Total: 14

COUNTRY: country name**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1550 Invalid: 0

Type: Discrete Width: 32 Range: - Format: character

Questions and instructions

CATEGORIES

Value	Category	Cases	
Algeria		29	1.9%
Angola		29	1.9%
Benin		29	1.9%
Botswana		29	1.9%
Burkina Faso		29	1.9%
Burundi		29	1.9%
Cameroon		29	1.9%
Cape Verde		29	1.9%
Central African Republic		29	1.9%
Chad		29	1.9%
Comoros		29	1.9%
Cote d'Ivoire		29	1.9%
Democratic Republic of the Congo		29	1.9%
Djibouti		29	1.9%
Egypt		29	1.9%
Equatorial Guinea		29	1.9%
Eritrea		29	1.9%
Eswatini		29	1.9%
Ethiopia		29	1.9%
Gabon		29	1.9%
Ghana		29	1.9%
Guinea		29	1.9%
Guinea-Bissau		29	1.9%
Kenya		29	1.9%
Lesotho		29	1.9%
Liberia		29	1.9%
Libya		29	1.9%
Madagascar		29	1.9%
Malawi		29	1.9%
Mali		29	1.9%

Mauritania		29	1.9%
Mauritius		29	1.9%
Morocco		29	1.9%
Mozambique		29	1.9%
Namibia		29	1.9%
Niger		29	1.9%
Nigeria		29	1.9%
Republic of the Congo		29	1.9%
Rwanda		29	1.9%
Sao Tome and Principe		29	1.9%
Senegal		29	1.9%
Seychelles		29	1.9%
Sierra Leone		29	1.9%
Somalia		29	1.9%
South Africa		29	1.9%
South Sudan		13	0.8%
Sudan		29	1.9%
Tanzania		29	1.9%
The Gambia		29	1.9%
Togo		29	1.9%
Tunisia		29	1.9%
Uganda		29	1.9%
Zambia		29	1.9%
Zimbabwe		29	1.9%

YEAR:**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1550 Invalid: 0 Minimum: 1995 Maximum: 2023 Mean: 2009.067 Standard deviation: 8.373
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 4 Range: 1995 - 2023 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_FEMALE_PC: min age of marriage for girls with parental consent**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1543 Invalid: 7 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 98 Mean: 17.219 Standard deviation: 11.974
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 98 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_FEMALE_LEG: legal min age of marriage for girls**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1543 Invalid: 7 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 98 Mean: 19.691 Standard deviation: 11.506
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 98 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_FEMALE_CRLAW: min age of marriage for girls under religious and customary law**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1469 Invalid: 81 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 99 Mean: 33.144 Standard deviation: 35.81
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 99 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_FEMALE_LOOP: min age of marriage for girls w/ legal loopholes**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1469 Invalid: 81 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 99 Mean: 31.647 Standard deviation: 35.794
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 99 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_MALE_PC: min age of marriage for boys with parental consent**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1543 Invalid: 7 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 21 Mean: 16.41 Standard deviation: 4.922
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 21 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_MALE_LEG: legal min age of marriage for boys**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1543 Invalid: 7 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 21 Mean: 18.804 Standard deviation: 2.498
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 21 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_MALE_CRLAW: min age of marriage for boys under religious and customary law**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1449 Invalid: 101 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 99 Mean: 34.239 Standard deviation: 35.478
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 99 Format: Numeric

MINAGE_MALE_LOOP: min age of marriage for boys w/ legal loopholes**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1449 Invalid: 101 Minimum: 0 Maximum: 99 Mean: 32.284 Standard deviation: 35.929
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 2 Range: 0 - 99 Format: Numeric

ISO3: iso 3**Data file: minagemarr-v1.1****Overview**

Valid: 1550 Invalid: 0
 Type: Discrete Width: 3 Range: - Format: character

Questions and instructions

CATEGORIES

Value	Category	Cases	
AGO		29	1.9%
BDI		29	1.9%
BEN		29	1.9%
BFA		29	1.9%
BWA		29	1.9%
CAF		29	1.9%
CIV		29	1.9%
CMR		29	1.9%
COD		29	1.9%
COG		29	1.9%
COM		29	1.9%
CPV		29	1.9%
DJI		29	1.9%
DZA		29	1.9%
EGY		29	1.9%
ERI		29	1.9%
ETH		29	1.9%
GAB		29	1.9%
GHA		29	1.9%
GIN		29	1.9%
GMB		29	1.9%

GNB		29	1.9%
GNQ		29	1.9%
KEN		29	1.9%
LBR		29	1.9%
LBY		29	1.9%
LSO		29	1.9%
MAR		29	1.9%
MDG		29	1.9%
MLI		29	1.9%
MOZ		29	1.9%
MRT		29	1.9%
MUS		29	1.9%
MWI		29	1.9%
NAM		29	1.9%
NER		29	1.9%
NGA		29	1.9%
RWA		29	1.9%
SDN		29	1.9%
SEN		29	1.9%
SLE		29	1.9%
SOM		29	1.9%
SSD		13	0.8%
STP		29	1.9%
SWZ		29	1.9%
SYC		29	1.9%
TCD		29	1.9%
TGO		29	1.9%
TUN		29	1.9%
TZA		29	1.9%
UGA		29	1.9%
ZAF		29	1.9%
ZMB		29	1.9%
ZWE		29	1.9%

REGION: world bank region

Data file: minagemarr-v1.1

Overview

Valid: 1550 Invalid: 0

Type: Discrete Width: 26 Range: - Format: character

Questions and instructions

CATEGORIES

Value	Category	Cases	
Middle East & North Africa		174	11.2%
Sub-Saharan Africa		1376	88.8%

WB_ECON: world bank income-level

Data file: minagemarr-v1.1

Overview

Valid: 1550 Invalid: 0 Minimum: 1 Maximum: 4
 Type: Continuous Decimal: 0 Width: 1 Range: 1 - 4 Format: Numeric

Questions and instructions

CATEGORIES

Value	Category	Cases	
1	low-income	622	40.1%
2	middle-income	899	58%
4	high-income	29	1.9%

ISO2: iso 2

Data file: minagemarr-v1.1

Overview

Valid: 1550 Invalid: 0
 Type: Discrete Width: 2 Range: - Format: character

Questions and instructions

CATEGORIES

Value	Category	Cases	
AO		29	1.9%
BF		29	1.9%
BI		29	1.9%
BJ		29	1.9%
BW		29	1.9%
CD		29	1.9%

CF		29	1.9%
CG		29	1.9%
CI		29	1.9%
CM		29	1.9%
CV		29	1.9%
DJ		29	1.9%
DZ		29	1.9%
EG		29	1.9%
ER		29	1.9%
ET		29	1.9%
GA		29	1.9%
GH		29	1.9%
GM		29	1.9%
GN		29	1.9%
GQ		29	1.9%
GW		29	1.9%
KE		29	1.9%
KM		29	1.9%
LR		29	1.9%
LS		29	1.9%
LY		29	1.9%
MA		29	1.9%
MG		29	1.9%
ML		29	1.9%
MR		29	1.9%
MU		29	1.9%
MW		29	1.9%
MZ		29	1.9%
NA		29	1.9%
NE		29	1.9%
NG		29	1.9%
RW		29	1.9%
SC		29	1.9%
SD		29	1.9%
SL		29	1.9%
SN		29	1.9%
SO		29	1.9%
SS		13	0.8%
ST		29	1.9%

SZ		29	1.9%
TD		29	1.9%
TG		29	1.9%
TN		29	1.9%
TZ		29	1.9%
UG		29	1.9%
ZA		29	1.9%
ZM		29	1.9%
ZW		29	1.9%

Download related resources

Other materials

Protection from Child Marriage, Africa, 1995-2023 public use data dictionary

Title	Protection from Child Marriage, Africa, 1995-2023 public use data dictionary
Date	2024-01-01
Country	Africa
Language	English
Contributor(s)	This is the data dictionary for the data file
Filename	pcm-1995-2023-dict.pdf

pcm-2023-dict.pdf

Title	pcm-2023-dict.pdf
Description	This is the data dictionary for the files
Filename	pcm-2023-dict.pdf
