**WORLD Policy
Analysis Center**

MEASURING NATIONAL ACTION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Using Policy, Implementation, and Outcome Data to Accelerate Gender Equality

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About WORLD

The goal of the WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD) is to improve the quantity and quality of comparative data available to policymakers, citizens, civil society, and researchers around the world on policies affecting equity, development, human health, and well-being. Under the leadership of Dr. Jody Heymann, WORLD is committed to making its broad, globally comparative findings publicly accessible to inform and encourage improvements in legal and policy frameworks worldwide, allow nations to learn from the approaches taken in other countries, facilitate studies of the feasibility and effectiveness of laws and policies in critical areas, and support efforts to hold decision-makers accountable.

Executive Summary

Within the past 40 years, the U.N. has adopted three major global agreements on gender equality and women's rights. Historically, efforts to monitor countries' progress toward realizing these commitments have focused on measuring outcomes. Outcome data provide important information on gender disparities in key areas and how inequality has changed over time. However, measuring outcomes alone only tells us the extent of the problem. To understand and analyze solutions, we also need longitudinal legal, policy, and implementation data.

The three core global treaties and agreements on gender equality are detailed and comprehensive in scope, and reflect decades of work and deliberation by the global community. While countries should deeply engage with the specific commitments of each, these instruments also consistently address seven key areas: non-discrimination, education, work and income, health, equal rights in the family, civil and political rights, and freedom from violence. These areas provide a framework for measuring and monitoring national action to advance countries' global commitments.

Quantitatively measuring countries' laws and policies on gender equality will enable us to monitor progress on enacting evidence-based policies over time. This approach complements traditional, outcome-focused monitoring efforts by providing actionable information to civil society members advocating for reforms; identifying areas of global progress and regress; and rewarding policymakers who take actions that may not yield immediate results but will have long-term impacts. Longitudinal policy, implementation, and outcome data also allow researchers to undertake rigorous analyses of when and how policies have impact.

QUANTITATIVELY MEASURING COUNTRIES' LAWS AND POLICIES ON GENDER EQUALITY WILL ENABLE US TO MONITOR PROGRESS ON ENACTING EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES OVER TIME.

1. Introduction

Over the past 40 years, the global community has adopted three major agreements designed to advance women's rights and gender equality. First, in 1979, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a landmark treaty that comprehensively outlined states' responsibilities for promoting the rights of women and girls. In 1995, 189 countries reaffirmed and strengthened these commitments at the Fourth World Conference on Women through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Most recently, in 2015, the U.N. adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a detailed set of 17 global objectives aimed at addressing critical health and equity challenges worldwide. SDG 5 explicitly calls on states to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," while other goals focused on health, work, and education specifically note the need to address persisting gender disparities.

Historically, efforts to monitor progress toward realizing these global treaties and agreements on gender equality have focused on outcome data. Outcome measures have provided critical insights into the scale of gender disparities in different arenas and how inequality has changed over time. However, outcome data alone only measure the scale of the problem, and provide few insights into successful approaches to address it. To understand what works to change outcomes for women and girls, we also need longitudinal policy and implementation data.

Together, longitudinal policy, implementation, and outcome data can accelerate progress on gender equality globally in two key ways. First, global, independently verifiable policy data, when presented in a readily comparative format, provide a complementary monitoring tool to evaluate whether states are fulfilling their commitments to women and girls under human rights agreements. Measuring and monitoring policy rewards decision-makers who undertake important reforms to advance gender equality, even if those reforms will not have measurable impacts on outcomes until their term in office is over. At the same time, policy data provide a tool for civil society to quickly identify how their country's laws and policies compare to others in their region or income group, and to hold their governments accountable for taking action. Second, when merged with outcome data, globally comparative policy data enable researchers to rigorously evaluate which policy approaches are effective at improving outcomes for women and girls across regions and socioeconomic contexts. Strengthening both these efforts, implementation data can yield critical insights about where to target attention and resources on the ground.

In recent years, important efforts have emerged, both within the U.N. system and within non-profit and academic institutions globally, to measure countries' laws and policies on gender. Currently, however, none achieve the following fully:

- comprehensive and regularly updated global coverage of all 193 U.N. member states with policy data linked to implementation and outcomes;

- an equity-based approach that prioritizes understanding whether laws and policies are inclusive of the most economically vulnerable women, including women in the informal economy and those living in rural areas; and

- comprehensive coverage of all law and policy areas that are both critical to gender equality and embodied in global agreements, including non-discrimination, education, work and income, health, equal rights in the family, freedom from violence, and civil and political rights.

This brief first provides an overview of how global, longitudinal policy data, together with implementation and outcome data, can accelerate progress on gender equality. This brief then outlines a global framework for measuring gender equality that synthesizes the commitments contained in CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and the SDGs. By distilling these comprehensive global commitments into a set of core elements, this framework provides a concise and manageable way to track and monitor countries' progress on gender equality.

2. What it Takes to Monitor and Accelerate Progress at Scale: Policy, Implementation, and Outcome Data

CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and the SDGs offer a roadmap for advancing women's equal rights and opportunities in education, health, the economy, and all aspects of public and private life. Their realization relies on everyone playing a role, from government to the private sector, and from organized civil society to individuals. Yet at their core, these agreements are a commitment by national governments to eliminate all barriers to the well-being and full participation of women and girls.

Central to this commitment is the formulation and successful implementation of national policies that are effective at achieving progress at scale. NGOs and civil society organizations can be critical engines of innovation, but governments are often uniquely positioned to operate educational, health, and social services at a national scale with universal provision. Further, governments establish the ground rules on non-discrimination and equality both in the public and private sector.

Past experiences from all over the world demonstrate the potential of legal and policy reforms to improve health, economic, and social outcomes overall, and opportunities for women and girls specifically. For example, in Mauritius, girls' school enrollment increased by more than 10% after 2005 reforms guaranteed that all education would be free and that education would be compulsory until age 16 (Waisath et al., 2014). In Uganda, primary school attendance rates increased from 62% in 1992 to 84% in 1999 after free primary was established nationwide in 1997, while gender disparities in enrollment dropped (Deininger, 2003). In the Maldives, rates of marriage among girls ages 15 to 19 dropped from 46.9% in 1995 to 5.6% in 2009; the Maldives had no written marriage law in place prior to the passage of the Family Act in 2001, which set the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 (Waisath et al., 2014).

Yet historically, much of monitoring has focused solely on outcome data; policy data have received comparatively little attention. Measuring changes in outcomes plays a critical role in assessing progress. In the case of education, for example, our ultimate concern is whether children and youth receive a quality education and attain high learning outcomes. In the case of poverty, our concern is whether individuals and families have an adequate income year-round.

However, when only outcome data are measured, a number of problems can arise:

1. Decision-makers may not know how to move the outcome. They may see that a high percentage of their population still lives in poverty but not know what steps would be most effective to enable more families to meet their basic needs. The same can be true for improving education, health, or other outcomes.

2. Individuals and communities may face greater barriers to holding leaders accountable for actions they should take. When policymakers' actions are not being measured in a transparent way, citizens have insufficient information to monitor whether their governments are making progress toward fulfilling their commitments under global treaties and agreements.

3. Leaders who do take important policy steps toward achieving gender equality may not receive credit for those steps during their tenure in government. For example, if training more teachers provides girls with improved educational outcomes four years into the future, a policymaker

should receive recognition for initiating a new teacher training program even if the results are not immediate due to the time needed for implementation and impact.

Similarly, measuring policy or process alone, although less common than focusing exclusively on outcomes, has notable limitations. For example, countries can enact a policy to guarantee free secondary school, but if transportation problems prevent youth from attending, the fact that education is tuition-free does not guarantee access. Likewise, if school is compulsory, more children may enroll, but if the classrooms are so big that students cannot learn then the quality of their education will fall short. Both of these examples illustrate the importance of measuring the outcome–how much the children learned. At the same time, these examples underscore the importance of understanding implementation and groups of policies that function together. If part of the problem is transportation, then we need to examine what is being done to enable children to travel safely to school. If removing tuition leads to an insufficient supply of classrooms and too few qualified teachers, we also need to examine what is being done to address teacher training, including both the policies in place and school systems' actual practices.

To monitor progress on gender equality, we need a comprehensive approach to data and monitoring that addresses all three pieces of the puzzle: policies, implementation, and outcomes. While past efforts have often prioritized outcome data over policy data, devoting equal attention to the development of globally comparative, longitudinal policy data, alongside implementation data, should be a priority in the decades to come. With high-quality, longitudinal data in each of these areas, we can accelerate progress on gender equality in two critical ways:

1. By monitoring the adoption of laws and policies that align with countries' human rights commitments to gender equality, and identifying gaps and global trends over time; and

2. By learning what works to improve gender equality outcomes across countries in areas where the most effective policy approach is unknown.

2.1 MONITORING ADOPTION OF LAWS AND POLICIES THAT ALIGN WITH COUNTRIES' HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY

Without policy data, we have no way to acknowledge the steps governments are taking today to benefit their citizens years after adoption. Globally comparative policy data fill this gap by enabling stakeholders to quickly grasp the action steps leaders are taking to ensure their countries are on track toward fulfilling their gender equality commitments in international treaties and agreements. Moreover, longitudinal policy data allow us to understand whether countries are strengthening or diluting their human rights protections over time.

For example, one area where gender inequality remains common in national laws is the minimum age of marriage. Globally, girls remain far more likely than boys to be married as children, laying the foundation for lifelong gender inequality. According to UNICEF, child marriage affects around five times as many girls as boys (UNICEF, 2018). While ending child marriage requires action on many fronts, inadequate legal protections and gender inequalities that are embedded in the law contribute to its persistence and disproportionate impact on girls. CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and SDG 5 all explicitly seek to eliminate child marriage, while the CEDAW Committee and Committee on the Rights of the Child have made clear that laws permitting child marriage violate countries' human rights treaty obligations (CEDAW & CRC, 2014).

Nevertheless, as of 2019, 9% of countries allowed girls to be legally married as children. Loopholes in the law undermine these protections even further. Forty-one percent of countries allow marriage before the age of 18 with parental consent.
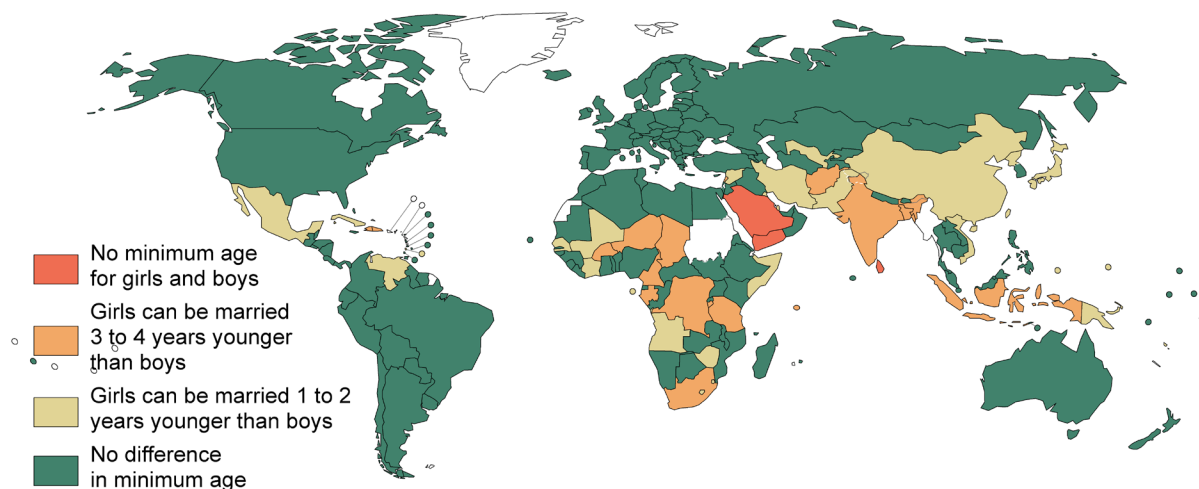
What is the minimum age of marriage
for girls with parental consent?
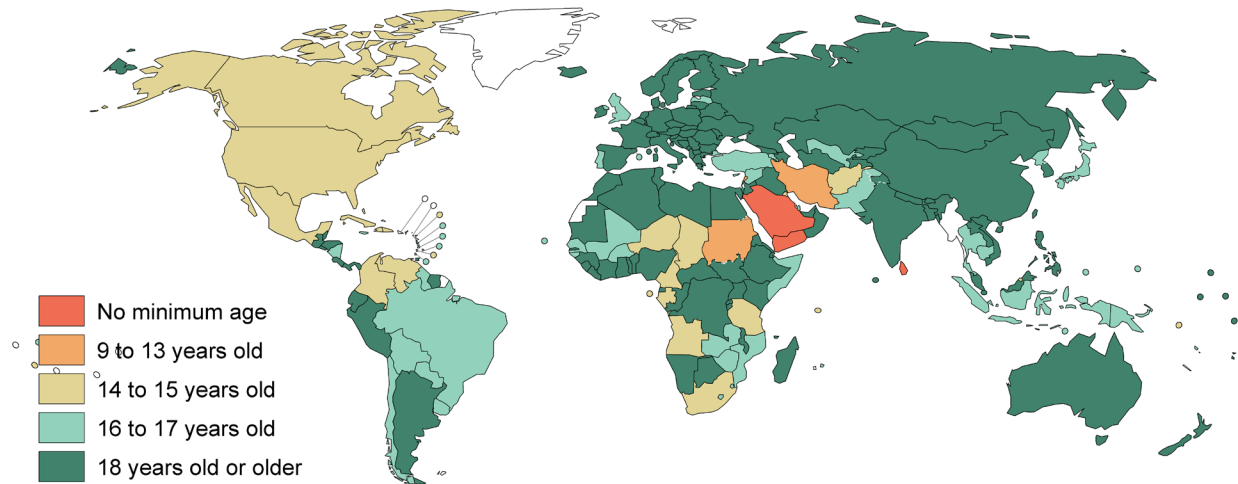
Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Child Marriage Database, 2019

In addition, 10% of countries legally set a minimum age of marriage that is younger for girls than for boys. Accounting for parental consent exceptions, more than a quarter of countries allow girls to be legally married earlier than boys. In 9% of countries, the disparity in ages between girls and boys is 3 or 4 years.

Is there a gender disparity in the minimum legal age of marriage
with parental consent?

Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Child Marriage Database, 2019

Encouragingly, these gender disparities are being closed over time. In 1995, only 27% of low- and middle-income countries had no gender disparity in the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys with parental consent. By 2005, that number had increased to 43% and in 2019 more than two-thirds of low- and middle-income countries had gender equality in the minimum age of marriage with parental consent.

2.2 LEARNING WHAT WORKS IN NEW AREAS

Second, linked policy, implementation, and outcome data can facilitate efforts to rigorously examine which law and policy approaches have impact on gender equality, providing a foundation for further evidence-based action.

Connecting policy and outcome data can be a particularly powerful technique for learning what works in areas where we are unsure whether a particular policy will work equally well in different contexts, or where advocates and other stakeholders committed to the same goals have different views about the best approach to take. For example, studies have shown that in high-income countries, paid maternal leave supports women's labor force participation and earnings (Rossin-Slater, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2013; Rasmussen, 2010; Waldfogel, 1998). Paid parental leave can also improve children's health outcomes in high-income countries by strengthening parents' abilities to take their child to the doctor or breastfeed for the recommended six months (Berger, Hill & Waldfogel, 2005; Ueda, Kondo, Takada & Hashimoto, 2014). One study using a sample of 18 OECD countries, for instance, found that increases in paid parental leave were associated with decreases in both infant and child mortality (Tanaka, 2005).

However, historically, less has been known about whether paid leave and other labor policies that work in high-income settings would be feasible or effective in lower-income countries. Questions arise regarding their transferability to countries where a greater proportion of the population works in the informal economy. Further, the administrative burden of providing paid leave may weigh more heavily on governments in lower-resource settings. By linking policy data on paid leave exclusively from low- and middle-income countries with changes in outcomes, it becomes possible to disentangle whether paid leave is similarly effective across different socioeconomic contexts.

A recent study on maternal leave and child health provides an example. Using data on 300,000 births across 20 countries collected via the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), MACHEquity and WORLD researchers examined whether increases in paid maternity leave made a difference for infant mortality across 20 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The DHS collects information on infant and neonatal mortality, including the age of death of any children who have died, as well as factors that might affect infant and neonatal mortality, including sex of the infant, maternal age, maternal education, interval of time between births, urban/ rural residence, household socioeconomic status, and the presence of a skilled birth attendant (USAID, 2018).

To understand the effects of leave, the study merged longitudinal policy data on the duration of paid maternity leave available in each country with the DHS data on infant mortality. Controlling for confounding factors, this study found that each additional month of paid maternity leave was associated with 7.9 fewer infant deaths per 1,000 live births, reflecting a 13% relative reduction. Reductions in infant mortality associated with increases in the duration of paid maternity leave were concentrated in the post-neonatal period, suggesting that paid leave for mothers in LMICs may indeed influence breastfeeding, immunizations, and other post-natal factors that support infant health (Nandi et al., 2016).

Studies using similar methods have shed light on these specific mechanisms. For example, a 2015 study of 20 LMICs found that each additional week of paid maternity leave increased the probability of an infant receiving all three doses of the DTP vaccine, which is administered in three doses, at least four weeks apart, beginning when the infant is at least six weeks old (Hajizadeh et al., 2015). By contrast, the study found no significant relationship between increases in paid maternity leave and infants' receipt of the BCG vaccine, which is typically administered immediately after birth rather than after many parents have had to return to work. Similarly, a study of nearly one million live births across 38 LMICs between 1996 and 2014 found that increasing paid leave by one month was associated with a 7.4 percentage point increase in the initiation of early breastfeeding, a 5.9 percentage point increase in the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding, and an increase in breastfeeding duration of over two months (Chai, Nandi & Heymann, 2018).

By combining policy and outcome data, these studies strengthened the evidence for how paid maternity

leave is an important health intervention in low- and high-income countries alike. Once we have this evidence, facilitating action by decision-makers requires making the data on countries' approaches readily available and comparable. For example, while all but eight countries worldwide guaranteed some amount of paid leave to women following the birth of a child as of 2015,[1] the duration of available leave varies markedly. Fifty-four percent of countries, including 50% of low-income countries, 45% of middle-income countries, and 75% of high-income countries, provide at least 14 weeks of paid leave, which is the minimum global standard established by the International Labour Organization's Maternity Protection Convention (ILO, 2000). Twenty-seven percent of countries, including 6% of low-income countries, 22% of middle-income countries, and 52% of high-income countries, guarantee 26 weeks or more, sufficient to support mothers to exclusively breastfeed for the six months recommended by the World Health Organization.

Is paid leave available for mothers of infants?

No paid leave
Less than 14 weeks
14 - 25.9 weeks
26 - 51.9 weeks
52 weeks or more
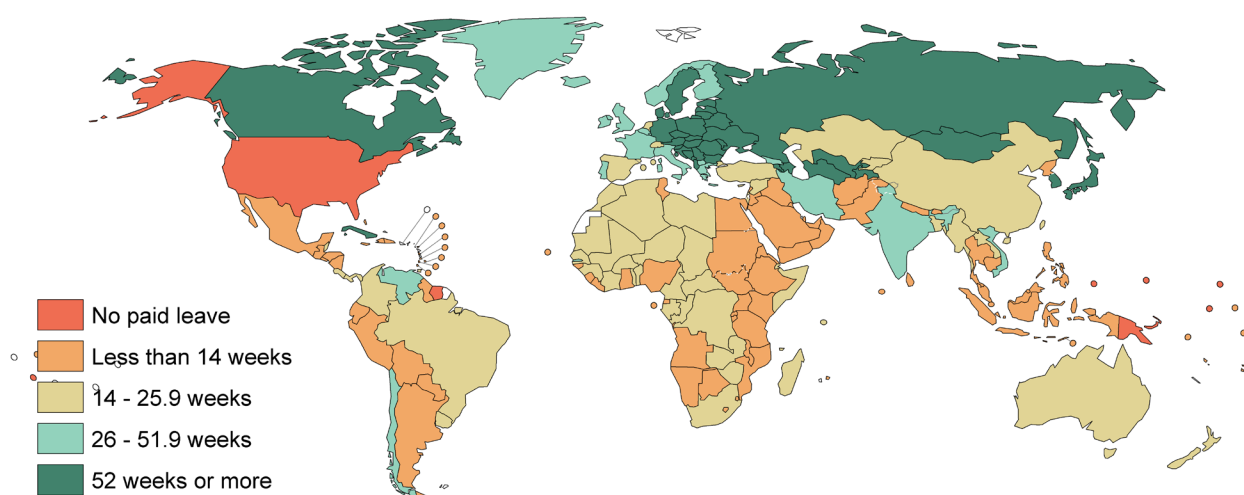
Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Adult Labor Database, 2015

Wage replacement rates also affect whether mothers can afford to take available leave. The ILO standard provides that should women receive at least two-thirds their regular wages while on leave (ILO, 2000). Globally, 81% of low-income countries, 66% of middle-income countries, and 45% of high-income countries replace at least two-thirds of wages during the maternal leave period.

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[1] Parental leave data in this brief reflect a systematic review of laws in place as of April 2015 supplemented with detailed data on OECD countries as of September 2016 and other known policy changes that have occurred since then.

What is the minimum wage replacement rate of paid leave for mothers?

Legend:
- No paid leave
- Flat rate or adjusted flat rate
- 20% - 65%
- 66% - 79%
- 80% - 100%
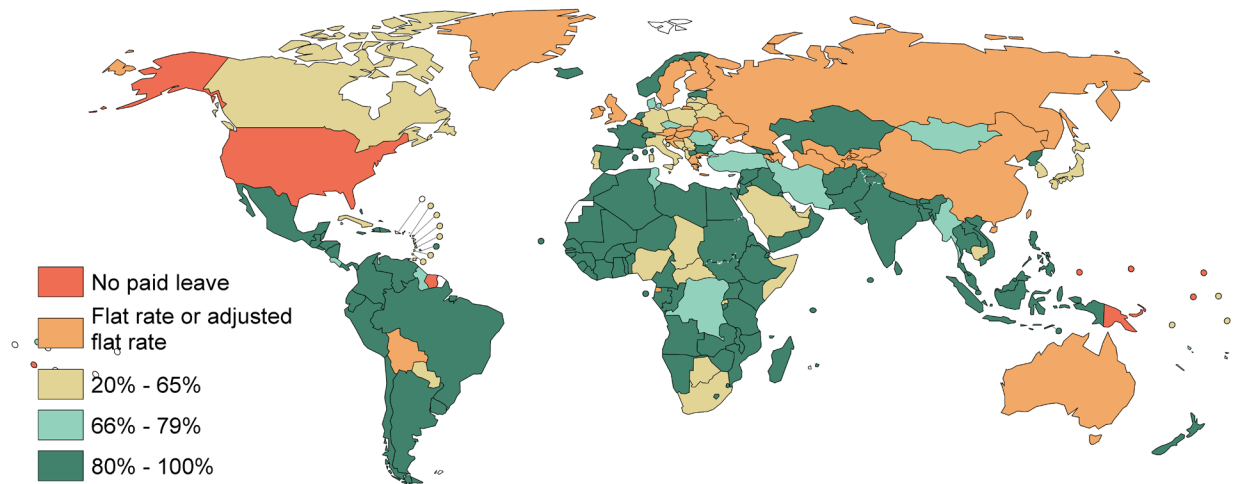
Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Adult Labor Database, 2015

Further, while initial studies linking leave policies to outcomes have focused on maternal leave, researching the impact of paternal leave is similarly critical. Paid leave for new fathers is fundamental to gender equality: it provides men with the opportunity to participate in caregiving, supports fathers' involvement with their children even after leave is over, facilitates more equitable sharing of household work, and supports women's participation in the workforce (Haas & Hwang, 2000; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; O'Brien, 2009). However, policy data reveal marked gender disparities in leave availability; just 53% of countries make paid leave available to new fathers, compared to 96% that provide maternal leave.

Is paid leave available for fathers of infants?

Legend:
- No paid leave
- Less than 3 weeks
- 3 - 13 weeks
- 14 weeks or more
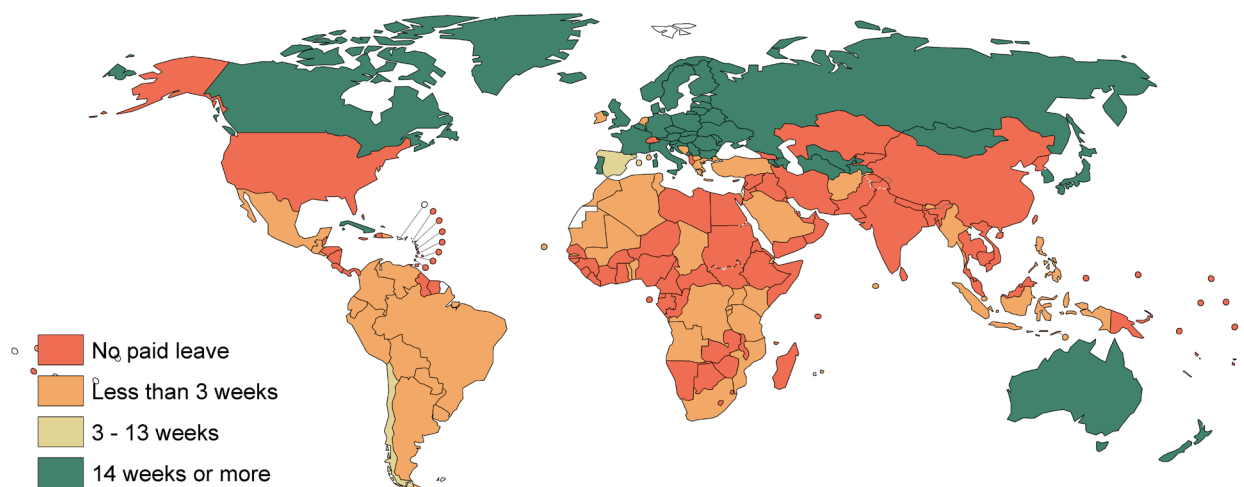
Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Adult Labor Database, 2015

3. Measuring the Status of Women: Key Areas of Global Policy Data

CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and SDG 5 each embody a comprehensive agenda for advancing gender equality. Countries should deeply engage with and strive to realize the specific commitments established by each individual instrument. At the same time, for purposes of global monitoring, identifying core elements that cut across these agreements provides an actionable approach to assessing progress on gender equality across countries. Further, representing an important recognition of the value of policy data, SDG indicator 5.1.1 calls for tracking "[w]hether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex." The comprehensive visions of CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration provide a foundation for developing a concise and manageable framework to both fulfill the SDG 5.1.1 mandate and monitor global action on gender equality more broadly.

Examining the text of CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and the SDGs, with particular focus on SDG 5, reveals seven consistent areas of focus: non-discrimination, education, work and income, health, equal rights in the family, civil and political rights, and freedom from violence. In Table 1, we identify the specific provisions in each instrument that outline countries' commitments in these areas. In addition, we provide a brief survey of some of the literature on their importance and impact, along with examples of core national laws and policies to support gender equality in each area. While this list of laws and policies is not exhaustive, it provides an actionable starting point for monitoring SDG 5.1.1 and evaluating national action to protect and advance the health, rights, and opportunities of women and girls. Moreover, the data presented throughout this article illustrate the feasibility of addressing these areas quantitatively, as well as the many possibilities for monitoring, research, and advocacy this approach allows.

Table 1: Global Framework for Measuring National Law and Policy Approaches to Gender Equality

Global Framework Pillar	Relevant Provisions in Global Treaties & Agreements	Sample Evidence on Impact and Value	Key National Laws and Policies
Non-Discrimination	CEDAW Art. 1 CEDAW Art. 2 CEDAW Art. 13 CEDAW Art. 14 CEDAW Art. 15 Beijing Declaration Par. 24 Beijing Declaration Par. 32 SDG Target 5.1	• Persisting gender disparities across education, health, work, and political representation • Intersections between gender discrimination and discrimination on the basis of race, class, disability, sexual orientation, migration status • Demonstrated impact of constitutional equal rights as foundation for overturning discriminatory laws, supporting new legislation to strengthen equal rights, and shifting norms in favor of gender equality	• Equal rights in the constitution • Equal rights in the law

Education	CEDAW Art. 10 Beijing Declaration Par. 27 Beijing Declaration Par. 30 SDG Target 4.1 SDG Target 4.2 SDG Target 4.5	• Increase in individual earnings (Patrinos & Montenegro, 2014) • Decrease in child marriage & early childbearing (UNESCO, 2004; Grown et al., 2005; Mensch et al., 2005; Sperling & Winthrop, 2016; Koski et al., 2018) • Reduction in infant and child mortality (Schultz, 1993; Gakidou et al., 2010; Quamruzzaman et al., 2014) • Increase in agricultural productivity (Appleton, 1996) • Increase in modern contraceptive use (Mocan & Cannonier, 2012) • Increase in GDP (OECD, 2012; ILO & ADB, 2011)	• Constitutional right to education • Free and compulsory education, including secondary school • Policies supporting quality, inclusive education at all levels • Free pre-primary education and childcare • Legal protection from paid and unpaid child labor
Work and Income	CEDAW Art. 11 CEDAW Art. 13 CEDAW Art. 14 Beijing Declaration Par. 26 Beijing Declaration Par. 35 SDG Target 5.a SDG Target 8.5 SDG Target 8.8	• Decrease in poverty (Heintz, 2006) • Improvements in child nutrition (Ponce et al., 2017) • Increase in investments in children's health and education (Thomas, 1993; Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2000) • Increase in girls' survival rates and educational attainment (Qian, 2008) • Women with their own incomes may be better situated to leave a violent relationship (Ellsberg et al., 2015) • Increase in GDP (Woetzel et al., 2015; Aguirre et al., 2012; Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013)	• Constitutional rights to work and unionize • Equity in caregiving (paid maternal leave, paid paternal leave, and leave to care for family members) • Equal rights at work (non-discrimination at work, equal pay for equal value, and equal access to all types of work) • Equal rights to economic resources (ownership and control over land and property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources) • Policies to support reduction of time poverty barriers (infrastructure, transportation, fuel, and water) • Social protection policies (adequate minimum wage, old age pensions, unemployment insurance)
Health	CEDAW Art. 12 Beijing Declaration Par. 17 Beijing Declaration Par. 27 Beijing Declaration Par. 30 SDG Target 3.1 SDG Target 3.7 SDG Target 3.8 SDG Target 5.3 SDG Target 5.6	• Girls remain less likely than boys globally to receive immunizations, adequate nutrition, and medical care (Khera et al., 2014; Nair et al., 2015; Treleaven et al., 2016) • Women often face greater barriers than men in accessing essential health care, including reproductive and maternal health services (Govender & Penn-Kekana, 2008; Sen & Östlin, 2008; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2015)	• Constitutional right to health • Policies to support equal availability, accessibility, and quality of health coverage, including full reproductive and family planning care • Policies to support caregiving for one's self and one's family (paid sick leave, physical access, and transportation)

Equal Rights in the Family	CEDAW Art. 5 CEDAW Art. 9 CEDAW Art. 12 CEDAW Art. 16 Beijing Declaration Par. 15 SDG Target 5.a SDG Target 5.3 SDG Target 5.4	• Girls married as children are less likely to finish school, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to experience violence, and more likely to experience early childbearing and its consequences for health (Jensen & Thornton, 2003; Santhya et al., 2007; Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Nguyen & Wodon, 2014; Nour, 2006; Santhya, 2011) • Women's ownership of land and other assets reduces women's poverty, supports the productive use of land, and improves women's bargaining position within the household (Agarwal, 1994; Allendorf, 2007; Doss, 2013)	• Equal rights to marriage (entering, exiting, to property, to inheritance, and in decision-making) • Legal protections from child marriage, including equality in minimum age of marriage • Policies to support redistribution and balancing of unpaid labor responsibilities
Civil and Political Rights	CEDAW Art. 3 CEDAW Art. 7 CEDAW Art. 8 Beijing Declaration Par. 13 SDG Target 5.5	• Women's political participation has important impacts on investments in public & community health (Duflo, 2012; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Miller, 2008) • Women's political empowerment also supports peace-building and transparent governance (Porter, 2003; Wollack, 2010)	• Equal civil and political rights (voting, holding of public office, association, assembly, expression, and access to public spaces) • Equal rights and access to information
Freedom from Violence	CEDAW Art. 6 CEDAW Art. 16 Beijing Declaration Par. 29 SDG Target 5.2 SDG Target 5.3	• 35% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives (WHO, 2013) • Studies have documented an association between intimate partner violence and negative health effects, including higher rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, low birth weight and premature birth, alcohol use, depression and suicide, and death from homicide (Campbell, 2002; Devries et al., 2013; WHO, 2013)	• Laws guaranteeing freedom from violence in all forms (harassment, violence, and rape) • Laws and policies supporting safety in all spheres (in family, at work, and in public spaces)

4. Discussion

Globally comparative, independently verifiable policy data can provide a tool for measuring improvements in countries' approaches to advancing gender equality over time, and monitoring how these approaches compare to their commitments under agreements including CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration, and SDG 5. Combined with outcome and implementation data, longitudinal policy data can facilitate research to understand the impacts of specific policy choices, across the life course.

Sample findings presented in this article help illustrate the feasibility of building global policy data for monitoring as well as the power of linked data for analyzing what works. Civil society groups have leveraged the data included in this framework, as well as key findings from studies linking the policy data to outcomes, to highlight the gaps between their countries' laws and international agreements and urge their policymakers to undertake reforms. For example, in the Philippines, two senators cited findings from the study showing that extending paid maternity leave had an impact on infant mortality to pass a bill that would double the length of maternity leave from 60 to 120 days (Quismundo, 2017). In Ireland, after a civil society report illustrated with global policy data that the country's failure to provide paid paternal leave made it an outlier in the region, the parliament passed the Paternity Leave and Benefit Bill 2016, which provides fathers with two weeks of paternity leave and two weeks of paternity benefit (Equality Now, 2015; Equality Now, 2016). In this way, global policy data offer a tool for a wide range of stakeholders to meaningfully advance gender equality.

To accelerate progress on gender equality, the global community should monitor countries' actions on enacting or strengthening laws and policies that recognize gender equality as a fundamental human right. Further, increasing the availability of longitudinal policy, outcome, and implementation data can enable researchers to identify those policies with the greatest potential to improve health and well-being for women and girls. Finally, global policy, outcome, and implementation data on gender must be made publicly available in readily accessible forms, including global maps, comparison tables, and downloadable data that allow quick comparisons across countries. This accessibility is critical for truly empowering researchers, civil society, and concerned citizens to effectively advocate for greater equality in the law and to hold their governments accountable for enacting and implementing evidence-based approaches.

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