REPORT

The U.S. in search of gender equity: Policy lessons from around the world

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Acronyms

BLS	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
ESOL	English Speakers of Other Languages
E.U.	European Union
FMLA	Federal Family and Medical Leave Act
GBV	Gender-based Violence
ICT	Information Communication Technologies
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer and Questioning, Intersexual, Asexual and plus for individuals and communities who do not feel included in the other categories. This includes people who identify as pansexual, demisexual or other sexual orientations and gender identities not easily summed up in one term.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
U.K.	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
U.S.	United States
VAWA	Violence Against Women Act

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Executive Summary

Promoting gender equity is smart development policy. Current efforts to understand how and why the world shrinks for some people and expands for others continue to underscore the far-reaching implications of gender inequity for women, men, girls, boys and people of all gender identities. Global evidence on effective gender equity policies is needed to support worldwide learning, inspire action and guide additional policymaking. Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, this report presents the findings of a global scan of effective and promising gender equity policies that can inform and inspire current efforts in the United States (U.S.) to improve socio-political, economic, educational and health outcomes for all.

Countries included in the scan were identified using the Global Gender Gap Index, a composite measure of several indicators in health, education, economy and politics, used to track progress on the gaps in these domains between women and men globally. In areas where the index measures were less relevant to the U.S. context (health and education), we instead relied on other global measures. Ultimately, policies in 11 countries were examined in the domains of political participation, economic participation and opportunity, health and education. To supplement the policy review findings, 13 key informants were interviewed to understand policy development and implementation in those countries.

Generally, the gender equity policies discussed in this report share a few significant similarities. They were commonly heralded by comprehensive national commitments to gender equity that were often explicitly articulated through formal state policy frameworks or strategies; were often complementary and integral to wider national policy goals of tackling large-scale gender-based imbalances in specific development areas; and, were most times, implemented in countries characterized by continuing high levels of women's representation in political positions. In their formulation, implementation and ongoing improvement, the identified effective gender equity policies combined top-down and bottom-up approaches, requiring frameworks set by government as well as the active participation of critical stakeholders at multiple levels. The policies also frequently blended actions that are urgent with strong commitments to ongoing learning and future reforms, and often had a targeted focus on groups most likely to be left behind, in the search for solutions to a broad range of barriers to equitable participation in national socio-economic and political life.

With respect to the specific domains covered in the review, our study showed that Iceland and Rwanda have achieved near equal participation and representation of women in top political positions through electoral gender quotas policies. Countries such as Iceland, Spain and Nicaragua have expanded women's economic participation and opportunity through policies that support paid family leave, women-targeted credit schemes, protection of the rights of migrant workers, opportunities for career advancement for low-wage workers and closing gendered wage gaps. In health, Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore's lower maternal mortality ratio (MMR) was aided by policies that facilitate women's access to, and retention in, quality healthcare services during pregnancy and the period immediately surrounding it, as well as formal and long maternal leave requirements to ensure that women rest adequately post-delivery before resuming work.

The ratification of key international and regional policies and conventions related to gender-based violence (GBV) has been a

powerful force of change and commitment in countries such as Estonia, Canada, Slovenia and Singapore, facilitating robust national coordination and accountability in the development, implementation and monitoring of GBV prevention initiatives and programs. Canada's whole-of-government policy approach has particularly ensured a joint and seamless coordination of activities by diverse ministries, public administrations and agencies and industry to push the agenda of GBV prevention at multiple levels. Lessons from Tunisia's success in promoting female enrollment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines point to the importance of policy interventions that put communities at the center of STEM education and digital investments, prioritize the development girls' confidence to succeed in math and science early on, promote coordinated parental and role model engagement in supporting girls to embrace STEM, transform how classes are taught by connecting STEM to girls' lives and promote an active culture of hands-on and experiential education for learners. The United Kingdom (U.K.) and New Zealand's enviable track record of female participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) stemmed from sustained policy efforts that target young women, particularly from marginalized regions and communities, including Indigenous women and girls; that continuously seek to improve the image and respectability of TVET, provide stipends, transport support, childcare centers and tool kits; and that incentivize institutions and industries to support women and girls' entrepreneurship and employment.

These findings present important lessons for gender-equity policymaking in the U.S. Given the experience of other countries, U.S. gender equity stakeholders, including policymakers must see the country's first National Strategy on Gender Equity as a lifetime opportunity to be part of creating lasting gains in all spheres of the country's life. The findings suggest that U.S. policymakers must prioritize an integrated policy approach to gender equity policymaking, avoid patchworks of unconnected public policies, pursue participatory gender equity policy making and implementation approaches and give precedence to gender equity policies that respond to urgent injustices while ensuring responsiveness to changes over time and integrating learning for improvement and reforms. Moving forward, U.S. policymakers also need to focus policy interventions on promoting women's representation in high-level political and legislative bodies at all levels of U.S. government as a demonstrable strategy for tackling the most urgent drivers of gender disparities in health, earnings, training and access to economic opportunities, advancement and workforce participation. Additional lessons include the need for sustained and strategic policy focus on the country's most at risk groups, and on initiatives that tackle longstanding gender disparities in burdens of unpaid labor and caregiving; ensure free or low-cost childcare, especially for young children; and support women to work, attend school, benefit from opportunities to advance their skills and training and earn respectable wages.

While primarily addressed to U.S. policy actors, the insights contained in this report have wider relevance. The report offers the global community of gender equity stakeholders, program implementers, and leaders and organizations critical global lessons for advancing gender equity in a variety of areas. Coming at a time of growing awareness that the world's most pressing issues require collaborative learning for sustainable solutions, this report is an opportunity for countries and policy actors to learn from and adapt best ideas and proven practices from other world contexts.

Introduction

Promoting gender equity is smart development policy. Current efforts to understand how and why the world shrinks for some people and expands for others continue to underscore the far-reaching implications of gender inequity for men, women, boys, girls and all persons. No society can develop sustainably without transforming the distribution of opportunities, resources and choices for its members so that they have equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to society. But the topic of gender equity, and particularly its intersections with race, religion, age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and class is not only very complex, but it can also be culturally and socially divisive. Consequently, advancing gender equity requires a firm grounding in knowledge and evidence, as well as the courage and commitment to eradicate exclusionary norms and practices and bring about true social transformation.

Unsuccessful gender equity policies and programs litter the world. As a result, research has focused on diagnosing and highlighting why and how such policies and initiatives fail. But continuing focus on policy failures alone frustrates understanding of successes and opportunities. Effective and promising gender equity policy initiatives need to be identified, compiled, described and widely disseminated to generate learning, guide policymaking and inspire action. Currently however, rigorous attempts to identify, document and publicize effective gender equity policies remain scarce globally. This leaves policymakers with little or no information about what has worked or is working in settings other than theirs, what can be adopted or adapted from other contexts and the circumstances conducive to success.

Photos by: Chona Kasinger/Disabled and Here (top), Monstera/ Pexels (middle), Nazlihan Memis/Turkey/ Unsplash (bottom).

Learning from Success

For many measures of gender inequity, women in the U.S. rapidly made up ground in the latter half of the 20th century. But progress has since decelerated or stalled entirely. In 2020, the U.S. placed 53rd in the Global Gender Gap ranking, which benchmarks countries according to their progress with achieving gender equity (Schwab et al., 2020). The country faces gender pay-gaps; unfavorable workplace or other social environments for pregnant women, mothers, parents and families; the persistence of cultural stereotypes or expectations that bias women, girls and people of color toward low-wage careers and debasing jobs or roles; and high levels of gender-based violence, microaggression and overt and subtle workplace discrimination toward gender, racial and ethnic minorities. Gender-based norms, expectations and practices that disadvantage girls and women, including both cis- and transgender women, persist along with binary interpretations of gender in policymaking, resource allocation and service provision. Ethnic/racial minorities in the country also have limited opportunities to make decisions that affect their lives and communities and to emerge as leaders in government and other positions of influence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the urgent need for gender equity in the U.S., and indeed, globally. It has triggered multiple crises that have complicated the challenges that women, girls and other marginalized groups face. The pandemic further unraveled and intensified the intersection of inequities with, and their compounding by, disability, race, chronic illness, gender roles, sexual orientation and gender identity and poverty to impair access to public health and socio-economic opportunities. Acknowledging the urgency of gender equity in the U.S., the Biden-Harris Administration recently launched the country's first-ever National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality. The Strategy, which recognizes that gender equity promotes the wellbeing of individuals and fosters economic growth, development, democracy and political stability, "sets forth an aspirational vision and a comprehensive agenda to advance gender equity and equity in domestic and foreign policy" (The White House Gender Policy Council, 2021).

One of the ways countries can accelerate progress toward gender equity is by learning from and adapting best ideas from other contexts. The experience of other countries with identifiable progress in advancing gender equity in a variety of areas can provide insights, ideas and inspiration on efforts, programs, policies, and practices that might work in the U.S. It can also act as an opportunity for U.S. policymakers and inform a progressive course of action. Achieving gender equity and inclusive development in the U.S. entails more than just a national statement of positive intent; it requires a sustained, multipronged effort that unites contextual evidence from the U.S. and best ideas and practices from other countries to address not only the immediate social conditions that promote inequities, but also the systems, norms and values that allow such conditions to thrive and persist.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) steadily supports advancing health, equity and wellbeing through the identification, documentation and dissemination of lessons and best practices from abroad that can accelerate U.S. as well as global progress toward equity. This report, prepared by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), through the generous support of RWJF, presents findings of a global scan of effective and promising policies that can benefit ongoing efforts to advance gender equity in the U.S. The report offers important lessons and insights not only for U.S. policymakers, program

implementers, and leaders and organizations working to advance gender equity, but also for the global community of gender equity stakeholders and actors.

The specific goals of the policy scan were to:

1. identify and document effective and promising gender equity policies in other countries and contexts that can potentially inform gender equity policymaking in the U.S.;
2. examine how such policies define and frame gender equity and its intersections with race, generation, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other factors, and how those that are outside the gender binary were considered, incorporated, and centered, in both the design and implementation of such policies;
3. analyze how such policies operationalize gender equity, measure and monitor progress toward it and ensure sustainability in outcomes;
4. assess national or municipal governance and accountability mechanisms established for such policies; and
5. synthesize lessons for gender equity policymaking in the U.S. to deepen learning and facilitate action.

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Methods

Selection of Policies and Countries

If a country appeared at least once in the top 10 Global Gender Gap Index Rankings in the last decade (2009-2019), it was initially selected for inclusion. Those 15 countries were: Belgium, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Lesotho, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Rwanda, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Next, we examined these 15 countries' scores on the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) sub-indexes in four gender equity domains: political participation, economic participation and opportunity, health and education. Noting that the indicators from the sub-indexes for political participation and economic participation and opportunity were relevant to the U.S., we further examined the GGGIR sub-indexes in these two domains (see below). However, we found that the health and education indicators from the sub-indexes were not relevant to the U.S. (namely, that the U.S. surmounted the benchmarks that those sub-indexes measured, such as equal literacy rates between men and women) and determined that we needed to explore other indicators to select the countries and policies for these domains. We describe each domain below in more detail.

The Global Gender Gap Index includes several different composite measures in health, education, economy and politics to track progress on gaps in these domains between women and men globally. For the past 14 years, researchers at the World Economic Forum have measured countries' progress in these areas using the index. We chose the index to initially identify countries for this review because the index examines countries' progress in closing the gender gap, it is global, and the measures are available yearly for the last 10 years. Some researchers argue that the index is not as comprehensive as it could be because it uses national level measures (e.g., political participation indicators are only at the national, not local level). Beneria and Permanyer (2010) suggest that the Global Gender Gap Index is a deficient gauge for gender inequity because it only portrays disparities in certain aspects of women's lives. The index also ignores situations where women outperform men in certain aspects (Stoet & Geary, 2019). However, we used the index as a starting point to find countries that had made progress in closing gender gaps in specific areas, and then further researched whether there were specific policies contributing to the closing of the gender gap in these areas. In areas where the index measures were less relevant to the U.S. context (health and education), we instead relied on other global measures.

Political and Economic Participation and Opportunity

For the 15 countries that met our inclusion criteria, we examined the GGGIR Political Participation sub-index rank for each of the countries in 2006 compared to 2020 (see Table 1). The Political Participation sub-index incorporates the following indicators:

- percent of women in parliament;
- percent of women in ministerial positions; and
- years with a female compared to a male head of state.

We chose two countries that improved most in closing the political participation gender equity gap between 2006 and 2020. These countries are Iceland and Rwanda.

TABLE 1

GGGR political participation sub-index country rank in 2006 and 2020

Country	2006 GGGR Ranking Political Participation	2020 GGGR Ranking Political Participation
Belgium	19th	34th
Finland	3rd	5th
Germany	6th	12th
Iceland	4th	1st
Ireland	9th	11th
Lesotho	41st	102nd
Nicaragua	25th	3rd
New Zealand	11th	13th
Norway	2nd	2nd
Philippines	16th	29th
Rwanda	n/a	4th
Slovenia	88th	71st
Spain	5th	8th
Sweden	1st	9th
Switzerland	34th	19th

For the 15 countries, we also examined the GGGIR Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index rank for each country in 2006 compared to 2020 (see Table 2). The Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index incorporates the following indicators:

- ratio of female labor force participation;
- wage equality between women and men for similar work;
- estimated female earned income over male value;
- ratio of female legislators, senior officials and managers over male; and
- ratio of female professional and technical workers over male.

We chose the five countries that improved most in closing the economic participation gender equity gap between 2006 and 2020. Those countries are Iceland, Ireland, Nicaragua, Slovenia and Spain. Of these, relevant case studies were selected from Iceland, Nicaragua and Spain, thus narrowing the focus to these three countries.

TABLE 2

GGGR economic participation and opportunity sub-index country rank in 2006 and 2020

Country	2006 GGGR Ranking Economic Participation	2020 GGGR Ranking Economic Participation
Belgium	54th	54th
Finland	8th	18th
Germany	32nd	48th
Iceland	17th	2nd
Ireland	47th	43rd
Lesotho	61st	84th
Nicaragua	101st	81st
New Zealand	14th	27th
Norway	11th	11th
Philippines	4th	14th
Rwanda	NR	79th
Slovenia	34th	12th
Spain	85th	72nd
Sweden	9th	16th
Switzerland	18th	34th

Health

Given that the GGGIR indicators for health do not accurately reflect relevant gender equity gaps in the U.S. (e.g., sex ratio at birth), we selected other indicators that (a) fit into the theme of "universal access," which looks at preventing harmful outcomes for women and/or closing gaps for women, but also other groups (e.g., based on sexual orientation, wealth, race/ethnicity) in terms of accessing health services, and (b) are globally available and comparable.

We researched different indicators related to health that met the above criteria, eventually selecting the following:

- maternal mortality ratio (MMR)
- GBV prevalence

For maternal mortality and GBV, we developed a table of the top 10 ranked countries for each indicator. Below are more details of each indicator and the tables with the country rankings.

MATERNAL MORTALITY

We chose maternal mortality because it is an important indicator of women's health. Further, maternal mortality ratios in the U.S. are high compared to other developed nations. To select countries for this analysis, we targeted those that have progressed on this indicator over time; specifically, those with an MMR (a) close to the U.S. in 2000 (which was 12/100,000 live births) and (b) that by 2017 had fallen below 10 per 100,000 live births (the U.S. had an MMR of 19 per 100,000 live births in 2017).

TABLE 3

Countries with reduced maternal mortality ratios between 2000 and 2017 (per 100,000 live births)

Country	2000 MMR	2017 MMR
Belarus	22	2
Cyprus	14	6
Estonia	29	9
Lithuania	17	8
Qatar	14	9
Singapore	13	8
Slovenia	12	7
Macedonia	13	7
Turkmenistan	29	7

Source: WHO et al., 2019

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

We used the indicator of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prevalence in the last 12 months, which is part of the Women, Peace and Security Index (Georgetown Institute for Women & Peace Research Institute, 2021). The U.S. raned 19th for IPV in 2019, with 4.0 percent prevalence.

Note: The WPS index was first launched in 2017 and measured women's lifetime exposure to IPV. In 2019, the Index used a different IPV indicator, current exposure to IPV. Given differences in how IPV is measured in the two years, we were unable to calculate change and trends.

TABLE 4

Countries with the lowest Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prevalence in 2019

WPS Index rank 2019	Country and group	Intimate partner violence (experienced by women in the past year, %)
2	Switzerland	0.9
23	Singapore	0.9
11	Canada	1.1
5	Iceland	1.8
12	Estonia	2.0
13	Slovenia	2.0
15	Spain	2.0
25	Poland	2.0
22	Australia	2.2
6	Austria	3.0

FINAL COUNTRIES SELECTED FOR HEALTH

Below is the final table of top countries ranked for each health indicator. We selected five countries for the health policy review because they appeared at the top for more than one indicator (Estonia, Singapore, Slovenia and Canada).

TABLE 5

Top countries on selected health indicators

Maternal Mortality	IPV
Belarus	Switzerland
Cyprus	Singapore
Estonia	Canada
Lithuania	Iceland
Qatar	Estonia
Singapore	Slovenia
Slovenia	Spain
Macedonia	Poland
Turkmenistan	Australia
	Austria

For the health policy review, we searched for relevant policy-related materials in each country for the specific indicator(s) of interest. For the countries chosen for MMR, we searched broadly for maternal health policies. For GBV, we searched for broad violence prevention policies for violence against women, gender-based violence, and other violence against LGBTQIA+ populations, etc. While we focused on women, we also investigated how policies from selected countries have aimed to close the gaps in these indicators for LGBTQIA+ populations as well as racial and ethnic groups.

Education

Given the GGGIR education indicators do not accurately reflect gender equity gaps in the U.S. (e.g., literacy rate), we selected other indicators using criteria like the health indicators that (a) fit into the theme of "universal access," which looks at preventing harmful outcomes for women and/or closing gaps for women but also other groups (e.g., based on sexual orientation, wealth, race/ethnicity) in terms of accessing education services; (b) has the potential to map to policies that are actionable in the U.S. political context; and (c) are globally available and comparable across countries (to the extent possible).

We used the Center for Global Development's Girls Education Policy Index (Crawfurd & Hares, 2020) as our primary country selection source. This index has a set of indicators that measure primary and secondary education policy efforts among countries. We supplemented the index with post-secondary education indicators from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) database. The two post-secondary education indicators are:

- Share of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).
- Share of women in upper secondary vocational attainment.

We utilized preliminary data from the Girls Education Policy Index, which measures the policy effort of countries. The index's 18 indicators measure spending on education, sexual health, safety, labor market opportunities and role models for girls and women. We selected this index because each indicator was determined through the following criteria, (1) some empirical evidence that it matters for girls' schooling, (2) is a policy measure that governments can directly address and (3) has comparable data across many countries. Below is the table for the top 10 ranking countries for the Girls Education Policy Index:

TABLE 6

Top 10 ranking countries from the Girls Education Policy Index

Rank	Country	Index Score
1	**Denmark**	0.90
2	**Bulgaria**	0.87
3	**Portugal**	0.85
4	**Latvia**	0.84
5	**Finland**	0.83
6	**France**	0.82
7	**Spain**	0.82
8	**Serbia**	0.82
9	**Italy**	0.82
10	**Lithuania**	0.82

Source: Crawfurd & Hares, 2020

Moreover, women are underrepresented in math-intensive science fields which are important indicators for economic growth and are associated with occupations that have higher earnings. In the U.S., the STEM workforce is made up of only 27 percent women (Martinez & Christnacht 2021). We used two approaches to select countries using this indicator. First, we examined data from the Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics programs since this is the only STEM-related indicator where U.S. women achieved gender parity or outranked men. Women are still under-represented in the other STEM programs: Technology Innovation and Communication, Engineering, Construction and Manufacturing.

Second, given that few countries with higher female participation in STEM jobs currently perform substantially better than the U.S. in terms of female higher education enrollment and graduation in STEM, we decided to focus on the STEM gender equity paradox (Weingarten, 2017; OECD, 2019b). This describes a situation where countries that are less gender equal in terms of cultural norms and political and economic participation have more women completing undergraduate STEM degrees (Stoet & Geary, 2018). Based on this, we chose Tunisia, which, as a growing body of evidence shows (Times of India (ToI) 2018; DeBoer, 2016; DeBoer & Kranov, 2017; Zghal, 2006; Weingarten, 2017), exemplifies the paradox. Though considered less gender equal compared to many countries, Tunisia ranked second in the female share of graduates from Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs between 2015 and 2018). Research also shows that Tunisia has performed well in terms of actionable policies and interventions, something from which other countries could learn (UIS, 2011, 2015).

According to available OECD data (OECD, 2019a), globally, women represent at least half of upper secondary graduates from general programs but are under-represented in vocational training programs. Meanwhile, the demand for vocational training programs is growing worldwide and plays a central role in developing adults' skills and responding to labor-market needs. Based on data on the performance of countries in post-secondary vocational education and training as well as the results of a literature search related to the availability of published research on technical and vocational education (TVET) in different countries, we chose New Zealand and the U.K.

TABLE 7

Share of women exceeding men in upper secondary vocational attainment, 2017

Rank	Country
1	New Zealand
2	Japan
3	Ireland
4	United Kingdom
5	Brazil
6	Colombia

We chose a total of 11 countries for the policy review, with Iceland appearing in two domains because of their policies in these areas (see Table 8). We aimed to have a breadth of countries represented across different regions of the world.

TABLE 8

Countries Included in the Policy Review by Domain

Country	Domain: Political Participation	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Health	Education
Canada			X	
Estonia			X	
Iceland	X	X		
New Zealand				X
Nicaragua		X		
Rwanda	X			
Singapore			X	
Slovenia			X	
Spain		X		
Tunisia				X
U.K.				X

Policy Review

After selecting relevant countries by each domain, we conducted a search of the peer-reviewed and grey literature pertaining to each country and domain. We considered a policy as a law, regulation or procedure of governments. For political participation, we searched PAIS, CIAO, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, RAND and Ulrich's periodicals. Databases searched for economic participation and opportunity included ABI INFORM and FACTIVA. For health, we searched MEDLINE, PUBMED, CINAHL and social services abstracts. Databases searched for education included ERIC, Education Abstracts, PsycINFO and SCOPUS. We also reviewed legislation through searches of Congress.gov databases and Lexis Nexis. Finally, we searched the grey literature through OAISter. Through our searches, we identified peer-reviewed articles, grey literature (reports, news articles) and legislation. For each country and domain, we read relevant articles, reports, and legislation, and identified additional literature to review and include.

Key Informant Interviews

To supplement our policy review, we also conducted 13 key informant interviews with experts in different countries and domains. We identified experts in these areas and interviewed them over the phone to learn more insights about gender equity policies in their countries. We developed semi-structured interview guides for each domain, and interviews were summarized and integrated into our policy analysis to confirm or refute our findings and enhance the policy review with additional information.

Findings

The review surfaced several promising and effective policies related to four domains that hold relevance for U.S gender equity efforts. We describe these policies by domain below and make recommendations applicable to the U.S.

Political Participation

The equal participation of women and men in politics and government is imperative for women to shape laws and policies that matter most to them and affect gender equity and their full and equal participation in society. Public opinion polls demonstrate that women express different political preferences from men. Women in the U.S. are most interested in education, healthcare, contraception, abortion and the environment, issues different to men (Status of Women in the States). The same is true for women in different countries; their participation in politics and government allows them to make laws and policies that are of interest to them and that affect gender equity. Women must vote, run for political office and lead civil society organizations for their political voices to be heard. In the United States in 2021, women only comprised 26 percent of the U.S. Congress and 27 percent of the U.S. House of Representatives whereas in countries like Iceland, women's political participation is nearly 50 percent (CAWP, 2021). Globally, women's political participation (measured by percentages of women holding political positions at different government levels or as head of state) is only 25 percent. However, this was a twofold increase in the last two decades, driven primarily by the widespread adoption of electoral gender quotas (Clayton, 2021; IPU, 2021).

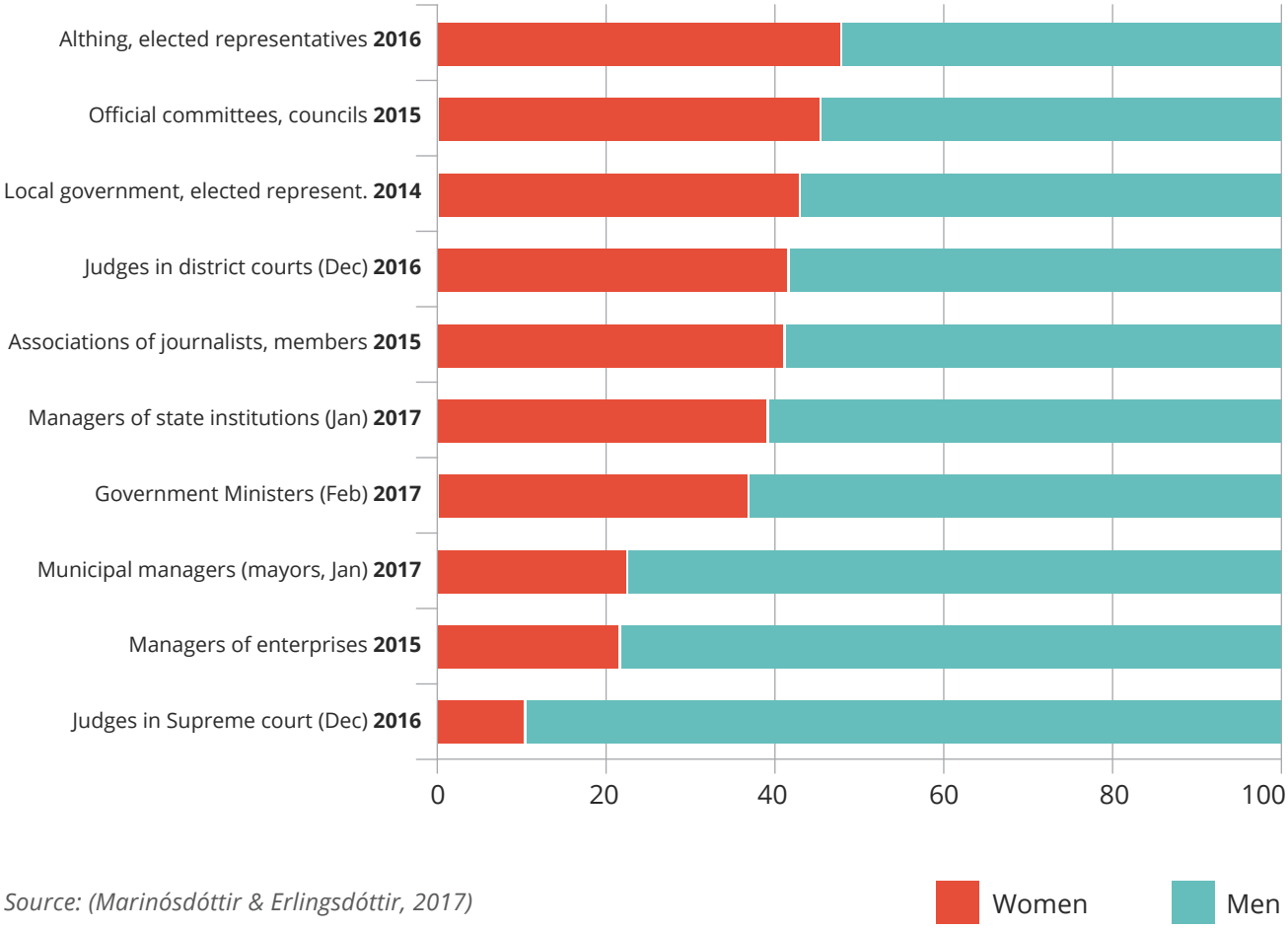
ICELAND

In Iceland, starting in the 1960s and 1970s, educated women started to gain positions of power in academia and started organizing to influence politics in their quest for equal rights (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017). On October 24, 1975, Icelandic women set the stage for increasing women's political participation by demanding equal rights to men through a nationwide strike called the "Women's Day Off." Ninety percent of Iceland's women left their paid and unpaid work that day to strike in the streets and demand equal rights with men. At the time, 5 percent of Parliament was made up of women (3 women), whereas in other Nordic countries women represented between 16-23 percent of their respective Parliaments (Brewer, 2015). In 1982, the Women's Alliance was formed to advocate inside parliament and "influenced the political debate and political agendas of the traditional political parties" (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017). Due to the Women's Alliance's advocacy and other initiatives, in 1983, the number of women members of parliament jumped from 5 to 15 out of a total of 60 members (From 8 percent to 25 percent of parliament) (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017). A key informant emphasized the importance of the women's movement: "*[A] critical factor for Iceland has been a strong women's movement. This has taken a long time: 50 years. [First with the] red Stocking movement in 1970. Before that, there were other women's movements... [but the red Stocking movement garnered women's] visibility in 1970. [The] women's strike in 1975 showed the importance [of women] to the economy and labor market. Then in 1982, the women's alliance started and became a political party. Women rose fast in parliament.*"

Building upon these gains a decade later, the Minister of Social Affairs created a committee to increase women's political participation in 1998 (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017). This committee conducted a national survey about women's political participation and then launched a campaign to increase women's representation in Parliament. Further, every political party in Iceland adopted gender quotas except one (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017). In the 1999 elections, women were elected to fill 35 percent of parliamentary seats (United Nations, not dated). Next, this committee focused on increasing women's political participation at the local level. The efforts included courses to support women in politics and working with the media for equal coverage of women and men. As a result, in the 2002 election, the number of women in local politics increased slightly from 28.2 percent in 1998 to 31.2 percent in 2002 and women became the majority in 10 local authorities; however, there were still no women in nine local authorities (United Nations). Women's representation in parliament has steadily increased over time with 48 percent of representatives in 2016 and almost equal political participation at the executive level of government (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017).

TABLE 9

Women's Political Participation in Iceland at Different Levels



Source: (Marinósdóttir & Erlingsdóttir, 2017)

RWANDA

Since coming into power in 1994, Paul Kagame and his party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), have made efforts to prioritize women's political participation by appointing them into top political and legislative positions, such as ministers, legislators in the transitional government, Supreme Court justices and as secretaries of state (Burnet, 2008). The 2003 constitution included quotas for women in parliament and sub-national government bodies (London, 2020). The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) was created by the RPF, and its purpose was to mainstream gender into all government departments and policies and to set up women's councils at all levels of government (Burnet, 2008). Vision 2020, a government strategy for Rwanda's development, incorporated gender equity goals. There are also a National Gender Policy (2010), a girls education policy (2008), a woman in agriculture policy (2010) and a reproductive and maternal health policy (2017).

Following the enshrinement of women's participation in parliament in the new constitution in 2001 (30 percent of seats to be women), women won 48 percent of parliamentary positions in the 2003 national election (Burnet, 2008). The average percent of women in parliaments around the world is only 25 percent, thus Rwanda greatly exceeds this global figure with a lower house that is 61 percent female and an upper house 38 percent female in 2021 (IPU, 2021). Rwanda achieved rapid gains in women's political participation post-genocide through quotas, even without much representation prior (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005).

ELECTORAL GENDER QUOTAS

Iceland and Rwanda have achieved near equal political participation of women through electoral gender quotas (IPU, 2021). Although quotas were successful in these countries, their specific histories and contexts brought women into political power in different ways. Electoral gender quotas are "...policies that specify a threshold-typically a percentage-of women that must be (s)elected or nominated to a political decision-making body" (Clayton, 2021). There are three types of gender quotas. The first applies to candidates whereby a certain percentage of women must be included in party lists. These types of quotas are often used in proportional representation electoral systems and have been adopted in almost all Latin American countries. In majoritarian electoral systems, quotas typically pertain to legislators (not candidates) and are popular in East Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Finally, some quotas are implemented through party constitutional amendments requiring a percentage of women candidates and are popular in Scandinavian countries (Clayton, 2021).

Gender quotas have been implemented in all regions of the world since the 1990s and over 130 countries have changed their political parties' rules, modified their constitutions or electoral laws requiring women as legislators or candidates (Hughes et al., 2019). In the last two decades, countries implementing gender quotas have quickly doubled or tripled women's political representation in the first election following quota implementation (Clayton, 2021). The policy effects of quotas are increased attention to women's legislative priorities as a group (Clayton, 2021). As women's political participation improves, researchers have shown that women are able to pass different laws that affect gender equity more broadly. In a recent review of gender quotas and their effects on policy, Clayton found that quotas can positively affect legislators of both genders, that quotas increase women's cross-party collaborations and increase women's appointments to party leadership and ministerial positions (Clayton, 2021). These effects are moderated by democratic transitions, the role of democracy in the country, quota design features, and parliamentary culture (Clayton, 2021).

Policy Effects of Electoral Gender Quotas

As a result of increased women's political participation in political bodies in Iceland and Rwanda, women representing their countries increasingly passed legislation that improved gender equity in the country related to issues such as gender equity, gender identity, wage equity, maternal/paternal leave and gender-based violence. These policies and laws address the socio-ecological environment enabling women to fully participate not only in government, but in all aspects of society. For example, the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men in Iceland passed in 2008 has specific language pertinent to women's political participation (*Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men No. 10/2008, as amended by Act No. 162/2010, No. 126/2011, No. 62/2014, No. 79/2015, No. 117/2016 and No. 56/2017, 2008*).

Aim of the Iceland's Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men

The aim of this Act is to establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, and thus promote gender equity in all spheres of the society. All individuals shall have equal opportunities to benefit from their own enterprise and to develop their skills irrespective of gender. This aim shall be reached by the following means, amongst others: (a) observing gender equity perspectives and working toward gender mainstreaming in policymaking and decision-taking in all spheres of society, (b) working to secure equal influence of women and men in society, and (c) specifically improving the position of women and increasing their opportunities in society.

The act also covers gender-based wage discrimination, work-life balance, education, analysis of gender statistics, increased gender studies research, gender-based violence and harassment and gender stereotypes. Another key informant underscored women's political participation as key to enacting gender equity legislation: "*By far the biggest actor has been the women's rights and feminist movement in Iceland. [These are] very strong and vibrant movements in Iceland. [These movements were] specifically driven toward political change [and] forced political parties to run women. For 16 years [Iceland has] had a feminist (second wave) party [and their] influence remains 35 years later. All these laws and rules - only happened when women came into power: parental leave, daycare, changes to gender equality. [The] policies came from women in parliament who are also feminists. Definitely increasing rapidly [the] representation of women in politics is absolutely crucial.*"

In Rwanda, following women's increased political participation, women drafted and passed legislation classifying rape as an egregious crime (1996), expanding the rights of pregnant and nursing women (1997), improving children's rights (2001), and including gender equity provisions in the Constitution (2003). An important law known as the "Inheritance Law" was passed in 1999 in Rwanda. This law allowed women to own property separate from their husbands or fathers, gave them legal rights to enter contracts, to seek paid employment and open bank accounts without the authorization of their husbands or fathers. The law drastically changed customary inheritance practices and gave girls equal rights as boys to inheritance. The successful passage of the bill was due to the coordination between MIGEPROF, women's organizations, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians and a caucus of women parliamentarians created in the mid-1990s (Burnet, 2008).

One of the greatest achievements of the women in parliament in Rwanda since forming a critical mass in 2003 was the passage of a law preventing and punishing gender-based violence (GBV) in Rwanda (Law Number 59/2008) (London, 2020). The law details penalties and procedures for GBV cases and it outlaws polygamy, marital rape, discrimination against pregnant women and indecent behavior. This law was passed through a consultative process with community organizations and with the public.

Despite the myriad laws and women's increased political participation in Rwanda, feminist scholars caution that the national level laws have not necessarily trickled down to women at all levels of society (Berry, 2015). Some feminist scholars argue that the increasingly authoritarian state and the patriarchal structures undergirding society still limit women's empowerment. Women's participation in politics and other aspects of society is differential, depending on class and ethnic group, with wealthy, Anglophone, predominately Tutsi women benefitting most (Berry, 2015). Another study of the Rwandan Parliament showed that quota-elected women parliamentarians increasingly advocated for the welfare and rights of Rwandan women, but these efforts did not always translate into policy (Longman, 2006).

Quotas are most successful when promoted through women's movements in civil society and grassroots activism, as is the case with Iceland (Clayton, 2021). Key informants in Iceland emphasized the importance of active women's movements as crucial to continuing to improve gender equity in the country and that their continued advocacy is needed for change. The type of quota also potentially affects the success of women entering politics. For example, legislative environments where women engage in political bodies via party quotas or candidate quotas are more "women friendly" than those whereby women entered via reserved seats (Clayton, 2021). However, women entering through party quotas may be selected to "hold the party line," rather than represent different, women-centric views (Clayton, 2021). Further, Clayton points out that the level of democracy is also an important moderating factor as to whether women brought into political positions through electoral gender quotas can ultimately enact their power through the legislative process (Clayton, 2021).

Researchers have identified a myriad of other positive effects of electoral gender quotas. Globally, gender quotas increase percentages of minority women in politics as well as diversify the professions and classes of women and men in office (Barnes & Holman, 2020; Hughes, 2011). Increased women's political participation may reduce bias against women, improve trust in political institutions and inspire young women and girls to stay in school and enter careers (Beaman et al., 2009; Beaman et al., 2012; Clayton et al., 2019).

Photo by: Yagazie Emezi/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment.

Economic Participation and Opportunity

Worldwide, women experience structural inequalities that undercut policies regulating the wage gap or women's workplace leadership, in part because traditional economic policies do not consider existing gender inequalities. For example, more austere social safety net policies on healthcare, food or rent assistance, or minimum wages disproportionately affect women who use more healthcare for reproduction, are more likely to be single heads of households and solitary wage earners, support more dependents on those wages, and live longer than men. These factors in turn influence women's ability to participate in wage-earning work throughout their lives, as well as their ability to meet the same lifelong income potential.

Economic empowerment is the process of improving an individual's agency and capacity to participate in, and fairly benefit from, economic growth in ways that are desirable and dignified (OECD, 2011). Given the current scholarly emphasis on the gender wage gap as an indicator of economic gender equity, we decided to focus only on this metric and the upstream determinants of the wage gap. This analysis explores care work and unpaid labor from the lens of the opportunity cost for wage work, but the gendered view of total labor share (e.g., women's ability to rest, to have their reproductive labor counted as a contribution) or manipulation of economic resources (e.g., access to financial institutions like credit) are beyond the scope of this report.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

Nicaragua

At face value, Nicaragua may not appear to have similar economic participation struggles as the United States: 78 percent of Nicaraguan women work in the informal sector, which includes unregulated jobs such as selling garden produce or prepared foods. However, it remains the best comparator for many forms of minimum wage work performed in the United States: workers generally receive no employer benefits like paid leave; scheduled hours (and therefore earnings) fluctuate out of the worker's control; these opportunities can be quickly lost without notice or cause; jobs in this category are some of the most demeaning and exhausting forms of labor; workers often have more than one of these piecemeal jobs or enterprises; workers would prefer a stable job, but for most, there is no realistic pathway out of this type of work. In both countries, women predominantly perform these jobs. In the U.S., most of these women are of color. Key differences for U.S. workers include that, workers' minimum-wage pay is subjected to payroll and/or income tax withholdings, and they generally must have documentation of legal permission to perform this low-wage work (e.g., have a green card, work visa, or social security number), whereas no such regulations are enforced for Nicaraguan informal workers.

In 2008, Nicaragua launched an optimistic gender equity agenda in part to improve women's economic participation. Initiatives included Usura Cero, a microcredit program that offers low-interest loans to women to grow or expand their businesses, as well as financing for state-run childcare services. These policies can be credited with Nicaragua's incredible leaps in performance on the GGGIR. Women now own 54 percent of Nicaragua's micro, small and medium enterprises. Globally, microcredit programs are most successful for women when no collateral is required, as women may not have as much say over what happens to an asset compared to men in their household. Therefore, a government scheme that offered even very

small loans to U.S. workers with low or no credit history (and without a collateral requirement) may be beneficial in closing the economic gender gap by allowing the lowest-level workers—most of whom are women—opportunities to chart paths to advancement.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Women workers disproportionately suffer from lost wages and lost opportunities for workplace advancement when they become parents. One critical policy, implemented in nearly all countries except the U.S., is mandatory paid time off work when a new child is born or adopted (Rosenthal, 2013). We use the term parental leave as a composite of maternity and paternity leave, as paid leave for all parents is a critical piece of alleviating the gendered economic burden of reproduction. More broadly, family leave includes protections for other types of leave such as to care for an elder, not only for a new child. However, parents of all genders—and their children—benefit from taking paid parental leave, not just the birthing parent. For example, men who take family leave do more childcare later compared to those who took no leave, reducing women's total unpaid care burden.

Iceland

Iceland's model, where fathers or non-birthing partners receive a separate, non-transferable allocation of parental leave time, is the most gender-equitable in the world. The government administers a Maternity/Paternity Leave Fund financed through employers. Monthly payments are 80 percent of the employee's salary except for some high-income parents who are capped at 75 percent (which, when implemented, affected 50 percent of fathers and 20 percent of mothers) (Eydal & Gíslason, 2012). Leave can be taken all at once or spread over a 24-month period. Parents (including same-sex parents) can take leave concurrently or separately. Part-time workers (who, as in the U.S., are mostly women) also qualify if they are working at least 25 percent of full-time. One Icelandic gender expert confirmed that the national leave policies have had a tangible difference in recent years on women's labor force participation.

Unemployed students may receive a grant under the same law. Importantly, the law is gender-sensitive and acknowledges that individual families should determine how paid family leave should be divided and implemented, with the stated intent of closing the lifetime gender pay gap. A recent study found evidence that the family leave policy is working. Since implementation, marriage and childbirth no longer decrease women's interest in earning promotions; however, while the drivers of the gender pay gap are closing, a 2008 study of Icelanders (Gupta, et.al, 2008) found no evidence that care work equity has changed in the home (with women still shouldering the bulk of that labor).

CARING AND OTHER UNPAID WORK

Care work is a necessary contribution to individual, family and social welfare yet its value is rarely measured, especially in comparison to paid work. "Social reproduction" or "reproductive labor" refer to any work that creates or nurtures the future labor force in an economic system. This includes housework, planning and obtaining medical care and education for dependents, direct care for children and the physical toll of pregnancy and childbirth, among other types of work. It is disproportionately borne by women even in the most gender-equal countries with the most progressive and generous social welfare policies.

This burden is a leading reason why women are more likely to remain in part-time paid work, yet still spend more hours out of 24 doing "work" than men do. Quantifying the value of care work, especially in contrast with work for money, is beyond the scope of the present report but is a key contribution of feminist economic research. The most important characteristics of gender-equal caring policies include: the extent to which women can remain financially

independent (i.e., in the labor market); the extent to which care work is valorized as worthy of financial support; the extent to which policies encourage men to increase their care responsibilities (Saraceno & Keck, 2011). Caring needs vary markedly between various global contexts based on factors like the availability of preschools and daycares, the life expectancy (and therefore proportion of older people needing care) of the population, women's labor force participation and the cost and availability of low-wage laborers such as house cleaners, nannies, or elder care workers (all of which are predominantly women).

Where care work policies are lacking, women typically shoulder both paid and unpaid care responsibilities and there are few incentives to encourage men to take on additional care responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced gender equity in the realm of care work in ways that are, as yet, difficult to quantify. However, U.S. data and evidence from other high-income countries show that school closures and other paused childcare resulted in women dropping out of the workforce without clear paths to return. Women have also taken on an unequal burden of added care duties even if still working. Migrant domestic workers particularly suffered in the early days of lockdowns that forced them to either move in with the families they worked for or else lose their jobs (and, in many cases, their legal work status), which underscores how care work is considered essential but not valuable (Rao et al., 2021). However, some national policies in countries like Spain have worked to influence this gender gap, such as parental leave incentives that encourage men to take on a larger share of care work.

Spain

Spain provides a relevant case study on policies to alleviate women's dominant care work burden at the family level. Beginning in 1990, Spain organized early childhood enrollment in public education for children under the age of 3. Now, nearly all (97 percent) Spanish children are enrolled in public school by the age of 3, and 35 percent by the age of 2, which is much higher than the E.U. average of 75 percent (Guner et al., 2014). An additional one-third of children ages 0-2 are enrolled in a private nursery or preschool, in part thanks to the normalization of early formal childcare (Guner et al., 2014). One study showed that this education access policy led to an eight percent increase in formal employment for women whose youngest child is 3 years old and increased women's likelihood to stay in formal labor over the long term (Nollenberger & Rodriguez-Planas, 2011). Spain also provides a monthly cash benefit to working mothers of children under 3, which is in part intended to offset the cost of private daycare. One study found that the benefit increased eligible women's employment, especially for the least educated mothers (Sánchez-Mangas & Sanchez Marcos, 2008).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKPLACE ADVANCEMENT

The perceived glass ceiling effect that prevents women from achieving high levels of leadership most frequently occurs very early in women's careers: the so-called "broken rung" occurs at the first step into management (Huang et al., 2019). Policies intended to repair the "broken rung" have generally not been directly attempted. One component of the solution to the workplace advancement gap is paid parental leave, as it partially levels the playing field of extended time away from work between men and women that otherwise makes men seem better candidates for promotion. At the macro level, gender-equitable use of parental leave and leave for other family care work

shifts workplace cultures to accommodate reproductive labor as an expected part of career paths. Women and gender minorities keenly benefit from more diverse workplaces, which in turn promote a workplace culture of opportunity and fairness that targets the "broken rung." COVID-19 means as many as one in four U.S. women are considering lowering their time spent on wage-earning career work, lowering their aspirations for advancement or leaving the workforce altogether, all to cope with the added care burdens of the pandemic. Public policies that do not rely on employer enforcement are still in the early stages where they do exist.

In 2018, Iceland introduced a policy requiring organizations with more than 25 employees (equal to about 80 percent of the labor market) to obtain a certification that they provide equal work for equal pay and promote based on known job criteria, or else be subject to fines (Wagner, 2018). The standard was carefully developed by government, social and labor union stakeholders over several years. Early evidence from employers shows that the policy, which turned voluntary equal pay efforts to mandatory, uniform efforts (where companies are forced to quantify the value of job tasks and determine which jobs are equal in terms of pay), has improved company practices, though it is still too early to say what effect, if any, the policy has on the remaining gender wage gap.

Health

MATERNAL MORTALITY

Maternal mortality is a complex issue, with multi-faceted causes. In 2017, the United States was only one of two countries to report a significant increase in the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) since 2000. The other country was the Dominican Republic. The United States' MMR is the highest compared to other high-income nations, at 17.4 per 100,000 (WHO et al., 2019). Significant racial disparities exist, with the maternal death ratio for Black women (37.1 per 100,000 pregnancies) is 2.5 times the ratio for white women (14.7) and three times the ratio for Hispanic women (11.8) (Declercq & Zephyrin, 2020).

There are various causes of maternal mortality, which can be categorized at three time points: maternal deaths during pregnancy, maternal deaths around the time of delivery and maternal deaths up to one year after delivery. In the United States, over 30 percent of deaths occur during pregnancy, and 52 percent of deaths occur in the post-partum period. The clinical causes of mortality include heart muscle disease (cardiomyopathy), blood clots, high blood pressure, stroke, other cardiac conditions, infection and severe postpartum bleeding. In the U.S., hemorrhage and cardiovascular conditions are the leading causes of death during pregnancy, while cardiomyopathy and mental health conditions (such as suicide or substance abuse) are the leading causes in the months after a birth. While some of these causes are related to individual health predispositions, others are driven by preventable behaviors and discriminatory environments that put women at risk. For example, individuals who experience economic pressure to return to work soon after birth often put their own physical and mental health on the line (Declercq & Zephyrin, 2020). In addition, aspects like quality of care and being believed by a health care provider vary

by race and gender and can have implications for maternal mortality as can other social and environmental determinants of health (Boyles et al., 2021; Declercq & Zephyrin, 2020).

The U.S. Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) requires eligible employers to provide family leave – however, unlike most other industrialized nations (and the countries in this review), it is unpaid, except for the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act, which took effect in 2020 for federal employees. There are no national standards on paid family or sick leave, despite significant public support for it (KFF, 2021a). Global evidence suggests that paid leave is protective of maternal health, although this protection varies by length of leave and the amount of compensation provided to mothers (Aitken et al., 2015). There is also evidence that leave policies improve maternal mental and physical health outcomes (Dagher et al., 2014) and even mental health in older ages (Avendano et al., 2015). Enhancing individuals' pregnancy and postpartum wellbeing can save lives; therefore, policies that facilitate access to and retention in healthcare services during pregnancy, labor and the postpartum period directly link to a reduction in maternal mortality (WHO, 2019). This includes policies that support all individuals – including those who are not citizens of a country, are of lower-income, and those without insurance – to attend prenatal and postpartum appointments. It also includes policies that help identify individuals who may be at risk for certain dangerous health conditions or with mental health or substance abuse issues. Clinical improvements in quality of care, as well as public health interventions that address structural racism and the social determinants of health, are essential.

Maternal mortality and parental policies in Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore

The figure below shows the trends in maternal mortality from 2000 to 2017 for Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore. The maternal mortality ratio in all three comparison countries fell during this time period, with the exception of the United States, where it went from 15 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 17 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2017.

We focused our review on policies from Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore that sought to maximize the health of pregnant and postpartum women, up to one-year post-partum. Our results covered the following categories:

- **Existence of health care coverage for pregnant and post-partum women** – State-run and funded health coverage in these countries allows for individuals to access care during pregnancy, birth, and in some places, after birth.
- **Long(er) and paid maternity leave** – Across the three countries, we found long periods of leave, especially leave that was paid in part or in full.
- **Existence of paternity leave** – Most countries had paternity leave, which is the number of days or weeks that new fathers can take, usually subsidized in full by the state.
- **Other benefits** – the countries we reviewed had built-in flexibility in their policies to allow for new families to maximize the benefits in the way that makes sense for their situation. Flexibility included being able to take leave in segments and the ability to trade out leave between parents. Other benefits included monthly cash installments for newborns to offset costs.

The table below outlines the major highlights from the review, as compared to the United States.

Federally mandated policies related to maternal care	United States	Estonia	Slovenia	Singapore
Health care coverage for pregnant and postpartum women	Yes – ACA requires all insurance plans in the Marketplace or Medicaid to cover services, but dependent on state adoption.	Yes – regardless of documentation status	Yes	Yes – many plans available
Paid leave available to mothers (in weeks)	0	20	15	16 or 8 (depending on citizenship and other criteria)
Paid paternity leave (in weeks)	0	4	4	2 (depending on citizenship and other criteria)
Other benefits	N/A	E38 per month per child until child is 3	Child benefit income supplement; parental allowance; delegation of leave to another parent if abandoned.	E.g., The one-off $3,000 Baby Support Grant (during COVID)

Sources: United States (Chzhen et al., 2019; KFF, 2021b); Estonia ("Changes in the Family Benefits Act"; Chzhen et al., 2019); Slovenia (Chzhen et al., 2019; Stropnik, 2020); Singapore ("Paternity Leave," 2021; Sin, 2020)

In Slovenia, pregnant women are eligible for 105 calendar days (15 weeks) of paid maternal care, four of which take place before birth with the remainder afterwards. It is obligatory that the birthing parent take at least 15 days of leave. These individuals are paid at 100 percent of average monthly earnings, and there is no upper limit. The minimum is 55 percent of the minimum wage. Paternity leave is for 30 calendar days and paid out at 100 percent of average monthly earnings, up to a ceiling of 2.5 times the average salary in Slovenia. Paternity leave can be taken at full or part-time (Stropnik, 2018).

In Singapore, if the expectant child will be a Singapore citizen and the expectant individual has been with current employer or self-employed for at least three continuous months before the birth of child, individuals are eligible for 16 weeks of government-paid maternity leave in accordance with the Child Development Co-Savings Act. Most other individuals are eligible for 12 weeks of maternity leave in accordance with the Employment Act, with the employer paying the first eight weeks (given a few conditions), with the remaining four weeks unpaid (Ministry of Manpower 2021).

Case study: Estonia

Estonia has garnered significant attention in recent years for its progressive policies supporting healthy pregnancy, delivery and post-partum wellbeing for women. The country has a universal health care policy and system, whereby any pregnant woman is entitled to health insurance coverage. Any woman in Estonia whose pregnancy has been confirmed by a medical professional is entitled to benefits within the Estonian Health Insurance Fund (Estonian Heath Insurance Fund). Regardless of legal residency or insurance contributions, women qualify for free maternal health care throughout pregnancy, including antenatal care. Care ends three months after the estimated delivery date (Thomasen & Hoctor, 2018).

In terms of federal policies for maternal leave, women in Estonia are entitled to 140 calendar days of pregnancy and maternal leave, where between 30 and 70 days can be taken before the expected date of birth. Women receive 100 percent of average earnings, with no upper limits. All employed mothers are eligible, including those on temporary contracts, and there are no conditions on length of service. There are no conditions linked to citizenship. There is variation in leave due to reasons like multiple or premature births, or delegation of leave to a person other than the mother. As of 2020, the payment period for leave can start and stop up until the child is three years old (Pall, 2017). Employed fathers receive 100 percent of earnings during paternity leave. As of 2020, paternal leave time was extended from ten days to 30 days (Pall, 2017). As of 2020, Estonia now pays for parental leave.

Estonia also has additional benefits for new and expectant parents (Kirss & James, 2020). On top of maternity and paternity leave, new parents who were working are eligible for parental leave paid at 100 percent of personal average earnings for 62 weeks, starting at the end of maternity leave. Unemployed parents get a minimum benefit of €540 Euros paid from birth of the child until the child reaches 18 months. There is a flat-rate payment of €38 per month, per child, paid from the end of the parental benefit payments until the child reaches the age of 3, for all working and non-working parents (Pall, 2017). By law, Estonians get 14 paid calendar days off per episode of illness for a sick child under the age of 12, with 80 percent of earning replacement. In addition, a parent with a child under 14 years of age can take ten working days of unpaid leave per year. Finally, parents can take a supplementary period of holiday – three days per year for a parent with one or two children under 14 years of age, and six days for more children. Lastly, breastfeeding mothers can take one thirty-minute break every three hours or one hour-break per day. These breaks are 100 percent compensated until the child is 18 months (Pall, 2017).

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a chronic issue in the United States. According to a 2015 nationally representative survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), over one in three (roughly 36.4 percent) of women experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime. Over one-third of women (36.4 percent) reported experiencing psychological aggression by an intimate partner during their lifetime. Forty-three percent of women (approximately 52.2 million) had experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime, with 4.7 percent of women experiencing this violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. Approximately one in five women (or roughly 21.3 percent) reported completed or attempted rape during their lifetime, and one in six women (or 16 percent) experienced sexual coercion. More than a third of women (37 percent) reported unwanted sexual contact at some point during their lives (Smith et al., 2018).

GBV is a complicated issue that spans across the life cycle. It occurs within different types of relationships, from intimate partnerships to strangers/acquaintances. It can occur in many different settings, including universities, workplace, households, schools and online (Frye et al., 2019). It also disproportionally impacts racial and ethnic groups – more than half of multiracial women have experienced sexual violence, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2017). Immigrant women and those in the LGBTQIA+ community have reportedly higher rates of violence. For example, about 44 percent of lesbians and 61 percent of bisexual women reported experiencing rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2013).

The main policy to prevent gender-based violence in the United States is the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which Congress passed in 1994 and to which many substantial improvements have been made during reauthorization, including recent provisions that recognize the inherent authority of Tribal Courts and respond to the voices of survivors and advocates (Hidalgo & Washburn, 2021).

There are several categories of approaches and policies that can successfully prevent, mitigate, and respond to GBV. These include general policies that give equal rights and opportunities for women and men (and increasingly, non-binary), making discrimination based on sex/gender illegal. By codifying equity in this way, GBV can be seen as mistreatment and punishable. In addition, GBV-specific policies addressing various aspects of gender-based violence across multiple sectors and actors—from government agencies to NGOs, police and women's support services—are essential. Finally, countries that adhere to international and regional conventions and treaties related to the elimination of discrimination, and protection of women and other vulnerable groups against violence, demonstrate that GBV is priority and that appropriate accountability mechanisms are in place to address and prevent it.

Gender-based violence and related policies in Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore

Much like in the United States, Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore have gender equality language enshrined in their constitution. For example, in the 1990s, Estonia's Constitution introduced language that everyone is equal before the law, and no one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex. Furthermore, the 2004 Gender Equality Act defined equality of women and men as a fundamental human right and provided that gender equality be mainstreamed in social life (Gender Equality Act, 2013). The Ministry of Social Affairs released several initiatives in the early 2000s aimed at improving understanding, achieving gender equality and developing tools to promote gender mainstreaming (EIGE, 2020a). Slovenia introduced gender mainstreaming into their national legislation through the Equal Opportunities between Women and Men act of

2002. The first national program on gender quality was adopted in 2005. Since that time, gender mainstreaming has been recognized as a key strategy across multiple policy areas (EIGE, 2020b).

Gender-based policies, approaches and environment

Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore have codified plans for reducing or addressing violence. Estonia's Development Plan for Reducing Violence (2010-2014) aimed to prevent violence by changing societal values and attitudes toward violence (among other outcomes) (UN Women, 2010). Slovenia passed the Domestic Violence Prevention Act in 2008 (henceforth: ZPND, amended 2016), a systematic and civil act that defines domestic violence, regulates cooperation between agencies, requires that budget funds be secured including training and the implementation of research activities. Following passage of the ZPND, five implementing acts were adopted that related to the measures to be taken by various bodies and services in the case of domestic violence (GREVIO, 2019).

In addition to codified laws, each of these countries boasts unique factors that have facilitated various successes for GBV prevention, mitigation, and response. In Slovenia, for example, experts have suggested that NGOs and academia have played large roles in facilitating government and policy change, along with effective collaboration between government sectors and supportive norm-changing campaigns hosted by organizations like Amnesty International (e.g., "yes means yes"). Experts in Singapore point to close collaboration between key factors such as police and family courts as well as political buy-in across party lines and governmental prioritization of the issue.

Adherence to international standards

International and regional standards and conventions related to gender-based violence are essential markers of a country's commitment to addressing violence. Signatories of these conventions commit to approaching the treatment of violence against women and girls, along with prevention of violence in general, protection and support for victims, using coordinated and comprehensive measures. These standards put human rights at the center of the commitment by recognizing that violence against women is a form of discrimination.

Estonia, Slovenia and Singapore have signed and ratified CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), the landmark treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. It is a comprehensive commitment against discrimination of women and includes several articles related to violence against women. The adoption of this convention is considered a major milestone in a country's progress toward addressing GBV. As of September 2019, only 34 countries had ratified the convention (*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 2021). The United States is one of a few countries that have signed the convention but not ratified it (SCWO, 2013).

These three countries also report progress and achievements related to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) to the United Nations (EIGE, 2021; UN Women), especially Slovenia, who has launched awareness campaigns and inter-agency working groups related to GBV (UN Women, 2020).

In addition to international commitments, regional commitments have been powerful forces of change, especially for Estonia and Slovenia as related to their accession into the European Union. They are active members of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), which tracks their progress toward gender equality goals including violence (UNECE, 2010). Singapore is a signatory of the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which requires member states to implement and monitor commitments related to research, gender mainstreaming, law reform, and empowerment of women (among others) (ASEAN, 2013).

Case study: Canada

Canada stands out in terms of their policies and approaches related to gender equity, GBV and adherence to international standards. The country has an impressive number of policies related to gender equity and gender-based violence, and in addition, has shown leadership on domestic and international commitments against violence.

Canada has had a longstanding commitment to gender equity (OECD, 2018) and continues to rank high compared to the United States on gender equity/equality measures (Devillard et al., 2017). Canada's 2018 Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) mandate aims to "advance equality with respect to sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression through the inclusion of people of all genders, including women, in Canada's economic, social and political life" (Government of Canada, 2021). This historic effort modernized and formalized the former Status of Women Canada into an official department within the government (Government of Canada, 2021). Although no country has fully met its commitments to gender equity as put forward in the United Nations' Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Canada excels in terms of its efforts compared to many other developed countries including the United States. According to a recent survey, 76 percent of Canadian citizens support gender equity and want governments to do more to promote it – a much higher percentage than survey respondents in the United States (FOCUS 2030 & Women Deliver, 2021). Canada has specifically paid attention to GBV as a marker of gender quality. Canada's largest effort toward reducing GBV is its 2017 policy "It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address GBV." This five-year strategy, worth $100.9 million, builds on federal initiatives, helps to coordinate existing programs, and lays a solid foundation for action on GBV (ASEAN, 2013). This whole-of-government approach involves investments across a broad range of agencies, including Public Safety Canada and the Department of National Defense, to address prevention, support and promotion of responsive legal and justice systems (Charlebois, 2017). In terms of the strategy's efforts toward prevention (Pillar 1), there have been several large accomplishments to date including the creation of a National Youth Awareness Strategy on GBV, and the development of a framework to address GBV in post-secondary institutions (The Gender-Based Violence Strategy, 2021).

As part of the strategy, the Minister's Advisory Council on gender-based violence advises on matters related to developing a National Action Plan to End GBV, responding meaningfully to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting alignment with national efforts to end violence against indigenous women and girls and identifying gaps, issues and challenges at the national, regional and local levels. The Council's membership is diverse, including survivors, and helps to provide evidence-informed advice on promising practices and lessons learned (The Gender-Based Violence Strategy, 2021).

According to experts, Canada's focus and attention on vulnerable populations is one of the greatest policy successes to date. For example, the 2017 Strategy to Prevent and Address GBV has filled gaps in funding and support for vulnerable populations such as missing and murdered indigenous women and girls (MMIWG), LGBTQIA+, and gender non-binary individuals; those living in northern, remote and rural regions; women and girls with disabilities; immigrant and refugee women; youth and seniors (Status of Women Canada, 2018). Canada has precedent addressing GBV issues with vulnerable populations, such as the Action Plan to Address Family Violence and Violent Crimes against Aboriginal Women and Girls, which outlined concrete action steps (2015-2020) to address crimes, proceeded earlier investments (2010-2015) to improve community safety and address issues in the justice system and law enforcement related to MMIWG (Status of Women Canada, 2018). While critics argue that the country is not doing enough, Canada has consolidated a plan to address the tragedy of MMIWG, committing $2.2 billion Canadian dollars fund to reach goals suggested by the National Inquiry into the (MMIWG). New legislation that adds the words "gender identity or expression" to various bills such as the Canadian Human Rights Act aim to expand protection against discrimination and hate speech a wider definition of Canadians (Bill C-16, 2017).

Newer regulations continue to legally protect various Canadians against violence and harassment at work and home. The 2021 Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations aim to support employees to know their rights and duties and strengthen measures to prevent and address all forms of harassment and violence in the workplace (Skrzypinski, 2020). The National Housing Strategy prioritizes survivors fleeing family violence, a strategy that seeks to shelter and protect women who might otherwise return to violent relationships or turn to the street.

Canada has ratified all major international treaties and conventions, including CEDAW (Government of Canada, 2020). In addition, the U.N. recommends that all countries have a National Action Plan (NAP) for GBV. As of January of 2021, groups working in Canada reached an agreement among several ministers to develop a NAP, which is an important step forward. The newly created framework will include new programs and laws to protect women across Canada (Ireton, 2021). Those developing the NAP on GBV/WAV, funded by the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE), have been making recommendations for the contours of the plan including that the federal government create a GBV Prevention Evaluation Grant to be used to inform best practices through evaluation of effective GBV prevention programs.

According to experts, provincial/territory tenancy acts that allow survivors to end tenancy early without penalty and in some cases, offer paid lead, have been recent efforts actively contributing to reduction in violence.

Beyond the policy environment, other factors have driven Canada's successes in reducing GBV, including a robust grassroots women's movement and survivor-led advocacy, an active NGO community, a productive research community that contributes to evidence-based policy-making, and public attention – specifically, the 2017 media attention on sexual assault by police, and the resulting action (Rotenberg & Cotter, 2018).

Education

Gender inequity in the United States' educational system has been declining throughout its history. However, many gender-related educational inequities persist in the country, including women's lower completion rates for undergraduate STEM degrees and technical and vocational educational attainment.

STEM ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION

Technology and engineering are among the top sought-after skills in the United States. STEM graduates also do well financially. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the median annual salary for STEM occupations in 2019 was $86,980, $48,820 more than non-STEM occupations. The Education Commission of the States projects that STEM jobs will grow by 13 percent between 2017 and 2027. In contrast, all other jobs will grow by only 9 percent during the same period. STEM field jobs also have one of the lowest pay gaps in the U.S., with an average difference of 19 percent between men's and women's salaries (Education Commission of the States).

Despite comparable achievement scores among male and female U.S. children in math and science, more men study and graduate from STEM fields in the country's higher education (Catalyst, 2020, Noonan, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The share of STEM degrees is even lesser for women of color in the United States. In 2017–2018, women of color earned only 14.1 percent of bachelor's degrees across all STEM fields. Women accounted for only 32.4 percent of all STEM degree recipients during the 2017-2018 school year, earning 237,874 of science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees at colleges and universities nationwide (Catalyst, 2020, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

As the demand for STEM talent increases, need exists to intensify efforts to increase women's share of both graduation in and participation in STEM fields. But despite the best of U.S. efforts, the STEM gender gap is not closing at an acceptable rate (Williams, 2019). U.S. efforts to increase the female participation in STEM can benefit from the experience of other countries where women have earned more than 50 percent of the total number of science degrees - one of such countries is Tunisia.

Case Study: Tunisia

Tunisian policymakers have generally welcomed gender parity (Murphy, 2003). Less than a decade after the 2011 revolution and four years after the adoption of the Constitution, women now comprise 47 percent of the local council positions in Tunisia following the May 2018 elections (Gouvy, 2021). Tunisia's publicly professed secularism, dynamic civil institutions and the enduring engagement of groups like the National Tunisian Women's Union in politics have improved women's general employment and their participation in male-dominated fields. The overall educational enrollment figures are approximately equal for women and men in the secondary and tertiary levels (UIS, 2015). Women also constitute half of the researchers in STEM fields in Tunisia (UIS, 2015). The overall population female-male literacy gap is smaller among those ages 15-24 (96 percent for women, 98 percent for men, UIS, 2015). UNESCO indicated that 65 percent of Tunisians with a bachelor's degree and 69 percent of Ph.D. holders are female. Tunisian women top UNESCO's ranking of African and Arab women's participation in scientific research. In fact, 55.1 percent of Tunisian researchers are female, the greatest proportion in Africa and in the Arab world (Gharbi et al., 2021).

In Tunisia, unlike many other settings, girls and women are systematically and steadily tracked into science and math throughout their early education, heightening their opportunity and preparation to go into these fields as adults. Tunisia's Science and Technology policies have evolved into the most developed in the Maghreb (ERCIM, not dated). According to the World Bank Country Assistance Strategy (CAS, 2012) report, "Sustained structural reform efforts since the early 1990s, prudent macroeconomic policies, and deeper trade integration in the global economy have created an enabling environment for growth. This environment has been conducive to attain positive achievements in the education sector which placed Tunisia ahead of countries with similar income levels, and in a good position to achieve the Millennium Development Goals." Tunisia's HDI value for 2019 is 0.740— which makes the country a high-human development country. It also ranks 95th out of 189 countries and territories. As far back as 1991, the country set up the Secretary of State of Scientific Research and Technology (SERST) directly linked to the Office of the Prime Minister. It collaborates closely with other Ministries through the "Conseil Supérieur de La Recherche Scientifique et de la Technologie (CSRT)" in formulating and managing national science and technology activities and in developing and encouraging international scientific and technological co-operation for Tunisian institutions. In 2000, the country introduced a competency-based approach in school curriculum and strategically revised textbooks to focus on promoting STEM education. In 2002, it enacted an Education Act that put Information, Communication Technologies (ICT) and science at the center of its education system.

While Tunisia has always invested in STEM the country's education ministry realized in the 2000s that prior investments did not closely align with teacher and student needs, and that teachers had insufficient support and training to enable them to effectively integrate new technologies into their daily classroom practice (Yarrow, 2014). In response, the Ministry of Education launched its digital school program "Solution Numerique Pour Tous" in May 2015, as part of its wider program of reform. Yarrow (2017) notes that the primary goals of the program were to work with two million students and 150,000 primary and secondary teachers to advance the quality of education through promoting the use of digital tools in learning, growing access to digital resources for all students, supporting scientific curiosity and using digital technology to encourage academic success, pedagogical innovation and social responsibility.

As Yarrow (2014) further notes, unusually for a middle-income country, Tunisia took a genuinely consultative approach to designing its Solution Numerique Pour Tous policy with input from thousands of citizens. Following these wide-ranging consultations, the country implemented a student, teacher and community-focused approach to STEM education and digital investments. The policy also ensures that, early on, girls are prepared to score high, love STEM, and to have confidence, not just at the household and community levels, but within the school. One of Tunisia's priorities within the digital and STEM education policy approach is to provide parents with information about how their students are doing in school, with regular updates recorded directly by teachers and the capacity for parents to ask questions and connect directly with school principals and their children's teachers. This approach has democratized access to information and allowed for better support and follow-up between the school and home.

Among other major steps Tunisia has taken to promote is to disrupt, at multiple levels, some of the gender stereotypes that support the viewing of STEM fields as masculine. Teachers are encouraged not to underestimate girls' math abilities but to continually affirm STEM as a field for girls, companies are encouraged not to perpetuate inflexible, exclusionary, male-dominated practices that can limit women's advancement, and role models are actively mobilized to inspire girls' interest in these fields. On the other hand, parents are also continuously engaged to enable them to motivate and support their daughters and girls to persist in and complete their STEM studies. Tunisia's success drives home the importance of a STEM policy approach that connects communities, parents and guardians with teachers, and promotes sustained policymakers' commitments and collective support to the success of female learners. As a Tunisian engineering professor noted "a large percentage of Tunisian girls aren't driven by passion for engineering but by performance as well as by encouragement by their parents and their communities to complete the mission and to prove that they are no less excellent than men." (Weingarten, 2017).

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Vocational skills education prepares learners with the knowledge, skills and competencies specific to a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades (UNESCO UIS, 2013). It empowers marginalized groups in a society by increasing their employability and promoting entrepreneurship. The subject areas most associated with career and technical education are business (office administration, entrepreneurship); trade and industrial (e.g., automotive technician, carpenter, computer numerical control technician); health occupations (nursing, dental, and medical technicians); and agriculture (food) (Daggett, 2002).

While demand and wages are surging for graduates of vocational and technical training (VET/TVET) programs, a deep gender imbalance characterized by both the limited participation of women in VET/TVET programs and a dire shortage of women in technical jobs persists in the United States, contributing to the country's intractable earning gaps between men and women. The U.K. and New Zealand offer interesting policy lessons for U.S. efforts to improve the participation of women in TVET.

Case Study: The U.K.

The U.K. is one of just five countries where women make up a larger share (52 percent) of graduates than men from vocational programs than general ones. The U.K. share of female TVET participation is higher than the OCED average of 46 percent, and the EU23 average of 46 percent. On average across OECD countries, 18 percent of 15–24-year-olds participate in vocational programs – in the U.K., the figure is significantly higher at 39 percent. Overall, 63 percent of first-time upper secondary graduates in the U.K. have a vocational qualification. This is way above the OECD average of 40 percent and the EU23 average of 46 percent (OECD, 2019b).

The success of the U.K. in closing gender and other inequities in TVET participation is the result of a long history of sustained government commitment and action to foster inclusion in and raise the image of VET. Concerns over low levels of productivity in the U.K. (linked to inadequate skilled workforce), standards in education, low levels of participation in training and high differentials between gender and other social groups led the government in 1997 to develop a strategy focused on both raising standards and increasing inclusion and participation. Since then, significant policies, initiatives and reforms continue to be implemented at a rapid pace. For instance, the Learning and Skills Act 2000 reformed the funding and planning of post-compulsory education and training by setting up the learning and skills councils (LSCs) in 2001, as well as the network of sector skills councils (SSCs, underpinned by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). The national qualifications framework (NQF) was also introduced in 2000 for quality assurance of all VET-related training. The NQF and vocational qualifications have also been reviewed since 2004 to reflect government's skills agenda

to create an employer-led qualification system for adults which responds quickly to shifting needs and demographics. All these efforts emphasized the need to ensure that women and other marginalized groups, including migrants, were not left behind (Cuddy & Leney, 2005).

Over the years, the U.K.'s TVET policies have also been increasingly motivated to emphasize outcomes, with more demanding national targets to raise participation and the effectiveness of available training opportunities. More rigorous national targets have also been set for apprenticeships to grow their inclusiveness and overall quality and effectiveness as the primary vocational option for young people. Age restrictions were also lifted so that more adults, particularly women, can benefit from these "earn and learn" opportunities. Recent reforms have also focused on improving the image of TVET, emphasizing benefits for women in TVET, providing tuition support and mentorship support for female TVET learners, expanding opportunities to include migrants and marginalized groups, and new lines of learning leading to diplomas in key and emerging sectors. An important aspect of these reforms is their underpinning in government action in the form of broader education and training policies, clear quality control and inspection plans, target-setting at institutional and local levels, outcome-oriented funding and performance measures.

Building on the U.K. Learning and Skills Act 2000, the Curriculum 2000 policy was introduced and midwifed specialized diplomas that sought to provide a vocational route to higher education and skills employment. It also included a skills-for-life strategy to tackle basic skills deficits and a learning infrastructure for adult literacy and numeracy, as well as extensive ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) programs for migrant workers and refugees, especially females, to help them develop entry level qualifications and skills for further TVET training.

Stakeholder participation has been a key aspect of the U.K. TVET policy action. Through consultation, collective bargaining and inclusion in formal structures, employers' and employees' organizations and trade unions are represented at relevant high-level government board such as the partnership board of Skills Alliance, at Regional Development Agencies (now called Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in England and its equivalents in the devolved administrations, as well as at the skills councils' board. There are also the Employer Training Pilots (ETPs), which encourage employers to promote gender equity in the training of low-skilled employees and support employers to grant low-skilled employees paid time off work to pursue education and training courses.

The U.K. New Deal for Skills (NDfS) policy launched in 2004 also sought to create flexibility for and diversity of learners, trainers and funding partners. The New Deal supported the development of vocational or sector specific skills, skills coaching services and a skills passport system (a validated record of the skills achieved) and other relevant measures. It also provided personal adviser and mentoring support through training and improving vocational skills; job search support/counseling and improved job matching; work placements and subsidized employment as well as specialized training of teachers and trainers for IVET and colleges.

Further TVET-focused reforms occurred as recently as 2021 with the launch of the Department for Education's (DfE) Skills for Jobs whitepaper which aims to transform post-16 education and training, boost skills and get more people into work. The Skills for Job program involves comprehensive and tailored skills plans to meet local training needs, propel innovation, and enhance collaboration with employers and give employers a central role in designing technical courses to ensure that the education and training people receive is directly linked to the skills needed for real jobs.

In general, the U.K. government TVET policy and program strides have also been characterized by a commitment to boost the image, quality and take up of TVET, and maintain its place in meeting key economic and social objectives, such as leveling up communities and groups, dealing with unemployment and equity and responding to demographic, gender role, environmental and technological shifts. Over time, the country has expanded women participation in TVET through policies that stress TVET as a legitimate field for women and that encourage female learners to participate regardless of age, migrant status, sexual orientation, and academic level or ability. The UK TVET policy interventions continue to promote targeted apprenticeship opportunities for women, match women learners with TVET role models, encourage participation of women as TVET tutors, provide stipends for female trainees, and offer flexible learning opportunities for women navigating child-care, work-related, and other challenges (Laverick, Heywood & Hollier, 2020). There is also high-level commitment to the continued use of evidence in ongoing reforms, addressing gaps in access to opportunities. The U.K. TVET policy and implementation process continues to involve extensive multiple stakeholders consultation; targeted outreaches to and inclusion of young people, adults, marginalized groups and employers, learners with special educational needs and disabilities; emphasis on expert teaching staff with up-to-date industry knowledge; strong and elaborate governance mechanisms with, clear governance codes and a commitment to effective learner-engagement where colleges use the "student voice" to inform institutional policies and strategies. While funding mechanisms vary in each U.K. nation, funding generally "follows the most vulnerable of learners" and reflects enrolment, retention, achievement, and progression.

Case Study: New Zealand

In New Zealand, more women (56.1) than men currently pursue a vocational track and 49 percent of 25 to 34-year-old women had a tertiary qualification in 2020, compared to 39 percent of their male peers. The share of female graduates from upper secondary vocational programs is also one of the largest among OECD countries and other economies with available data (56.4 percent, rank 2/39) OECD, 2021). Underpinning New Zealand's TVET strategy is the enduring understanding that female enrollment in TVET is key to responding to growing global competition, is an investment in the economy and society and is part of a larger mission to create an inclusive skill eco-system.

New Zealand, like the U.K., has historically emphasized a unified, coordinated, national system of TVET, more focused on skills leadership and making sure that the education and training provided meet the needs of employers and the country's quest for competitiveness. As a result, TVET policies and programs in New Zealand are backed by national legislation. The country's Education Act (1989) and its subsequent Education Amendment Act No. 3 (2010) form the main legislative framework for its overall education system. The Education Act (1989) established the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), and the Industry Training Act (1992) established the country's Industry Training Organizations (ITOs), which, for a long time, managed industry training. In 2002, the Industry Training Amendment Act focused on improving the quality of the industry training system and expanding TVET access. In 2008, New Zealand set forth a formal national TVET mission and strategy. Known as the Skills Strategy, the policy integrated workplace needs into formal education and training in the hope of achieving a competitive workforce in New Zealand and supporting everyone to work, through skills development and supportive workplace practices. The policy also emphasized a commitment to raise the profile and respectability of TVET.

Industry training, as organized by New Zealand's ITOs, has expanded from apprenticeships to a truer lifelong, more inclusive learning situation where older trainees and groups at risk of being left behind, such as Indigenous people and groups are increasingly supported to access TVET. For instance, an advisory group, *Te Taumata Aronui*, helps to ensure that Maori people are not left out of reforms in TVET. In 2020, a new institution, Te Pūkenga, the New Zealand Institute of Skills & Technology replaced existing polytechnics and institutes of technology. The new Institute has a strong regional focus, giving local leaders and groups much more say in the education and training offered in their region. The development of courses and programs has also been consolidated, freeing up resources to expand front-line delivery, and making it easier to share expertise and best-practice, and use more on-line, distance and blended learning.

Judging by the interview and review data, the thrust of New Zealand's policy efforts to support women's entry in TVET hinges on gender-friendly skill development activities. These specifically target young women, particularly from marginalized regions and communities, including Indigenous women and girls, providing special stipends, transport support, childcare centers and tool kits. Women-supportive skill development training has strategically been reinforced by orienting and counseling young people and providing role models and job opportunities. Incentives and appreciation also regularly go to institutions and industries that support women and girls' entrepreneurship and employment.

Lessons and recommendations

As the clamor for gender equity deepens in the U.S., and the country braces for the implementation of its first-ever National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, lessons from the policy successes of other countries can be beneficial. The current global scan sought to identify, document and analyze promising gender equity policies and interventions in other countries and settings with potential to inform and inspire gender equity policy options and actions in the U.S. The review focused on four broad areas of political participation, economic participation and opportunity, health and education. While no society has achieved gender equity, some countries have made substantial progress, providing critical policy lessons for the U.S., and indeed current global efforts to advance gender equity. The section that follows highlights some key lessons for effective gender equity policymaking in the U.S.

National gender equity frameworks set the pace for effective gender equity policies

Across the broad areas covered in this review, effective gender equity policies were preceded by comprehensive state commitments to gender equity that were often expressly articulated through formal national policy frameworks or strategies. It was often through these gender equity frameworks that country political leaderships demonstrated their public commitment to gender equity as a moral and strategic imperative, and to change, accountability, participation, and prioritization of investments for gender equitable

development. From Spain's Effective Equality of Women and Men Law of 2007, through Iceland's Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men of 2000 (updated in 2008), to Rwanda's 2010 National Gender Policy on Gender (updated in 2021) and Nicaragua's National Human Development Plan (PNDH) 2008-2012, national strategic frameworks on gender equality set the formal pace for governments and organizations to take intentional actions to prevent gender-related discrimination in different areas of society.

U.S. policy stakeholders should recognize the opportunities inherent in the launch of the country's first National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality by considering it as both the starting point of the government's public commitment to gender equity and an invitation to co-create lasting gains in all areas of the country's life.

Integrated policy strategies promote effective gender equity policies

A corollary of the above point, and another important lesson for the U.S., is that patchworks of unconnected public policies do not bode well for gender equity policies. To succeed, gender equity policies must be anchored on an integrated policy approach. The gender equity policies discussed in this report were complementary and integral to extant wider national policy goals of tackling large-scale gender-based imbalances in particular development contexts. Spain's National Equal Opportunities Strategic Plan 2014-2016 derived from its Equality Law of 2007. These were reinforced by the Action Plan for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in the Information Society (2014-2017), the Plan for Rural Women 2015-2018 and the Plan for Equality within the State Administration. Canada's GBV policies are hinged on its whole-of-government approach to addressing the socio-economic inequities that affect its most vulnerable populations, which also encompassed broader and sustained investments in job creation, health, justice and housing, among others. Importantly, all policies that showed effectiveness in addressing GBV were in countries that had signed and ratified such global treaties and conventions as CEDAW. New Zealand's policy efforts to promote women's participation in TVET are part of the country's larger policy mission to create an inclusive skill eco-system in which barriers related to gender and other forms of forms of identity were eliminated. Rwanda's gender quota in politics policy originated from its 2003 Constitution and 2010 Gender Policy. Generally, effective gender equity policies highlighted in this report developed from broader national policy goals of gender mainstreaming, that is, "the systematic incorporation of gender equality perspective is all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making" (Council of Europe, 1998).

Women's political representation facilitates effective gender policies

Our review provides evidence that women's participation in politics and government is key to the formulation of effective gender equity policies. A majority of the policies discussed in this study were from countries with continuing high levels of women's representation in political positions. In just three decades, Icelandic, Estonian and Spanish women have risen to occupy critical political positions in their countries. Iceland has had a woman as either president or prime minister for 20 of the last 36 years. Spain has sustained the tempo of women's representation in politics started in 2004, when the country's first gender-equal cabinet of eight women and eight men was launched. In 2003, Rwanda's 80-member parliament had 46 female members, a trend that has not weakened. For a long time, women's participation in high-level political positions has continued to grow in Tunisia. Women took 47 percent of the seats in local elections in 2018, and in 2021 the country appointed its first female prime minister. Nicaragua's political history is no different. Moving forward, strategies to promoted women's representation in high-level political and legislative bodies at all levels of government should be a policy priority for the U.S.

Effective gender equity policymaking combines top-down and bottom-up approaches

While states carry a heavy responsibility in terms of setting strategic directions for achieving gender equity, participative and consultative approaches are the hallmark of effective gender equity policies. The policies reported in this review generally required the participation of multiple levels of governments, local communities, socio-political movements, women, youth, families, organizations and businesses among others. This raises the need for U.S. policymakers to prioritize a broad-based participatory policymaking approach and to strategically coordinate inputs from different critical gender equity stakeholders, including relevant movements and groups directly affected by specific forms of inequities. They involved different critical stakeholders in their formulation, implementation, and ongoing improvement.

The women's movement in Slovenia, Estonia, Iceland and Spain informed and continue to influence gender equity reforms and policies. Nicaragua's policies for gender equity in economic participation appropriated ideas of the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women of the 80s, and from the country's autonomous women's movement of the 90s. Depending on the policy and country, stakeholders that informed the development and ongoing review and implementation of effective gender equity policies range from watchdogs, movements, communities, political parties and professional bodies to industry, Indigenous People, municipalities, young people, marginalized groups and learners with special needs.

Effective gender equity policies are adaptable

Adaptability was also common denominator of the gender equity policies that we found to be effective. These policies identified and prioritized issues that are time urgent with commitments to future reforms and learning. Put differently, they ensured needed springiness based on learning and emerging realities. The lesson here for the U.S. is the need to prioritize gender equity policies that respond to urgent injustices while remaining robust across a range of future possibilities, responsive to changes over time, and with explicit provisions for learning and modifications. To support the realization of ambitious gender equity pledges enshrined in Tunisia's 2014 constitution, the country's Commission for Individual Liberties and Equality has the mandate to identify and analyze new realities for their implications for the country's gender commitments and to propose new reforms and directions when needed. Rwanda's Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Spain's National Equal Opportunities Strategic Plan 2014-2016 (Plan Estratégico de Igualdad de Oportunidades (2014-2016)) and Canada's GBV policy efforts all acknowledge the importance to continuously update gender equity interventions using new knowledge, evidence and research.

Other critical lessons from the review include effective gender equity policies target the most vulnerable groups to ensure gender wage equity, economic empowerment and support, opportunities for workplace advancement and continued workforce participation. They seek to reduce gender disparities in the burden of unpaid labor and to ensure free or low-cost childcare, especially for young children, enable women to work, attend school, earn wages and reduce caregiving burdens.

Limitations

The intent of this global gender equity scan was to identify policies for promoting gender equity in specific domains. So, several promising policies that may have advanced gender equity in many other domains and countries were not included. From this review, we learned that rigorous evaluations of national policies are scant and that little robust research focus on the long-term monitoring of national policies over time. Many of the policies were national with little information on their implementation at local or municipal levels. The policies identified and reviewed in the scan also had few details on minority populations and the policy effects specific to them. Future research should explore effective gender equity policies in specific domains such as unpaid and household work, access to quality housing, savings and adaptation to the future of work due to growing automation. More insights are also needed on the implementation and operationalization of gender equity policies at local and municipal levels, and on promising policies for addressing the myriad health and socio-economic inequities that impact minority populations and most-at-risk groups.

Conclusion

Sustainable development requires that members of society have equal power to shape their own lives and benefit from and contribute to society. In the U.S., and several other parts of the world, gender inequities persist, hindering the participation, dignity, wellbeing and advancement of persons of all genders. Transforming the distribution of societal opportunities, resources and choices for citizens to foster equity requires knowledge of policies and interventions that work, as well as the courage and commitment to eliminate exclusionary norms and practices and bring about true social change.

Globally, there is growing acknowledgement of the urgency of policies to foster inclusion and equity. However, achieving gender equity and inclusive development entails more than national statements of positive intent. It requires sustained, multipronged efforts that unite contextual evidence and available best ideas and proven practices to address, not only the immediate social conditions that promote inequities, but also the systems, norms and values that allow such conditions to thrive and persist.

Focusing specifically on the broad themes of political participation, economic participation and opportunity, health and education, this report identified several actionable policy options to facilitate U.S. policy actors' efforts to advance gender equity. While primarily addressed to the U.S. policy community, the report has wider relevance. The policy experiences of the countries reported in this study offer the global community of gender equity stakeholders, program implementers and leaders and organizations important insights and lessons for advancing gender equity in a variety of areas. The study's recommendations are not meant to be implemented without contextual adaptation and modification. In the U.S., for instance, they require grappling with the antifederalist nature of U.S. governance and the diverse and occasionally incongruous interventions planned and executed at city, county and state levels (Mullah, 2018). Further, it is noteworthy that none of the identified policies have clear definitions and specific framing of gender equity or its intersections with race, generation, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Also, in their design and implementation, few of the reviewed policies demonstrated a clearly stated commitment to go beyond gender binarism.

Photo by: Zackary Drucker, Broadly Gender Collection, Vice.

The world's most pressing issues require collaborative learning and equitable and sustainable solutions, and countries can accelerate progress by learning from and adapting best ideas from other contexts. Global learning can support policy actors and stakeholders to stay informed, open-minded, responsive to diverse perspectives and aware of options and opportunities for action and change. The report is, therefore, a challenge to policymakers everywhere to pursue progressive courses of action through greater responsiveness to proven strategies for advancing development sustainably and equitably.

APPENDIX A

Key Informant Interviews

1. Gender-based Violence Expert Singapore - NGO
2. Political Participation Expert Rwanda - NGO
3. STEM Expert Tunisia - NGO
4. Maternal Mortality and Parental Leave Expert Estonia - Government
5. Gender-based Violence Expert Slovenia – University Researcher/Professor
6. Maternal Mortality and Parental Leave Expert Slovenia – University Researcher/Professor
7. Gender-based Violence Expert Slovenia – University Researcher/Professor
8. Political Participation Expert Iceland - NGO
9. Gender-based Violence Expert Canada - NGO
10. Vocational Training Expert New Zealand - NGO
11. STEM Expert Tunisia - NGO
12. Political and Economic Participation and Opportunity Expert Iceland – Government or Researcher

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